



The Book of Memory

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Memory is an albino woman languishing in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she has been convicted of murder. As part of her appeal, her lawyer insists that she write down what happened as she remembers it. As her story unfolds, Memory reveals that she has been tried and convicted for the murder of Lloyd Hendricks, her adopted father. But who was Lloyd Hendricks? Why does Memory feel no remorse for his death? And did everything happen exactly as she remembers?

In *The Book of Memory*, Petina Gappah has created a uniquely slippery narrator: forthright, acerbically funny, and with a complicated relationship to the truth. Moving between the townships of the poor and the suburbs of the rich, and between the past and the present, Gappah weaves a compelling tale of love, obsession, the relentlessness of fate, and the treachery of memory.

The Book of Memory Details

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From Reader Review The Book of Memory for online ebook

Aditi says

“When everything goes to hell, the people who stand by you without flinching -- they are your family.”

----Jim Butcher

Petina Gappah, a Zimbabwean author, has penned a deeply moving literary fiction, *The Book of Memory* that narrates the life story of a Zimbabwean convict on a death row charged for murdering her adoptive father, who was once sold to this man by her own parents and how she evolved into a different person while living with her new family and how easily she could forget her own family and how her happiness got destroyed because of her adoptive father. This is her story, mostly written from her early memories in childhood to teenage hood to an adult to figure out what the lawyers missed in the prosecution of her adoptive father's murder.

Synopsis:

The story you have asked me to tell begins not with the ignominious ugliness of Lloyd's death but on a long-ago day in April when the sun seared my blistered face and I was nine years old and my father and mother sold me to a strange man. I say my father and my mother, but really it was just my mother.

Memory, the narrator of The Book of Memory, is an albino woman languishing in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she has been convicted of murder. As part of her appeal her lawyer insists that she write down what happened as she remembers it. The death penalty is a mandatory sentence for murder, and Memory is, both literally and metaphorically, writing for her life. As her story unfolds, Memory reveals that she has been tried and convicted for the murder of Lloyd Hendricks, her adopted father.

But who was Lloyd Hendricks? Why does Memory feel no remorse for his death? And did everything happen exactly as she remembers? Moving between the townships of the poor and the suburbs of the rich, and between the past and the present, Memory weaves a compelling tale of love, obsession, the relentlessness of fate and the treachery of memory.

Memory is a convict serving her time, as she is on a death row, in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare. Her lawyer has asked her to pen her story starting from her childhood to the day when her adoptive father was found murdered in his home. Thus begins her tale which is a constant shift from the present time, her life as a convict and her life among others, the prison guards, the struggling and monotonous routine, her limited visitors and all, to the past when she was born in a family with two siblings and her parents in Mufakose and how one day her happiness turns upside down, when her father sells her to a white man named, Lloyd Hendricks, who was a professor and had a big house and how from then on her life drastically changed from being poor to being someone with a lot of means. But what exactly happens between Lloyd and Memory that lets their growing bond of trust turn into ashes?

The story is beautifully written and I devoured each and every word of this skilled and talented author. Her

eloquent writing style with time lapses and emotions make it one of an evocative read and a delightful reading experience for all. The narrative of Memory is first person POV which is free-flowing and highly expressive that no doubt makes the pace a bit slow, but also lets the readers look deeply and strikingly into the scenes. The story is engrossing enough to keep the readers glued and yearning for truth till the very last page.

The author has captured the backdrop of Zimbabwean landscape vividly with in-depth details about the country's shifting politics, culture, linguistics, society, in-differences, the streets, the food, the fashion and everything and it certainly feels like a magic portal where the readers can travel to Zimbabwe through the author's words. I was instantly transported to Harare, inside the prison cell, and on the dusty streets of this place. And the author has flawlessly arrested the routine of a female prisoner, the tortures and the harassment they undergo from the prison guards.

The characters in this story are highly well-developed, especially the main character, Memory, whose back story throws light to her constantly evolving demeanor, and how she honestly pens her every mistake and every right decision. I liked her character, not because of her honesty, but because of her laid back attitude even though she is on the death row. Her painful and sad past engulfed me with its intensity and my heart cried out for her. The character of Lloyd is also well-structured and the way the author unfolds him is quite brilliant. The rest of the characters are also quite interesting enough to remember them even after the end of the story.

