



Paradise

Abdulrazak Gurnah

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Paradise is at once the story of an African boy's coming of age, a tragic love story, and a tale of the corruption of traditional African patterns by European colonialism. It presents a major African voice to American readers - a voice that prompted Peter Tinniswood to write in the London Times, reviewing Gurnah's previous novel, "Mr. Gurnah is a very fine writer. I am certain he will become a great one." Paradise is Abdulrazak Gurnah's great novel. At twelve, Yusuf, the protagonist of this twentieth-century odyssey, is sold by his father in repayment of a debt. From the simple life of rural Africa, Yusuf is thrown into the complexities of precolonial urban East Africa - a fascinating world in which Muslim black Africans, Christian missionaries, and Indians from the subcontinent coexist in a fragile, subtle social hierarchy. Through the eyes of Yusuf, Gurnah depicts communities at war, trading safaris gone awry, and the universal trials of adolescence. Then, just as Yusuf begins to comprehend the choices required of him, he and everyone around him must adjust to the new reality of European colonialism. The result is a page-turning saga that covers the same territory as the novels of Isak Dinesen and William Boyd, but does so from a perspective never before available on that seldom-chronicled part of the world.

Paradise Details

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Author : Abdulrazak Gurnah

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From Reader Review Paradise for online ebook

Lynne Norman says

Beautifully written but baffling story that seems to go nowhere. I'll hold my hands up and admit that I might have missed something - but I'm not sure what it was!

Destiny says

Paradise by Abdulrazak Gurnah is a well written book and is worth reading. This novel alternates between the beauty of African life, culture, love, brutality and the horrors of slavery in East Africa. It's centred on the life of a young boy named Yusuf who is pawned off to a merchant to cover his father's debt. Yusuf helps out in a store the merchant own's. He doesn't have a lot of time for himself due to the fact that he's always working and traveling to make trades. Yusuf doesn't receive any schooling and isn't really attended to. But, personally I really liked this book; it offers a glimpse into a desperate life as a slave to the world. I would definitely read more of this authors work.

Lolilu says

Paraiso
COMPRAR

Paul says

A curious and surprising novel, which I think can be easily misunderstood, if the reviews are anything to go by.

It concerns Yusef, a boy who is taken by his "uncle" from his parents to pay a debt. He works in his uncle's shop with Khalil an older boy in a similar situation. As Yusef grows it is clear that he is very attractive to women and men. Uncle Aziz takes him on one of his trading expeditions through what is now Tanzania and we encounter jungle, strange and wonderful people; Yusef stays with a trading partner of Aziz for a time, where his growing attractiveness continues to be a problem. He then goes on a journey with Aziz and his trading caravan and has further adventures. They return to the uncle's home after some time and Yusef's beauty continues to be a problem.

There is a, on the surface, puzzling end. Yusef is a narrator who is a little apart and things happen to him in an oddly detached way. The Europeans are very much a background threat until the end; an ominous absence.

There was a richness and depth to the story and there are parallels to another story. Even with my limited knowledge of the Koran, there were obvious similarities with the story of The Prophet. However this is all about corruption; the worm in the bud, the rotting fruit. Yusef seems so innocent and acted upon, but there is something at his core that he sees that no one around him does. The end is completely baffling if you do not see it.

Enjoyable read which asked more questions than I initially thought it would.

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

The best description I can give of this book is that it reads like a translation, even though it isn't. There's a certain flatness and distance to the writing that I associate with poor translations, and this turned out to be a book I had to push myself through. Fortunately, it's short.

Paradise is the story of an adolescent boy, Yusuf, in early 20th century Tanzania. Yusuf's parents sell him to a merchant to satisfy a debt, and he spends the rest of the book working in the merchant's shop and accompanying him on a trading expedition to the interior. And that's the plot in its entirety. Apparently it's supposed to be a parable, mirroring the story of the Prophet Yusuf (the same person as Joseph in Genesis, unless I miss my guess). Unfortunately, the book is written in a plodding style and Yusuf is a non-entity, without personality or goals to keep the reader's interest. I've read interpretations arguing Yusuf was written as a blank slate to symbolize Tanzania, which was at a crossroads (we see the beginning of European colonization here, as well as Arab and Indian influences). I suspect that does Tanzania a disservice, however, as no country could possibly be as boring as Yusuf.

