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Shay Youngblood

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In her critically acclaimed new novel, Shay Youngblood, the Pushcart Prize-winning author of *Soul Kiss*, chronicles the Parisian odyssey of a young African-American woman retracing the footsteps of the literary legends who inspired her.

Black Girl in Paris Details

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From Reader Review Black Girl in Paris for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

I liked the premise of this novel, about a young aspiring writer who travels to Paris to attempt to follow in the footsteps of her idols, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin. Some aspects of the book were quite vivid. But the language was too flowery for my taste--I found it alienating rather than intimate.

Victoria Carter says

I wanted to love this book entirely but I have to admit that closer towards the end, I felt like I was waiting on something big to happen, but when that moment came, it felt so small. I did enjoy the journey through Paris and it does make me want to visit there more than ever. I just wish that this book could've given me something more. It's kind of hard to put into words. However, I don't regret reading this and I hope to read other works by Youngblood soon enough.

Nikita T. Mitchell says

I read this book during my freshman year in college as an English assignment. I couldn't put it down. I loved it so much that when I began writing my essay that was assigned(which I love doing for books anyway), I ended up rereading the book. Choosing quotes was so hard because there was so much about the book that I found beautiful. It is now my all time favorite book. EVER. That could also be due to the fact that for much of my teenage years I dreamed of the possibility of living in Paris one day. Thus I instantly fell in love with the protagonist, a young black woman seeking to find her own true self just as I was doing at that time (I'm sure many of you were, too, at 18). All I can say is read it!

Favorite quotes:

"Paris. September 1986. Early morning. She is lying on her back in a hard little bed with her eyes closed, dreaming in French. Langston was here." 1

Before I left home I cut my hair close to my scalp so I could be a free woman with free thoughts, open to all possibilities. I was making a map of the world. In ancient times maps were made to help people find food, water, and the way back home. I needed a map to help me find love and language, and since one didn't exist, I'd have to invent one, following the trails and signs left by other travelers. I didn't know what I wanted to be, but I knew I wanted to be the kind of woman who was bold, took chances, and had adventures. I wanted to travel around the world. I was my little-girl dream." 3

"My name is Eden, and I'm not afraid of anything anymore. Like my literary godfathers who came to Paris before me, I intend to live a life in which being black won't hold me back." 4

"I carry words around in my pocket, put them behind my eyelids, in my mind. I let words float in my mouth. I roll them around on my tongue, taste them until sounds slowly push out of my mouth. Each word is a poem. Parler... la verite... a minuit... regarde... une etoile... le nuage... fume." 35

"I began to make maps of my experience. I could feel my inner landscape changing, my edges softening." 43

"...here in another country I am new, I could choose what and who I would be. A writer." 126

"His words were like stones he laid at my feet. I have become wet earth for stories like these, they take root in me and grow wild, nearly choking me." 157

"Our people are a great race of people and though the Europeans raped and plundered, we have kept inner riches. You got a cup of African blood and that means something, means you got a responsibility to be proud of it and use your talents or suffer self-destruction." 178

"I picked up the gold pen Dr. Bernard had given me, and between my tears words began to bloom on the page, one after the other. Words crowded each other, trying to lead me out of despair. I was exuberant. The maps I'd made were guides to my interior. I remembered all the places I'd been, all the things I'd seen, and caught them in my imagination. Jimmy was with me and Langston too. I wrote to understand where I had been, where I was going, to make sense of the world that had led me to the small room on the edge of the Abyss." 231

"I had discovered something that no one could take away from me. I had found a path on my interior map and learned to follow it. There was power in the pen. I knew this for certain. I didn't need Jimmy to tell me that." 232

yunique says

This book was a joy to read. It helps that I'd recently visited Paris and Versailles at the beginning of winter. Thus, I was transported to several of the locales with the protagonist. Standing on the street, outside of a restaurant. The cold nipping at my nose. One day, I'll have to visit again, using the map laid out between the pages of this book as my guide.

Velvetink says

Black Girl in Paris by Shay Youngblood is a colorful literary jazz arrangement where the author's narrative improvisations transport the reader through the streets of Paris, deconstructing in their wake many fixed preconceived ideas about France and its influence on African American artists. The interest these virtuosos show for the city of lights is still undeniable in spite of, or due to, the present tumultuous situation between the United States and France. However, one must confront the image of a haven that is free of racism with other more paradoxical representations in order to gauge the full extent of the French influence for African American artists of the twentieth century.

I really enjoyed this book and some quotes give food for thought. Embraces the Blues and the Jazz in the vein of Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin or Ishmael Reed. Good stuff.

Julia says

This was a great read and a story that I will definitely revisit. I love the bravery of Eden and found myself

envying her (oh responsibility, why are you so heavy?). Shay has hit the nail on the head with the racial tensions witnessed by the characters. Whether it's interracial dating or immigration, the views expressed are relevant today which makes me sad especially when expressed by the President of the United States of America. I've definitely recommended this book to friends and hope they decide to pick it up.

Rena says

Granted, I read this *years* ago, but I loved the imagery and the prose. I'm also a big fan of Youngblood's Soul Kiss.

Leia G says

Okay Read

I liked the content it was actually perfect. But the turns were too sharp for the plot twist and other settings.... I found myself having to read the paragraph over and over just to catch on. Overall though the story was well. I understood the message. But if it were a pillow, more swan feathers would be needed in order to fulfill.

Fiona says

Hmmm... I had much higher expectations of this novel. These expectations were partly based upon the fact that this book was my first ever 'group-read'. Perhaps my indifference to this fictional memoir is underpinned by my current temperament; perhaps I simply could not endure the idealism of the impassioned and inspired protagonist Eden, as she chased her literary dream around Paris.

