



Sugar Money

Jane Harris

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Martinique, 1765, and brothers Emile and Lucien are charged by their French master, Father Cleophas, with a mission. They must return to Grenada, the island they once called home, and smuggle back the 42 slaves claimed by English invaders at the hospital plantation in Fort Royal. While Lucien, barely in his teens, sees the trip as a great adventure, the older and worldlier Emile has no illusions about the dangers they will face. But with no choice other than to obey Cleophas - and sensing the possibility, however remote, of finding his first love Celeste - he sets out with his brother on this 'reckless venture'.

With great characters, a superb narrative set up, and language that is witty, bawdy and thrillingly alive, *Sugar Money* is a novel to treasure.

Sugar Money Details

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Cathy says

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There were a number of things that attracted me to *Sugar Money*. Firstly, it's one of the six books shortlisted for The Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction 2018 – always an excellent hallmark for quality historical fiction – and I'm attempting to read all the shortlisted books before the winner is announced on 16th June 2018. Secondly, the book's setting on the Caribbean islands of Martinique and Grenada. I've been lucky enough to visit both those islands - admittedly only for a day as part of a cruise itinerary - but I remember loving Grenada, particularly the colourful market in the capital, St George's, (referred to by its previous name Fort Royal in the book) with the smell of spices in the air. In fact, I'm still using the nutmeg and mace I bought there. Thirdly, I read Jane Harris's first book, *The Observations*, some time ago but remember being captivated by its quirky narrator, Bessy.

Jane Harris repeats that feat in *Sugar Money*. The narrator, Lucien, engages the reader from the start with his distinctive mode of speech that is a mixture of English, Creole, French and his own individual way of describing people, places, events and his own feelings. For example, after taking perhaps slightly too much rum: 'Indeed, after several further swig, I came over all misty inside and considered myself to be quite invincible.' I think many of us may have experienced the feeling of being 'all misty inside' after a touch too much to drink. There's some lovely humour as well. During the voyage to Grenada in the rather dilapidated vessel owned by the strange Captain Bianco, Lucien observes a shooting star. 'Magical sight. Perhaps it were a good omen. For a brief instant, I allowed myself to feel encouraged. But as the star died, trailing silver embers, old Bianco let flee a fart, startling as a blast of musketry, and the precious moment was ruined.' I laughed out loud at that.

I also really liked the touching relationship between Lucien and Emile. Lucien looks up to his older brother but at the same time he is an acute observer of his moods and innermost thoughts. There might be a good deal of disputation and quarrelling but underneath there is loyalty and a real bond of love and affection. As he says, 'I found myself too much in simple-hearted awe and adoration of my brother.'

In *Sugar Money* the author has taken what might be considered a footnote in Caribbean history and fashioned it into an adventure story crammed full of realistic detail. The reader gets a detailed account of the preparations for the mission the two brothers have been given, including the process of convincing the slaves to take part and the discussion about how the escape will be managed. I'll confess there were times when I felt I was getting a little too much detail and the pace of the book slowed a bit but once the plan is under way the tension definitely builds again.

Behind the adventure story is a chilling depiction of the dreadful atrocities of slavery and the appalling life endured by the plantation slaves. Worked to exhaustion, surviving on meagre food, subjected to the vilest and most cruel punishments, the women frequently the subject of sexual abuse, it is a life of misery and early death. For the slaves of the hospital plantation in Grenada, what is on offer is the opportunity to escape the harsh conditions they are currently enduring in the hope of slightly less harsh conditions on Martinique. The change of location does not offer them the prospect of freedom. They will still be the possessions of someone else, put to work for the benefit of their owners with no say over their lives. In effect, they are being repossessed like objects. Furthermore, there are dire consequences for the slaves should the plan be

discovered.

Sugar Money is both a compelling adventure story and a powerful indictment of the cruelties of the slave trade. I really did feel myself transported back to 18th century Grenada with its sights, sounds and smells conjured up brilliantly. In Lucien, the author has proved once again her remarkable ability to create a distinctive, original and engaging narrative voice.

Jill says

Is it possible to combine literary historical fiction that focuses on yet another instance of man's inhumanity to man with a gripping adventure that keeps readers on the edge of their seats?

Before reading Sugar Money, I would have voted "no". Horrific tragedies like the horrors of Caribbean slavery in the 1700s cannot and should not be minimized. And yet, Jane Harris pulls off this feat, so that at no time is the reader not invested in the human cost of this endeavor.

The storyline – inspired by reality – is this: a group of French surgeon-monks, situated in Martinique, plot to recover their "property" that they "lost" after being expelled from nearby Grenada. Grenada is now under the management of the British, who are even more brutal "masters" than the French – and Jane Harris does not shy away from describing their atrocities.

It's all about obtaining forced labor for their sugar plantations – hence, the title, Sugar Money. Chosen to execute this plot is Emile, a mulatto man in his late 20s, who is asked to convince the slaves to follow him to a waiting ship as their masters indulge in Christmas revelries. It is a fool's journey and he is also forced to take along his kid brother, Lucien, our narrator, who is barely entering his teens. Refusal is not an option.