I try to give foreign literature the benefit of the doubt, as there's always the possibility that I just lack the cultural background to understand it, and East African readers would doubtless appreciate this more than I do. There is some story here, albeit a plodding one, and there are sparks of character among the secondary cast, particularly the merchants. While there's not an enormous amount of cultural detail, the book did put Tanzania on my mental map in a way that it wasn't before. However, this book completely failed to entertain me, and I found little to appreciate in the writing. (My favorite line: " 'I don't know,' Uncle Aziz said, shrugging with indifference." Yes, the shrug had already tipped me off to his indifference.)

In the end, not a book I'd recommend unless you are Tanzanian or are writing a thesis on a relevant topic. For the rest of us, not much to see here.

Simona Pierrovskiai says

Yusuf is young when he has to leave his family in order to become a rehani, a sort of hostage held in order to repay his father's unpaid debts to a rich merchant, the man who he calls Uncle Aziz but that sooner or later will become only the seyyid (master). Yusuf follows the merchant in quite a passionate way, even in dangerous situations such as an expedition through the inner parts of the country in which he seriously risks to lose his own life. Yusuf is beautiful, and passionate, and idealist. Sooner or later he will discover that he - and his mates - are only little draughts in the hands of the merchant and that entrusting his life to Uncle Aziz he has become just a shit eater, as he has to accept any decision of the seyyid regarding his life - like a slave. Finally he understands that the seyyid and the White man are the same, and that, at least, following the White man he won't feel as hypocrite as following the seyyid. A passioned, and disenchanted book wtitten in comparative way with *Hearth of Darkness*, where the Darkness is - more than the inner part of the country - the obscure custom of slavery and fatalism of the precolonial word that, in the end, according to the acute analisys of the narrator, shades off in the slavery to the White man.

Jim Fonseca says

A historical novel set around WWI in East Africa, modern-day Kenya and Tanzania, then the area around Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The Germans are moving in and building railroads. A young man from the interior is sold into bondage by his father to his uncle in payment of a debt. Poverty at home is such that the boy looks forward to a bone in his soup, so moving to the coastal city may be an improvement. The uncle owns a store in a coastal city and is a trader in the days of year-long pack-animal caravans into the heart of Africa (the lakes around where modern-day Congo and Uganda meet).

The story switches from the rural interior to the cosmopolitan urban coastal world. The boy and his uncle are Moslems; the young man who runs the store and takes charge of the boy is Indian; the interior folks have traditional African religions. There is discussion of differences among the various gods. The characters use a variety of languages including Arabic, German and English; the lingua franca is Swahili. There is much discussion of “what do the Europeans want?”

The boy’s trip into the interior is a stand-alone adventure story. In this all-male world of travelers and traders there is much homoerotic talk and some sex. Our narrator, who is a “pretty boy,” is constantly fending off advances from men. The beginning of the end starts when he begins to get involved with his master’s two wives. In the end the defining moment brings our main character back to the beginning: will he accept his serfdom for life or will he revolt? Everyone else accepts their serfdom: even if you are “freed,” where can you go? What would you do?

Rachel Page says

Yusuf is taken from his home by his "Uncle" as repayment of his father's debts. Thrown into a new situation, Yusuf must find his place in the whole as he travels around Africa.

The biggest appeal of this book is its writing. It is evocative and wonderful to read. The plot itself feels rather inconsequential. Not much happens other than the development of the main character Yusuf. It is a book to savour.

Ruqaiya Said says

When you have Zanzibar as the backdrop to a book you'd expect wonders given it's rich culture and history. I was speechless when I finished reading Paradise not out of amazement but disappointment. This had the potential to be one awesome book, but Gurnah ruined it. I hated just how unoriginal his main character was. Ripped straight out of Chapter 12 of the Holy Quran, Gurnah's Yusuf like the Prophet was:

- Extremely handsome.
- exiled from his family at a young age.
- saw things in his dream that did somehow become reality.
- accused of seducing the wife of the merchant he worked for. (down to even the shirt torn from behind detail!)

If I wanted to read the Prophet Yousuf's story I'd read the original one, it's more eloquent!

Pera says

Shortlisted for booker price and whitbred prize.

Itu logo di sampul depan buku yang kubaca, yang tentu turut menyatakan bahwa buku ini punya keistimewaan.

Tokohnya bernama Yusuf. Dengan keistimewaan dan jalan hidup yang mirip dengan kisah Nabi Yusuf. Berwajah menawan, terbuang dan kemudian bermasalah dengan perempuan karena kerupawannya.