Overall, this is a compelling novel set in Zimbabwe which is not only thought provoking but also leaves the readers with a feeling of contempt after reading this book.

Verdict: *A true gem for literary fiction lovers.*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the author, Petina Gappah, for giving me an opportunity to read and review her novel.*

♥ Sandi ♥ says

3 stars ... And this book started out so well.

An albino woman imprisoned for the death of the man who allegedly bought her, at 9 years old. The man who raised her and gave her every opportunity - a good education and with many steps up in her social status. Memory, is on death row -the only woman on death row in Zimbabwe. She is charged with writing the account of her life and the murder. It tells the back story of not only her life, but that of her family. Memory is an unreliable narrator.

For all intent and purpose I did enjoy this book. It had a great premise with likeable and dis-likable characters. Many times this novel brought to life the pain and suffering of its haunted actors. However this astute young author did the one thing that I am so terribly tired of - a ploy that other authors have taken the liberty of doing, to the point of ruining novels for me. I can accept a few foreign words scattered throughout a novel. I much prefer that there is translation adjoining the foreign word or phrase, and that this practice is kept to a minimum. Once this becomes habit and it is peppered generously throughout the novel, especially with no additional translation, then for me, it ruins the momentum of the novel. If an author wants to write a novel in a foreign language, then do so, but stop ruining the English version with a foreign language that I do

not understand and that is not being translated.

There is no other option for me than to take at least one full star off the rating that I give.

Calzean says

The first half dragged, meandered and was dry. But the second half of this book was excellent as Memory's story unfolds and the truth about her mother is revealed.

At the age of 9, Memory is "sold" to a single white man Lloyd. She is well educated in a caring house. They meet Zenko, an African artist, and Lloyd's secret (a fairly obvious one) is revealed. Memory goes to Europe and University and finally returns to Zimbabwe where she once again goes to live in Lloyd's house. Memory tells her story while sitting in her jail cell convicted of Lloyd's murder.

The setting is at the end of Rhodesia into the early days of Zimbabwe and there is a good mix of the white's world and the native world through this period to make the book interesting for historical, cultural and story-telling reasons.

Liz Barnsley says

The Book of Memory and I were at odds with each other for the first little while. The language Petina Guppah uses is rich and beautiful, peppered with local dialect and at times challenging to follow, but ultimately worth the effort.

The Book of Memory is exactly that – not only of the person narrating the story, Memory herself, but also memory itself and the way it flows backwards to points in time without any particularly cohesive order. The descriptive prose is haunting and gorgeous, I got a real feel for the streets upon which Memory lived, the shock of the culture change as she moved onto other things and a sharp knowledge of all the characters she met along the way – or at least of her interpretation of them.

It is a literary novel, the narrative tells a life story – Memory has to be seen as an unreliable narrator because it is simply her own world view of those things that have happened to her. It is entirely fascinating and at times very moving, with a sharp influx of ironic humour and a brilliantly placed sense of time that speaks to wider issues within its setting.

I enjoyed it, admired it whilst not being completely in love with it and would definitely recommend it for fans of literary fiction with entirely wonderful yet not wasted language. The Book of Memory is short and sharp – a little gem to be savoured on a quiet afternoon. Give it a go.

Anne says

There are some advantages in a rainy Bank Holiday Monday, and one of them for me was that I was able to sit down and read The Book of Memory in almost one sitting. This is a debut novel that is both stunning and original. It is a book that will transport the reader to places unimagined, yet it is also a very challenging story, one that at times is difficult to follow. Despite this, The Book of Memory is so beautifully told and captures the heart. Memory's voice is strong, she is mysterious and at times unfathomable, yet she is a

character whose voice lingers long after the last page is turned.

Memory is recounting her story in the hope that her death sentence will be overturned. She has been found guilty of the murder of her adopted father Lloyd Hendricks and her solicitor has asked her to recount what happened in the lead up to Lloyd's death.

Memory does not just tell the facts of the events leading to the killing. She looks back at her early life with her family, before she was nine years old, before her parents sold her to Lloyd. Memory has always been unusual. She's an albino, she's also the first woman for many years who has been sentenced to death. Memory has tried to hide for most of her life, and yet now, she is the centre of attention, both inside the prison and outside too.

Memory's story is not always easy to follow, her narrative skips back and forth as she remembers various things. Her recollections of her siblings, of her overpowering mother and her loving father are mixed up with the story of her transition to Lloyd's home; a sharp contrast to the poverty she has known before.