The concept works because Lucien is still somewhat of an innocent, worshipful of his brother, desirous of proving his budding manhood, not totally understanding that the world is stacked so heavily against the disenfranchised. In his mind, his brother can do anything he sets his mind to do. The narration, written in an idiosyncratic English with Creole accents, is beautifully rendered; for true, Jane Harris is a ventriloquist.

There will, I suspect, be outcries of appropriation: can a white woman be the voice of a young slave-boy? I believe that there should be no boundaries on creative expression. (William Styron, a non-Jew, wrote one of the most affecting novels of Holocaust literature with Sophie's Choice). Judged entirely on its own merits, this daring novel of a little-known historical rebellion works. And it reconfirms the inner courage and tenacity of spirit that often – but not always – enables good forces to prevail.

Gumble's Yard says

Now I have to start this review with an embarrassing confession – I had seen the title of this book mentioned in several end of year reviews and tipped for the Women's Prize. Subconsciously though I had read the author as Joanne Harris – most famously author of Chocolat (a novel made into a film about a single mother opening a chocolaterie in Rural France – a broad sweet food-based theme she picked up in later books) and I assumed from the title that this novel would follow in a similar theme – perhaps around a small shop selling

sweets.

In fact the book is by Jane Harris – whose debut novel *The Observations* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize – and has been described as a rollicking and funny but dark Victorian pastiche. Her second novel *Gillespie and I* was also longlisted for the Orange Prize. And while this, Harris's third novel, is around the making of money from the sale of sugar, it is instead based on the slave-fuelled sugar trade of the West Indies in the 18th Century.

The story draws on true events in 1765 on the Islands of (French-owned) Martinique and (occupied by the English in 1763) Grenada, shortly after a truce is signed between the two nations.

Two mulatto brothers Emile and the much younger Lucien are asked by a mendicant Friar to travel to a hospital and sugar plantation in Grenada, once owned by the French Friars but now overseen by the English. Emile and Lucien are the bastard sons, via rape, of the previous cruel French overseer of the hospital and plantation in Grenada. Their task is to try and persuade some previously French-owned slaves there to flee from their tyrannical English and Scottish masters (who also are actively suppressing their French influenced speech and culture) and return with them to Martinique – although only as slaves there.

These new Fathers over there in St Pierre, they're just white men from Europe same as any other. Lefebure, from what I hear is only interested in making rum. What that suggest to me is, he will do whatever is necessary to get sugar. He'll work you hard. And Cleophas is no saint. Most of you met him when he was here. You know the kind of man he is. He only wants sugar money. That's why they [the French] need you [in Martinique]

The brothers have a Power of Attorney setting out the French claim to the slaves as being in their possession – but its clear that the English are very unlikely to recognise its validity and so effectively the brothers are asked to smuggle the slaves away across the Island.

The book is recounted (we later learn as a written account many years later) by Lucien – in a distinctive colloquial style, scattered with Creole (we later learn translated from the original which was written in a mix of English, French and Creole).

Lucien is simultaneously in awe of his older brother, particularly after discovering his role in some battles on Martinique, and resentful of his brother's protective attitude towards him which often shades into condescension. The two's relationship is complicated by them seeing in each other traces of their "vile devil of a father", although for me one of the most memorable images of the novel is when Lucien recounts that after the two fight

Emile grab me by the shoulders and said through his teeth: Remember our mother. Her blood flows in our veins too, just as much as his. We never have to be like him, not ever.

So that we realise that the brothers are ashamed of the white part of their heritage.

One of Emile's motivations for returning to Martinique (albeit his slave status gives him little choice) is to meet again his love Celeste (who he was parted from years earlier when taken to Martinique) only to find she is pregnant, seemingly via the English doctor who runs the hospital. Celeste played an important role in bringing up Lucien who loves her deeply, and the complex relationships between the three is the key

dynamic of the novel.

The book is, like Harris's first novel, told effectively as a rollicking adventure tale – with very detailed accounts of the brothers' adventures on the Island, which I often found myself skipping.

Particularly early on, the adventurous nature of the brother's quest can seem to obscure the reality of their status as slaves; although, particularly when the brothers reach the sugar plantation in Grenada, the appalling cruelty of the English (and Scottish) treatment of the slaves breaks through in occasional horrific details of some of the punishments meted out to errant slaves.

Yes [Raymond] said But for true it has to be better than here [in Grenada, with the English]. Every day now we wondering – who will be next. What will they chop off? Will it be a finger, toe, a hand or a foot? Who will lose his head? How will they torture us? What terrible thing will they make us do? What will they make us eat? Our own ears or worse.