"The words were crowded together carefully as if they had been written in a small, dark place by someone with plenty of time, lots to say, and no one to listen".

In the first instance, the lacklustre title really bothered me as it utterly undermines the sensuousness of the young black female protagonist and of the French capital itself (however upon reading this book and connecting the title to the narrative I do now understand and appreciate that reason for this simplicity). Secondly and much to my disappointment, Shay Youngblood's greatly-esteemed prose style only managed to glimpse a few opportunities to seduce me, as such and thirdly, this book failed to wholly captivate and reach inside of me, churn my emotions and enliven my senses in the way I had so hoped, and was under the impression that it would. I figure this might be because I am not so naïve to the charm, rhythms and colours which infuse a bohemian European lifestyle. Even so, I felt that something was definitely lacking in this piece of writing. And whilst it is clear that and how Shay Youngblood successfully explored the inner mysteries and developing spirit of her protagonist and gorgeously captured the unique essence of France, as I was working my way through this novel I began to wonder whether or not the aspiring writer Eden might have accomplished this to much greater effect, with even more intuition and grace. I would like to experience the exuberance of Eden's book; Shay Youngblood's attempt felt too considered, clichéd, constrained, less free.

"I have become wet earth for stories like these, they take root in me and grow wild, nearly choking me."

I think that, most likely, this review has too much subjectivity in it to be fair. Yes, some Europeans drink deliciously dark and rich coffee from bowls - pick your jaw up from the ground, get over it and on with your Self.

From my perspective, this book was good, but not good-enough.

Lala says

Wonderfully nuanced book, though again, I probably took too long to read it. I might go back and reread during the winter when a place like Paris will fuel my depression based wanderlust and self imposed isolation.

Danielle says

Before I left home I cut my hair close to my scalp so I could be a free woman with free thoughts, open to all possibilities. I was making a map of the world. In ancient times maps were made to help people find food, water, and the way back home. I needed a map to help me find love and language and since one didn't exist, I'd have to invent one, following the trails and signs left by other travelers. I didn't know what I wanted to be, but I knew I wanted to be the kind of woman who was bold, took chances, and had adventures. I wanted to travel around the world. It was my little-girl dream.

I really enjoyed this novel. I feel like I should rate it in-between a three and a half and a four, but let's not split hairs. I'm guessing (based on the mini-bio) that *Black Girl in Paris* is semi-autobiographical, it sure did feel that way. For me, it added to the reading experience, and in some ways it didn't read like fiction. Youngblood crafted a novel that felt like little short stories that flowed into each other. Like she was your friend and she was sharing her experience in Paris with you, one story at a time. And of course, the overabundance of Baldwin references pushed it over the top for me. I like the little allusions she made to his work, some obvious, others not so much. I would recommend this book to anyone. It's a quick but satisfying read. And it made me want to be a black girl in Paris, too.

Andrea says

One of my favorite works of fiction. Got really mad when the book ended.

Nancy says

Cross-posted at Outlaw Reviews and at Shelf Inflicted

I love Paris, its grandeur, its palaces, museums, monuments, breathtaking views, restaurants, cafes, its rich culture and history. It is a dynamic, international and happening place.

It's been about 5 years since I've been there last, so I was really looking forward to taking a literary trip to Paris.

Eden, a 26-year-old Black woman from Alabama and an aspiring writer, journeys to Paris with just \$200 in her pocket to follow in the footsteps of her literary heroes – James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Langston Hughes.

This could have been a fascinating story, but I found the descriptions of Paris vague, the main character too naïve for her age, and far too much of the story focused on her menial jobs. I wanted a little glimpse of the past, some insight into her heroes who were just names dropped on the pages. I also wanted to know more about France's troubles – the racism, the struggles of the poor and working class, the problems of immigrants.

I wanted a more serious story and less whimsy. I could have done without the recipes and the silly musings about art and love. There were interesting secondary characters I would have liked to know more about – Eden's androgynous boyfriend, Ving, and his friend Olu-Christophe, a Haitian living in Paris without papers, and Luce, Eden's friend/lover who taught her how to take what she needed in order to survive.

The story was pleasant enough reading, but lacked passion and spirit, making my literary trip to Paris rather disappointing.

The Black Geek says

I believe that I read this book after my first trip abroad; I could not put it down. Youngblood uses language like a poet and definitely knows how to write a scene...She captures emotion in characters with the most beautifully crafted detail. There is a warmth in her writing; her language never stagnant. It truly does not surprise me that Youngblood is also a painter. The skill and imagination that she has with a paintbrush and canvas is evident in her storytelling.

Tamara Evans says

It's not too often that I read a book that I can't put down. In reference to this book, that was exactly the case. Although this is the author's first work, I found myself unable to stop reading because of the way in which she writes. I feel that this book is great because it allows the reader to be exposed to various personalities of the main character.

When I first saw the title of this book, I'll admit, I was somewhat offended. I didn't know why I felt that way, it just seemed like the term "black" was somewhat degrading to say the least. However, once I began reading the book, I realized that this was not so, and that the title was based on not her own view of herself but how others saw her.

Throughout the course of the book, the main character Eden takes on various different roles and we as the reader are given an opportunity to see how she deals with each role with dignity. Even when she is a thief, she still makes the reader feel for her as well as her situation.

I believe that this is a great book for anyone to read, whether they are black, white, or any other color. Not only will people be able to relate with the experience of being a stranger in a strange land, but also, they will get a glimpse into the soul of a person.