Lalu kenapa judulnya "paradise"? Kisah diawal novel menggambarkan impian tentang tempat didunia yang seindah paradise. Digambarkan sebagai tempat berupa taman yang cantik, dan keindahan alam. Perjalanan hidup Yusuf kemudian membuatnya ter"buang" dari keluarga, dan berhenti di sebuah rumah saudagar yang memiliki taman yang indah. Khayalan masa kecil membuat Yusuf terikat secara psikologis dengan taman tersebut. Yusuf selalu tertarik meluangkan waktu untuk merawat dan menjaga keindahan taman "paradise"nya. Dan aktifitas itu kemudian membuatnya didekati oleh istri si saudagar yang terpesona dengan kerupawannya.

Alurnya memang sangat datar. Bahkan terkesan bertele-tele. Kisah novel ini mengambil setting kehidupan perdagangan antar bangsa, berbeda bahasa dan budaya, menjelang era kolonialisme bangsa eropa. Yang menarik adalah tujuan dari si saudagar_majikan Yusuf dalam berdagang. Ada misi menyebarluaskan agama di dalamnya. Tidak semata untuk keuntungan bisnis.

Berbeda dengan kisah nabi Yusuf, pesan dari kisah si Yusuf dalam novel ini adalah Kebebasan.

Yusuf diasuh oleh si Saudagar untuk melunasi hutang ayah Yusuf. Yusuf bekerja secara gratis kepada si Saudagar alias menjadi budak secara sukarela. Dan Yusuf tidak sendirian, ada Khalil, temannya yang juga bernasib sama. Hidup menghamba pada sang saudagar karena hutang orang tua. Demikian juga Amina, perempuan yang dicintai Yusuf, saudara angkat Khalil yang menjadi istri kedua sang Saudagar. Ada pula Mzee Hamdani, budak yang setia merawat kebun sang Saudagar meski telah lama dia diberi kebebasan untuk lepas dari status sebagai budak.

Mereka sebenarnya bisa saja lepas dari nasib sebagai budak sang Saudagar. Tapi kebebasan bukan masalah tembok dinding bangunan yang memenjara diri. Tembok penjara sebenarnya ada di pikiran.

Seperti kisah Nabi Yusuf, Yusuf di novel ini pun kemudian di rayu si Istri Saudagar hingga bajunya terkoyak. Aib dan bahaya mengancam Yusuf. Dan selanjutnya kisah sedikit berbeda dari kisah Sang Nabi, Yusuf dimaafkan.

Namun Yusuf merasa terdesak dengan hutang budi ketika Sang Saudagar, baginya ,pemberian maaf itu berselubung dengan penghambaan seumur hidup, di simbolkan penulis dengan anjing yang memakan kotoran majikannya. Yusuf dalam pilihan tetap seperti "anjing" atau masuk menjadi pasukan perang orang Eropa yang sangat asing baginya.

Ketika semua orang di desa memilih mengurung diri bersembunyi dari orang Eropa yang terkenal kejam, Yusuf memilih kebebasannya. Sepintas terlihat nasib Yusuf seperti keluar dari mulut Harimau masuk ke mulut Buaya. Tapi itulah "paradise" baginya dan bukan taman indah bagai surga milik saudagar yang selama

ini mengikatnya. Paradise adalah ketika Yusuf bisa melihat, bahwa dia tetap punya pilihan. Paradise adalah kebebasan.

Syukurlah bagian akhir buku ini mengobati kebosananku dari kedataran ceritanya.

Kevin Pedersen says

Light on story but long on literary-ness. The book gives a detailed picture of a specific point in time, an Africa on the brink of colonial takeover, told from the point of view of some of the lowest castes in society. The final pages turn this into a decent character study, too.

Maura says

Lonely planet recommended book for Tanzania. I liked it a little better than "petals of blood", because it had a swifter-moving plot.

It had an interesting depiction of how one became a slave to other Africans in colonial Africa. But otherwise not gripping.

Lisa Faye says

I really enjoyed listening to a story told while Tanzania was just experiencing the first bit of colonization and even better to hear it from someone from a lower caste. The plot is pretty much non-existent, but there are some interesting characters in the book that carry you along on the various stories.

Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

DNF

I rarely do this, but I have to face facts: I'm not going to finish this book. Maybe I could have another day, another time, a different place and mood, but considering I was reading this in April for the Around the World in 12 Books Challenge, I've run out of time and must admit defeat. Out of 247 pages I read to page 126.