Petina Gappah's vivid and imaginative writing brings Zimbabwe to life. Even though I struggled with the names of both the inhabitants and the places, this country becomes a character within its own right. The contrast between rich and poor, the tastes, the smells, the sights, the colour, and the memories. For Memory is not just the name of the lead character, it is also the theme of this novel. Memories easily recounted, and those that are hidden, through fear and because they are painful.

The character Memory can be difficult to fathom, she appears to have no remorse that Lloyd is dead, despite the fact that through him, she was introduced to books and to music, and to riches. She traveled, she was educated at the best university and although she keenly observes those around her, she doesn't seem to want to look deeper into her own mind.

The Book of Memory is not a long novel at just under 300 pages, but it is a satisfying read with a complex lead character. Petina Gappah is a natural storyteller, her book is evocative and poignant and deserves much success.

Julie says

Perhaps not a fair rating, since I didn't finish it, but I can't imagine suffering through to the end.

This story held such promise and I really wanted to like it, but had to abandon it after 45 pages. The dull, lifeless prose had me nodding off at the end of every page. It was a struggle to get as far as I did. Life is much too short to waste it on this.

Susan says

When we meet Memory, the narrator of this novel, she is in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Zimbabwe, having been found guilty of murder. From the start, we are told that she did not murder her

adopted father, Lloyd Hendricks, and she is writing down her life story as part of her appeal against her death sentence. In effect, Memory's life has two parts – the first nine years of her childhood, spent at 1486 Mharapara Street and then the next nine years of her life, spent with Lloyd Hendricks; the white man that she claims her parents sold her to. As we read of the unfolding life of Memory, we move between past and present and gradually unravel what really happened to lead her to a life in prison.

The author of this novel first became successful through a volume of short stories, "An Elegy for Easterly." I have to admit that short stories have never been a favourite of mine – but I now regret that this author did not come to my attention earlier, as I loved this book. From the first moment Memory begins speaking to the reader, I was completely enthralled. We begin with her life in the busy and chaotic life on Mharapara Street, which Petina Gappah brings totally to life with an exuberant cast of characters. Unlike most of the inhabitants of the street, Memory lives a slightly outcast life – her parents seem to lack the endless relatives that visit most of her neighbours and she is set apart by the fact that she is an albino. Of course, children's memories are often uncertain and there are things that they do not fully understand, but we see everything from Memory's perspective, while also being aware that there are undercurrents beneath the facts that are related to us.

At the age of nine, Memory is taken to live at the beautiful house, 'Summer Madness,' with Lloyd Hendricks and has a new life, a more privileged education and a different set of acquaintances. From the start she is unwilling to confront the fact that she believes her parents sold her to Lloyd and, gradually, the two become close. As Memory grows though, things change and her love for the artist Enzo will have a devastating impact on future events.

This novel moves from Memory's current life in prison and backtracks from her childhood to early adulthood and across the world – from Zimbabwe to Oxford and other countries – as Memory grows and changes. Gradually, as she writes, she confronts the childhood memories that she has always shied away from and uncovers the truth of what happened all those years ago and the events that led to her current situation. This is not always an easy book to read – much of it is sad, although there is also a lot of humour. The book is peppered throughout with local dialect and, although I did not understand many of the words, the author cleverly intersperses them into the text to add flavour and a sense of place, while managing to keep the story moving and making it unnecessary for you to follow every single word. Personally, I thought the whole story absolutely wonderful – moving, evocative and poignant. Memory is, essentially, an outsider in both the worlds she inhabited outside of prison and this status makes her doubly perceptive.

Alongside the story of Memory, is her life inside the prison, set a few years after independence. With an election looming, we are aware of events outside of the prison walls and of the reason why Memory's trial and sentence was so swift and decisive in a country all too aware of the world's eye on a country erupting in violence and where the death of three white farms in the month before Lloyd's death had more than a little to do with the judgement against her. This novel has a lot to offer, both as a personal read and as an ideal choice for book groups, with so much to discuss. Undoubtedly, this is one of my favourite reads of the year and I recommend it highly. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Katherine says

Memory, an albino Zimbabwean woman, is the only female prisoner on death row in the notorious Chikurubi

prison in Harare. The law of Zimbabwe restricts her to a single appeal for a change of her sentence, to save her own life. She is accused of murdering a white man, to whom she was sold as a child.

