



Child of All Nations (Buru Quartet)

By Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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In **Child of All Nations**, the reader is immediately swept up by a story that is profoundly feminist, devastatingly anticolonialist—and full of heartbreak, suspense, love, and fury. Pramoedya immerses the reader in a world that is astonishing in its vividness: the cultural whirlpool that was the Dutch East Indies of the 1890s. A story of awakening, it follows Minke, the main character of **This Earth of Mankind**, as he struggles to overcome the injustice all around him. Pramoedya's full literary genius is evident in the brilliant characters that populate this world: Minke's fragile Mixed-Race wife; a young Chinese revolutionary; an embattled Javanese peasant and his impoverished family; the French painter Jean Marais, to name just a few.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The imperialistic injustices of the 19th century have become the firmly institutionalized injustices of the 20th century in many countries, as evidenced by the fact that Pramoedya wrote this novel while imprisoned in Indonesia because he was considered a subversive writer. The work, the second volume of a quartet called the "Buru Tetralogy," speaks convincingly for itself. The balanced and enchanted life of natives in the Dutch East Indies of the 1890s is disrupted as they are set against one another and destroyed by the Dutch. As Minke, the main character of *This Earth of Mankind* (LJ 10/1/93), struggles to reclaim a dignified identity amid the confusion, we can feel the universal plight of the oppressed anywhere, whether caused by governments, terrorists, or technology. If this seems a bold claim for a novel, it is because Child is the kind of work that upholds the drastically important tradition of literature's attempt to create empathy. A moving work and a valuable cultural artifact. Recommended for general collections.

- Brian Geary, *West Seneca, N.Y.*

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From [Booklist](#)

Toer delivers the second volume of his Buru Tetralogy with devastating effect. Continuing with the characters of *This Earth of Mankind* (1991), the story focuses on Minke, a young, European-schooled Javanese writer--an "educated native"--fighting for his rights in the Dutch East Indies at the turn of the century. Minke is in the process of recovering from the death of his wife, who was murdered by Dutch colonials, and trying to assert his voice and the voices of his people. Everywhere he turns, the colonial forces and the all-powerful sugar companies build walls against his words. He struggles over which language to write in and which plights to address--there are so many languages, so many castes, and so many problems. In the end, Minke and his beloved mother-in-law are still trapped within their society but have gained a greater understanding of the possibilities of independence and stronger voices with which to shout. Ironically, this novel--and all of Toer's work--is banned in his native Malaysia. *David Cline*

From Kirkus Reviews

The second (*This Earth of Mankind*, 1991) in a quartet continues the often bittersweet story of the growing anticolonial movement in the Dutch-ruled Indonesia of the 1890's. As before, the novel is first told in oral form in a prison camp in 1973--a process that may be responsible for the uneven quality of the work, which veers from pedestrian passages on capitalism, colonialism, and local events to stunning vignettes of men and women destroyed by the pervasive Dutch presence. Minke, the narrator, picks up where he left off. His young wife, Annelies Mellema--daughter of a wealthy Dutch settler and a native concubine--has been sent to live in Holland--according to the terms of her father's will--and her marriage declared invalid. Then a grief-stricken Annelies dies, and back home Minke and mother-in-law Mama try to make new lives for themselves. Sometime journalist Minke plans to be a doctor, but friends like Jean Marais, a French artist, and Kommer, a mixed-blood--the Dutch, as they did in South Africa, specialized in racial classifications--advise him to write in Javanese, not Dutch, and to get to know the country people. Which he does in a desultory way: He learns how Dutch sugar planters stole land from the peasants; how a young woman deliberately infected herself with smallpox so that her Dutch master would die; and how the Mellema fortune itself is tainted. And in a series of set pieces--culminating in the stinging rebuke of colonialism that he and Mama deliver to the Mellema heir who's come from Holland to claim his inheritance--Minke begins to fight at last. A grand concept--as well as a searing indictment of an often cruel and malevolent regime--but Toer's agenda is more political treatise than a window into the human heart. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Ellen Scherer:

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