Shortlisted for the 1994 Booker Prize (now the Man Booker Prize), this story about a boy called Yusuf who is sold into the service of a successful merchant to pay his father's debts when he is 12, has much to recommend it and I don't in the slightest want to put anyone else off reading it.

Set during a time of European expansion in Africa - sometime before WWII, judging by the descriptions of the German's silver cross flag (after the war, Africa was divided up more clearly by the Europeans but before

it, places like Tanzania saw several different colonisers - I picture them mapping their way through the land, deciding which bits they want based on the natural resources available) - this place that wasn't quite Tanzania yet is on the cusp of losing its pre-colonial identity. Through Yusuf's innocent, uneducated eyes we get glimpses and snippets of the presence of Germans, Belgians and Brits, though most of the time the locals don't even know - or care - what country they're from.

Interestingly enough, though, the Indians seem to have largely "joined the other side", so to speak, and are practically native, with their own insights into colonialism. The clash of cultures is delicate, subtle and quite beautifully rendered, and entirely from the perspective of the Africans (at least up to where I read) in the days before the Europeans brought their own war to African soil. Take this snippet of conversation between Kalasinga, a Shiekh Indian who lives almost like a local (and is accepted by them), and Hussein, a shop keeper who lives in a village halfway up the mountain:

'In India they have been ruling for centuries,' Kalasinga said. 'Here you are not civilized, how can they do the same? Even in South Africa, it is only the gold and the diamonds that make it worth while killing all the people there and taking the land. What is there here They'll argue and squabble, steal this and that, maybe fight one petty war after another, and when they become tired they'll go home.'

'You're dreaming, my friend,' Hussein said. 'Look how they've already divided up the best land on the mountain among themselves. In the mountain country north of here they've driven off even the fiercest peoples and taken their land. They chased them away as if they were children, without any difficulty, and buried some of their leaders alive. Don't you know that? The only ones they allowed to stay were those they made into servants. A skirmish or two with their weapons and the matter of possession is settled. Does that sound as if they've come here for a visit? I tell you they're determined. They want the whole world.' [pp86-7]

But the novel itself seemed to be less about colonialism - at least directly - and more about the end of Africa's isolation from foreign interests and greed. As Yusuf journeys into the interior with the merchant, Aziz, and a large retinue of porters and guards, conversation and descriptions of landscapes become more and more about, well, paradise. Not having finished it, I don't have a complete picture of the novel and where it's going, thematically, but I wanted to at least share with you what I gleaned from the half that I did read. It's also about religion - namely Islam, seeing as the people converted to it long before the Europeans arrived - and paradise as a garden is the highest level of heaven in that religion. I can't even say if this is presented in an overly romantic or nostalgic way - it didn't seem so, but I'd need to read the whole thing.

As I said, I don't want to put anyone else off reading this. Where I struggled was with the prose. It's technically, or grammatically, an easy story to read, but my mind constantly wandered and the way the story's written, I found it very hard to visualise as I read, making it even harder for me to concentrate and focus on the story.

You know how sometimes you read a story that you loved and you say something like, it drew me in or I got lost in the story or even the more dull, I couldn't put it down. Those stories stay with us for a long time, and the magic of the prose lingers on in our heads - as do the images. This was the opposite of that, for me. I felt

immensely distant from the actual story, by not the words *per se* but the structure of the sentences. It occurred to me at some point that this could very well be an *African* style of storytelling, which I struggled with because I'm so used to a European, or western style of storytelling. I'm not even sure that sharing a quote would help get this across, as there was no particular passage that alienated me and it all reads perfectly well. Maybe that's the problem: maybe it's too *literal* for me and so I had a hard time visualising. I'm sure a linguist would have a theory or two.

Ugh I hate not finishing books!

Catherine says

Centered on the life of Yusuf, taken from his home to repay a debt to a trader, *Paradise* sets the reader down in the region we now know as Tanzania and asks that we look at the world from that vantage point, in all its complexity. Europeans arrive on the scene as strange, ugly creatures with hair growing out their ears and a bewildering sense of authority; ethnic and racial divisions criss-cross each community and reveal the history of trade and human migration that have shaped the region for hundreds of years; resistance, adaptation, and cooperation mark varied responses to the incursion of European economic goals into older systems. There is much here about what it means to be poor - and what poor actually is - about religion as a lived experience, about slavery and freedom, and about masculine performance. All this and a completely captivating coming-of-age story too (although I wish the ending had been less abrupt).