As a *murungudunhu*, I am a black woman who is imbued not with the whiteness of *murungu*, of privilege, but of *dunhu*, of ridicule and fakery, a ghastly whiteness.

Gappah has been called (to her dislike) "the voice of Zimbabwe." Rather than being pigeonholed as an African author, or given the impossible task of being a single voice for a diverse population with diverse and opposing beliefs, we should regard Gappah as an author from Africa who writes *for* Zimbabwe. Memory's white skin, and her sale to Lloyd, results in her receiving a white upbringing of privilege, while her childhood on Mharapara street gives her memories of growing up in modern Zimbabwean black culture, and in poverty. She is too white for the township and too African for the rich white farm community. Memory is an outsider who watches and reflects on both sides of the growing Zimbabwean conflict.

The whole thing had been reduced to the simple matter of blackness versus whiteness. White people stole the land. Black people took farms and ruined them. Black people took control and ran things down. White people stole.

The Book of Memory is a bilingual book, as Shona phrases appear without translation. However, I never felt that I couldn't understand what was going on; why should English be the only written language for a society that is anything but homogenous? At the Edinburgh international book festival she quoted Chinua Achebe, saying, "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard-of things with it." In addition, the inclusion of Shona superstitions and traditions made the novel sing with pride for her country. It also sang of sorrow, as the farm invasions and murders occurred, and as Memory encounters racism, ostracism and loss. However, there is a note of humor that had me giggling too, particularly in the hilarious malapropisms of Patience.

"Irregardless of the absence of water," she says, "you should make sure the hoarse pipes are connected."

"You must make sure that your plates and bowels are clean."

As the book shifts back and forth between Memory's childhood, her early years with Lloyd, her current circumstances in one of the worst prisons in the world, and the days leading up to Lloyd's murder, a vivid and vibrant picture of Zimbabwe is skillfully painted. The Shona traditions and superstitions give a depth to the stories, and give voice to an advanced, culturally complex society that has been silenced and discarded by the western-centric education system in place since the beginning of colonialism. The effect of this is the colonization of the mind, as prison guards dream of the riches of white privilege and base their ideas of success on it, while they continue to fear witchcraft and discriminate according to their old superstitions.

In this independent, hundred-per-cent-empowered and fully and totally indigenous blacker-than-black country, a superior education is one that the whites would value, and as the whites do not value local languages, the best-educated among us have sacrificed our languages at the altar of what the whites deem supreme. So it was in colonial times, and so it remains, more than thirty years later.

The wide-reaching message of the book is that of political and social commentary. However, the story of one woman awaiting her execution for a complicated crime is a brilliant story as well. As she tells the story of her circumstances, the reasons for her parents' sale of her to a white stranger, her relationship with him, and the many different circumstances that lead up to his murder, the reader is gripped and forced to question their assumptions at every turn. The final truth was entirely unexpected, and utterly heart-breaking.

She is the voice of the Chimera that haunts my dreams. She is the stranger that glances back from my mirror when I least expect to see her. She is my beating heart, my palpitating fear.

The Book of Memory is a multilayered book, both an emotionally charged story of passion and crime, and a critical portrayal of Zimbabwean corruption and politics. Ultimately, however, it is a mature and honest depiction of a diverse society that is working through its violent and traumatic history, and how that history affects the present. It is a story of Zimbabweans of all races and alignments, and how prejudice, ignorance and corruption continue to cause immense tragedy. Gappah is not *the* voice of Zimbabwe, but she adds her voice to the chorus of Zimbabwean writers who are doing incredible things with fiction, and in *The Book of Memory* she hits all the right notes.

Read more of my reviews on Literogo.com.

Diane S ? says

3.5 Interesting premise for this well written book. Memory is an albino black, convicted of the murder of the white man who raised her. Given the death sentence she waits, incarcerated in the maximum security prison in Harare, Zimbabwe. She is our narrator and this is her story.

This is not a quick read, nor is it a fast moving story. Rather it is the story of a young woman and how she got from there, a home with siblings and a mentally ill mother and a father she adored, to here, awaiting death.

Life in the prison, the other women serving time with her, the constant political unrest in this country and how it affects the women in the prison, her life with her adopted father and lastly, his death. A book that take patience, with a twist at the end, when all answers are finally revealed. The ending is not definitive but I felt it did the book justice. Also highlights the unreliability of memory and how our memories of childhood are

incomplete or not correctly understood.

