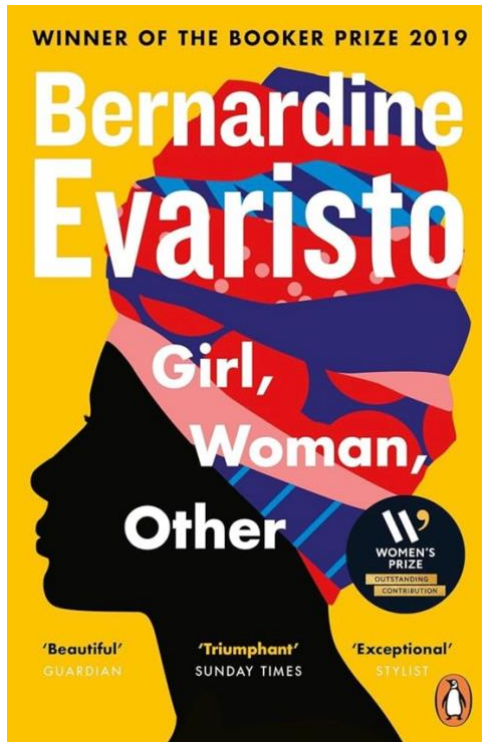


## Review of *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernadine Evaristo



*Girl, Woman, Other* follows the lives and struggles of twelve very different characters. Mostly women, black and British, they tell the stories of their families, friends and lovers, across the country and through the years. It quite rightly won the 2019 Booker prize. Evaristo, former president of the Royal Society of Literature (RSL) is funding a £10,000 award, the Pioneer prize, which will “honour and thank trailblazing women over 60” which this year goes to Maureen Duffy, poet, author and playwright.

Bernadine Evaristo is the Anglo-Nigerian award-winning author of several books of fiction and verse fiction that explore aspects of the African diaspora: past, present, real and imagined.

This is a novel about 12 women but it is also a sweeping history of the black British experience. ” It’s about the characters that other authors squeeze into peripheral roles to add colour and diversity to their monotone tomes.

Evaristo brings them front of stage and lets them shine”. It is an education about what it meant to be black in the 50s and 60s, the general emancipation of women and eventually black women.

Some comments from our members – these are longer than usual but well worth reading!

“I really enjoyed this book ... made it last for as long as possible! I think it should become a classic. or at least on British schools Eng. Lit GCSE curriculum. I felt I was being educated in an entertaining, but also shaming way, on the subject of prejudice against black women’s lives in Britain, from decades back and even to today, concerning racism and sexism.

Amma, the main character, after a difficult childhood and rebellious schooling, develops a real love of the creative arts, and of women. Feminism via lesbianism and various gender alternatives was one of the main subjects of the book, very informative but very confusing.

I liked the stream of consciousness style of writing, a compact, clear, natural and

compassionate outpouring of feeling about the development of 12 black women's lives that are connected as friends /lovers to Amma. This is also a story of too often accepted power of white males over black females in British society. This is thankfully slowly being addressed through authors like Evaristo, and more enlightened parts of the white community. I was glad the book ended happily with Hattie's illegitimate baby, who had been adopted finally was reunited with her very old mother. And also, Amma's play performed at the National Theatre being accepted with rave reviews.

The use of lower case was a purposeful choice by the author. It took me a few pages to settle into reading this style of writing but then it really grew on me. I thoroughly enjoyed the book and how all the women were connected in some way. All with their own individual unique tales to tell, with different lives some intertwined more than others. The stories were about women of a black ethnic background or women connected to people from a black ethnic background. How their ethnicity has influenced their life, choices and opportunities in a positive or negative way. I liked some of the characters more than others. I particularly liked Hattie, the 93-year-old who lived in the Scottish borders. Her story was poignant and I was so pleased that her long lost daughter found her. Hattie's daughter was taken from her when she was very young.

The stories were informative in their own right, each character telling their own personal story. I found Bummi's views to be thought provoking and interesting. Bummi's daughter wanted to marry a white man and Bummi didn't want this to happen. She wanted to keep 'Blackness' in the family not let it be 'diluted' with white. She saw it as a betrayal to being 'Black' if black people marry or have children with a white person. However, her daughter did marry a white man and Bummi grew to really like him.

It was interesting to read racial prejudice against a white person from a black person's perspective. I wonder if the book would not have been accepted if the author and her characters were white and there had been mention of not wanting a daughter to marry a person of black ethnicity? It would have been seen as racist and maybe banned? On the other hand, it also showed that race/ colour doesn't matter, that love and family are the things that matter. I did enjoy it and would read other stories by this author".

I found it difficult to slot characters into the storyline when they reappeared later in the book, sometimes younger than they were before, sometimes older. This book has a very thin storyline. The author goes to great lengths to define types of lesbians, trans-people and feminists using long words which I did not understand, and quite frankly, I was not interested enough to find out more about them than I knew already. I gave myself a pat on the back when I managed to plough through to the end of the book.

The book was not written to be enjoyed, but to increase our understanding. The author takes great pains to include all the injustices Black and Coloured people have had to endure particularly in Britain where the disgraceful ways these people have

been treated makes me very ashamed to be British. The author accurately depicts life for them in Britain through various characters throughout the 20th century.

I did enjoy the ending where Hattie was reunited with her first child. Thank goodness it did not end as I was expecting it to - with a scene at the farm, after it had been converted into a retreat for lesbians!

I wrote the review as I went along and, as I was writing, I realised that I am the person she is having a rant about! A white, middle-class racist snob, and that I was arguing and disagreeing with what she was saying. My instant reaction was not to like this book. Amma has a "chip on her shoulder" about being a woman, black and lesbian but in 60s London (and I was there) women were still second-class citizens regardless of colour. Being black was still unusual and being lesbian was not talked about. However, by the end, the stories were coming together and the Epilogue was the best bit of the whole story!

This was an engaging, easy long read with lots of original ways of look at life's problems illustrated by black women's lives but relevant to striving white lives too – it was very humorous in parts.

It showed deep insight into young folks defining their place in modern Britain – the sheer horrors of racial prejudice, the fear and emotional damage that women still endure. But the book is about how a number of different characters are still able to change and grow within a living culture. One feels the author has such an accurate knowledge of different scenarios (e.g. institutional banking) and she makes well-considered, wise observations of human nature and how it changes through life.

The book is an uplifting read in territory and culture I have some familiarity with – a sister married to a Jamaican with 3 mixed race adult children brought up in the Stockwell/Brixton area 0 Ritzy cinemas visit and street markets. A great read!

Christine Wright