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Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter

By J. Nozipo Maraire



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In an extraordinary novel--written as a letter from a Zimbabwean mother to her daughter, a student at Harvard--Maraire transforms the lessons of life into a lyrical narrative about love, war, separation, and the very meaning of being a woman.



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Maraire, a Harvard-educated native of Zimbabwe now living in the United States, has written a beautifully poignant first novel about what it means to be a woman in Africa. The novel is written in the form of a letter from a mother to her daughter, Zenzele, who is just beginning her studies at Harvard. The mother writes of her girlhood in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe's colonial name), the struggle for Zimbabwe's independence, and her hopes and fears for the next generation. She has watched villagers send the best of her generation to Europe or America for an education, with the hope that they would return with their newly learned skills to better the lives of their compatriots. Instead, she is saddened when they do not return home to live but come back only for visits, seeming to have lost all remnants of African culture. The mother offers her own stories in hopes that her daughter, while creating herself, will never forget whence she came. Highly recommended for women's studies collections and to general readers seeking an intimate view of another life. ?Debbie Bogenschutz, Cincinnati Technical Coll.

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From [Booklist](#)

" Until we begin to put our pen to paper, we historically do not exist." This first novel by a Harvard-educated Zimbabwean writer takes the form of a dramatic monologue delivered in several epistolary reminiscences by an ailing Zimbabwean mother for the benefit of her daughter, who has gone off to study at Harvard. Mostly the monologue is a meditation on "what or who is the African woman," as observed by a member of an elder African generation that fought against colonialists for independence. But the passion of the book also comes from the urge to endow and complete written language with a sense of oral gravity and vividness. How to do this without betraying or compromising an oral culture? Elegiac stress lends power to the story, resulting in a humane antiminimalism that may owe some of its richness to the work of authenticating in writing a largely unwritten experience. Although Maraire yields at times to rhetorical overflow, she mainly imbues the novel with the complexities of the mother's rural life as it undergoes political transformation in the world of the city. *Molly McQuade*

Review

... a rich impression of the warmth and color of Zimbabwean family life, a view of the traumas of the struggle for independence through a series of sharp vignettes. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, *Penelope Lively*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Dudley:

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Florinda Redfern:

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