A good if slower read.

Jen Campbell says

A DNF, unfortunately.

Renita D'Silva says

This author's short story collection is one of my favourites, beautifully written gems of perfection, giving a glimpse into a fractured Zimbabwe. And this novel is even better. Moving, heart wrenching and beautiful. By co-incidence I was reading it while Zimbabwe was in the throes of political upheaval once again and that made it all the more poignant and powerful. LOVED every word.

Dagio_maya says

” Oggi ho pensato alla falena bianca. Anch’io, come lei, ho dovuto mutare forma e colore per mimetizzarmi nel mondo circostante. Anch’io, come lei, svolazzavo alla cieca, cambiavo colore, mi sforzavo di adattarmi, di sopravvivere. Forse decidere di sopravvivere può bastare. E ricominciare a vivere, che sia qui dentro o fuori, consapevole della verità. Forse come inizio può bastare. “

Ammetto di aver acquistato questo libro dopo aver letto la seguente dichiarazione:
«Una magnifica scrittrice.» J.M. COETZEE. Premio Nobel per la Letteratura

Per un quarto circa di lettura ammetto di essermi pentita.

Sì, Gappah scrive bene (non benissimo, non male).

Sì, il contesto è tutto da scoprire (Zimbabwe).

Sì, la storia è interessante (molto).

Inizialmente, tuttavia, ho trovato il racconto molto farraginoso e con due elementi, per me, irritanti:

- l’inserimento di alcune frasi, e/o termini, in lingua *shona* senza traduzione alcuna;
- un racconto che fa riferimenti a persone e/o fatti che il lettore ancora non conosce da cui un forte stato confusionale.

Questo per un quarto, circa di lettura.

Poi si decolla e tutto cambia....

” La storia che mi hai chiesto di raccontarti non comincia con la penosa mostruosità della morte di Lloyd.

Comincia il lontano giorno d'agosto in cui io avevo nove anni, il sole mi scottava il viso pieno di bolle e mio padre e mia madre mi vendettero a un estraneo."

Con questo avvio, Memory riavvolge il filo della sua vita scrivendo ad una giornalista americana interessata al suo caso.

"È questa la sensazione che mi danno i quaderni. Quando torno in cella a scrivere inizia la parte migliore della mia giornata. Sheherazade raccontava storie per mantenere la testa attaccata al collo. Io scrivo per restare in vita. E sto anche mettendo ordine tra i fili che l'hanno tenuta insieme, per vedere dove questo si collega a quello o s'intreccia con quell'altro, per vedere come formano l'arazzo da cui mi allontanerò per averne una visuale migliore.

Tuttavia scriverti non è semplice come immaginavo. Credevo che una volta seduta al tavolo avrei raccontato una storia lineare con un normale inizio, un finale e una parte centrale. Non avevo idea di quanto la mia realtà attuale e i ricordi emersi a casaccio si sarebbero insinuati nel racconto"

Memory è un'africana albina, detenuta nel braccio della morte per aver ucciso Loyd, il bianco che l'aveva comprata (!!!).

Lo scenario è quello dello Zimbabwe – ex Rhodesia- con le sue superstizioni, le sue tradizioni tribali e poi la corruzione e quell'arte di arrangiarsi che va oltre la legalità comune ma talmente diffusa da diventare macchietta.

Tratti molto comuni nel ex colonie africane, scaraventate a precipizio nello *status* indipendente senza alcun strumento valido a costruire una reale democrazia.

La società si fonda, dunque, su credenze che condizionano ogni scelta e in questo scenario nascere albini è spesso una condanna che, a volte, si rivela mortale (in sintesi la si considera una maledizione e ciò ha portato a veri e propri massacri)

Memory, memoria.

Ed è proprio il ricordo che prende parola.

Nella *township* in cui è cresciuta (" *zone piene dei detriti dell'esistenza umana*") regna la povertà come normale condizione (" *Accettavamo la semplicità della nostra vita ignorando la possibilità di una vita più ricca.*") e dove ai bambini vengono dati nomi (*Joy/ Princess/ Pretty/Progress/ Promise/ Providence/Privilege/ Prudence/Praise/Promotion/ Prevarication / Predestination...*) che evocano speranze che comunque sopravvivono.

