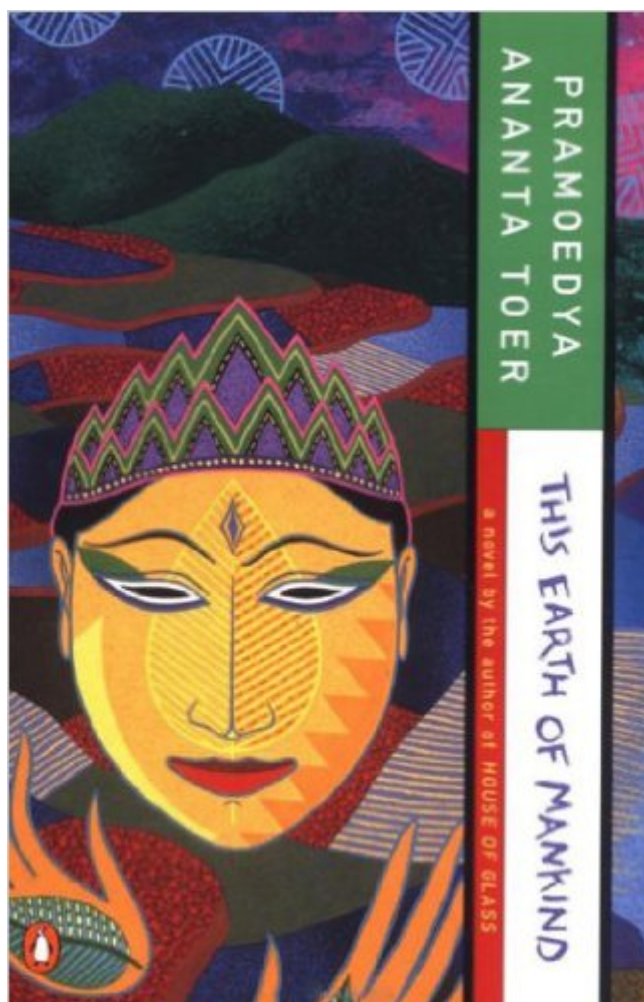


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This Earth Of Mankind (Buru Quartet)



Synopsis

Minke is a young Javanese student of great intelligence and ambition. Living equally among the colonists and colonized of 19th-century Java, he battles against the confines of colonial strictures. It is his love for Annelies that enables him to find the strength to embrace his world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Kirkus review printed above damns Toer's novel with faint praise when it states that the book is "too obvious a polemic." Too obvious for whom? I wonder if the reviewer would take the same view of any other number of political novels which were used by their authors as a barely disguised fictional framework to attack flawed or unjust cultural values. Is *The Grapes of Wrath* too obvious a polemic? Of course not, and neither is *This Earth of Mankind*. Toer makes no effort to disguise the nature of his critique of the social and political values of colonial Indonesian society. Toer's narrative is brilliant; the characters are vivid and developed so well that we have no trouble identifying with them personally, and yet at the same time they are patently obvious symbols of the different racial and social strata in the world of which the novel is set. Toer has been accused of being overly melodramatic in this novel, and while I think that is a reasonable criticism, I have to disagree. The antagonists here are hissable characters, but Toer plays fair with them. They have a clear rationale for what they do and the justification for their actions may seem reasonable and even honorable to them even if we view it as an outrage. Toer balances this all with a tone that never comes across as angry, although given the hardships he himself has endured would make it perfectly understandable

if the novel had been tinged with more brimstone. But the narrative does give one the sense of social and political displacement felt by Minke, the book's narrator, and by the family he meets in whose fate he becomes entangled. In *This Earth of Mankind*, Toer exposes the evils of a society based on and obsessed with castes of race and money, and in doing so has produced one of the essential political novels of the 20th Century.

I am impressed by this English translation of *BUMI MANUSIA*, but the original is still more rich and colorful. I lived for a decade 30 miles from Pramoedya's home town of Blora, presumably the B_____ from which Minke comes. All of Pram's books were banned then and Pram himself was in the midst of his imprisonment on Buru, but I had discovered what an amazing opening they provided to the world of turn-of-the-century colonial Java. I am a student of Javanese history and culture, but Pram's works, beginning for me with *TJERITA DARI BLORA* (Stories from Blora), provided a florid vision to the realities of that world for people of every caste of the colonial social structure. Every time I went into a used book shop I searched for his works. *THIS EARTH OF MANKIND* is in my mind an unparalleled gift to Indonesia and the world, providing innumerable images of the range of human experience in colonial Java. The Kirkus reviewer needs to know that "nyai" is not a person's name but an appellation applied to unofficial "rightless" wives of European men who were part of the colonial system. There were many of them in every town. Read *CHILD OF ALL NATIONS* to learn how this particular woman became Ngoro Mellema's nyai. Pram's story opens the window for us to see a whole range of human experience heretofore hidden from public view even from present-day Indonesians who were denied access to Pram's works until recent years. The subsequent novels in the quartet carry on the stunning and poignant revelations. Grievously last month when I out of habit looked again for Pram's works in bookstores in Indonesia they had again disappeared from the shelves of major stores! The story goes on.

The history of South East Asia is often misunderstood and misrepresented. By itself, this book stands as a classic love story of a timeless beauty. As an historical passage, this book brings home an understanding of the seeds of Indonesian nationalism. Anyone wishing to learn more about South East Asian history around the period of colonial rule and/or the struggles of a people against a cycle of abuse will find this story compelling, especially given the circumstances under which it was written. I loved the book from both the love story and historical perspectives.

Plunged in economic, religious, social, and racial turmoil, the children of the "Jewel of the Pacific"

nation today are left with a deep silent cry for the fate of their beloved land. They are stunned by the entire mumble-jumble political storm happening around them. They know their ancestors did something right by the fact of their independence from colonialism, but something is missing...Being victim of a corrupt system from the past few decades by their own government blinds and robs them from the connection with the past when their grandfathers and grandfather's fathers fought shoulder to shoulder to free the nation from the oppression of colonialist dogs that robbed, raped, exploited, and enslaved the people. Mr. Toer through his vivid depiction and powerful character projection from the missing era reconnects the children of Indonesia today with their own buried past to rekindle the fire of genuine nationalism. He drew the map to let them find their root and solidarity as a nation. Through drawing a picture of the past, Mr. Toer provides a guide for the nation's future. The tetralogy is a must-read for today's Indonesian generation while the social drama presented in his writing also provides a peek for all humanity to see its own strength, pitfalls, and potential for greatness. No readers will be left behind. I am a child of that nation that selfishly used to be called Dutch East Indies and from the depth of my heart I would like to thank Mr. Toer to endure such barbarism in his life in order to pass on the knowledge that otherwise will be buried by hypocrisy and ignorance. Merdeka!

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