Questa è una storia che parla di paure: quella di Memory succube degli sguardi inorriditi che l'accompagnano da sempre; quella di un paese che più cerca di essere "altro" più rotola giù e come Sisifo deve nuovamente compiere lo sforzo per disancorarsi dalle arcaiche credenze che molto (troppo) spesso sono state (e sono) veri e propri strumenti di morte,

Ma se la storia di questa nazione mostra le sua atrocità in tutta evidenza, non si può dire altrettanto per quella di Memory dove ci sono ancora curve che possono portare a qualcosa di inaspettato.

Consigliato!

Jaytinder says

Impossible to believe in. I like the author's personality, what it seems to be like anyway, nice smile, but it's

not a good book. If the heroine was really a Cambridge (Britain) educated albino on death row in Zimbabwe she be world famous international news, she wouldn't be locked quietly in prison. The way the author made her albino as a symbol for culturally white (educated, intelligent, lives with white people) is just embarrassing. May be the way the author feels about herself. And the way the heroine doesn't reveal what really happened early on (no spoilers! - but of course she's not guilty) is not likely - it would be the first thing on her mind she wanted to say! Yes? The forensic stuff is impossible - amazing the author has a law degree (not criminal law?). The voice is too happy for someone accused of murder and at least bereaved - when she starts quoting I eat my peas with honey... I've done it all my life... Makes the peas taste funny... but it keeps them on the knife! Accused of murder? Nice adoptive dad dead? in really really bad circumstances? COME ON...

Simon says

Thanks to Sterling Books in Brussels for the free review copy!

The Book Of Memory tells the story of a Zimbabwean woman called Memory whose parents sold her to a white man when she was nine. She relates her tale in flashback as she sits in prison, having been convicted of the same white man's murder. I won't spoil any more of the story (personally I'm not interested in book reviews which discuss the plot in too much detail) other than to say that we do finally get some answers to the main mysteries: why did Memory's parents give her away, and how did the white man, Lloyd, really die?

But this is not a murder mystery or a thriller. It's a story about identity and belonging, and how various characters, for various reasons, are marginalised by society. Memory is an albino, meaning that rather than play out in the blistering heat of the sun all day she prefers to stay indoors and read books or retreat into her own imagination. She becomes educated and has little time for the witchcraft and superstition so fervently believed in by many of her compatriots. She's witty and thoughtful, generally a fun and stimulating character with whom you're happy to spend time. Her story splits almost equally between childhood memories and present day descriptions of life in the women's prison where she's being held. Both are described equally vividly, with telling details such as sounds and smells.

But finally this is a surprisingly mature story about acceptance, both of yourself and of your circumstances, and about the sometimes futile search for "meaning" in life. It's a very impressive novel and I expect to hear a lot more about Petina Gappah in the future.

Julie Christine says

Mnemosyne, known as Memory, writes to an unseen, unmet Western journalist from her cell in Zimbabwe's notorious Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison. She has been sentenced to death for the murder of her childhood guardian, Lloyd—a white man to whom her parents handed her off in a diner when Memory was a young girl. Memory is an albino African, a condition that, even after she is treated for its physical pain, leaves deep scars in her psyche. Memory's attempts to define her identity and reason through a family and community that abandoned her lead her beyond Africa and into a redemptive life in Europe. But when she returns to Zimbabwe, disaster in the guise of a horrifying coincidence befalls her and she lands, unwittingly, on death row.

The premise is breathtaking, the execution less so. The epistolary narrative means relying on the memory (a compelling and well-rendered theme) of an unreliable narrator. Much of the first half is devoted to describing daily life in this women's prison, which is worthy of its own novel, but it does crowd out Memory's memories of her childhood and it becomes difficult to know quite where to focus one's attention. The second half of the novel, where Memory brings the reader into her life after she is sold to Lloyd, is rushed and so many of the events inexplicable and tangential.

Gappah's writing is gorgeous—strong and clear with full-color descriptions and a vivid sensuality that brings every setting, every character to life. The narrative is well-paced and the foreshadowing of deeper, darker secrets—the essential mystery of Memory's relationship with Lloyd and her arrest and conviction—propel the reader forward. The plot is distracted and unsatisfying, but this is still a worthy read for its insights into current Zimbabwe and its wonderfully rendered female characters.