Overall this book was a little too much of an adventure book for my tastes – however there is much to admire in the conception of the novel and in particular Harris's braveness in telling the tale, fully conscious that she could be accused of cultural appropriation. Certainly for a British audience, a slavery tale which is set in the Caribbean; and one in which the English (and Scottish – an deliberate decision on Harris's part was to identify the role of the Scottish in slavery in the sugar plantations) are seen by the slaves as the worst of all possible masters; makes an arresting contrast to the number of recent slavery-based novels appearing on literary prizes which are typically set in the Southern states of America.

Alice Lippart says

Well written, engrossing and nearly impossible to put down.

Evelina | AvalinahsBooks says

[image error]

Karen Kay says

I received this from netgalley.com in exchange for a review.

From the blurb, "Martinique, 1765, and brothers Emile and Lucien are charged by their French master, Father Cleophas, with a mission".

The language was absolutely unique to this story, using pieces and fragments of Creole (Kréyòl), a sprinkle of French and a dose of clipped English (no past tense, no plurals).

Good book.

4?

Tia says

Not to be missed. I Recommend to anyone who enjoys history and learning about slavery in different lands. It's a punch in the gut page turner. Ms. Harris, unlike many others who write about the slave trade, didn't leave out the gore and deplorable treatment of the slaves. She showed how manipulations of the greedy Friars led others to their deaths. Harris writes where you can understand and sympathize with the slaves, like when they decide not to escape to Martinique. It is a well written story that I won't soon forget. You will be on pins and needles rooting for Emile, Lucien and Celeste. Emile! Emile! I find myself calling him as well.

Over seer Belle

Friar Cleophas

Mr White

Lucien

Emile

Celeste

Martinique

Grenada

Didi says

Sugar Money is a very well written historical fiction that is based on a real even to that took place in Grenada 1765. Not knowing that much about the Caribbean I decided to pick this one up. I'm glad I did despite some of the torturous passages I read to read about the brutality the English put the slaves through. Chilling and horrific! This book is well worth the read and informed me on a bit of this period, 18th century Caribbean and slavery there. The story is full of suspense for the reader. You'll want to continue to find out if Emile and Lucien manage to pull off this feat with success. Very happy that my 2017 ended on a really good book. I definitely recommend to people who like reading well-written historical fiction novels.

Melanie (Mel's Bookland Adventures) says

I mainly picked this book up because it is longlisted for the Walter Scott Award in 2018. I am fairly certain, I would have not picked it up otherwise as the other two books by Jane Harris were just ok for me. I am so glad, that I did pick it up though because this certainly had the wow factor for me. The story focuses on two slaves who have been charged by their owner to retrieve some slaves from a neighboring island which is now under British rule. It is a fool's errand and dangerous, but being slaves they have no way of saying no or getting out of it. The story is told in a way that breaks your heart but does not allow you to wallow in any melodrama, there is no sugar sweetness here, no tear jerking, no cry buttons that are being pressed. And I

guess that's why some people found the characters to be remote, we are so used to that type of horrific historical fiction to trigger a "weep" response. This is not a tear jerker, this is a book that shows you what the reality of those lives could have been like. Horrific, brutal, de-humanising. Not an easy read, well worth being longlisted for the Walter Scott Prize.

Rowizyx says

Mi è piaciuta la scelta della trama e come l'autrice ha deciso di trattare gli eventi storici romanzandoli ma senza perdere la veridicità della storia. Non conoscevo questo particolare avvenimento storico e sono stata raggelata per buona parte del libro.

Mi fermo a tre stelle però perché ho detestato la voce narrante per la maggior parte del libro. Il narratore è Lucien, un ragazzino molto giovane che viene mandato col fratello maggiore a recuperare gli schiavi a Grenada da uno dei Frères de la Charité ora di stanza a La Martinica. Lucien è davvero giovanissimo, poco più che un bambino e ha dei comportamenti boh, ma considerando che il racconto è a posteriori, in cui Lucien dice di essere invecchiato, che tuttavia lui sia riportato in maniera così pedante e petulante, a volte facendo i capricci come se non comprendesse la gravità del pericolo della missione, mi ha infastidito parecchio. Mi ha fatto piacere leggerlo, però quando la voce narrante ti dà sui nervi il voto non può salire più di tanto...

Rebecca says

(3.5) Weird book serendipity: I happened to read two novels set among the slaves of a Martinique sugar plantation and incorporating snippets of Creole language at the same time. (The other was *Slave Old Man* by Patrick Chamoiseau, translated from the French.) What are the odds?!

If you've also read her first two novels, you'll know that Harris writes rollicking and utterly convincing historical fiction, and here you can't help but fall in love with the voice of 13-year-old Lucien. To render his non-standard speech, Harris is inconsistent with his plurals and past tenses, and adds the odd line in Creole, which she either repeats in English or leaves you to understand from the context (usually easy enough, especially if you have some French – a lot is phonetic.) Along with his older brother Emile, Lucien gets roped into their French master's plan to steal 42 slaves back from their new English masters on the brothers' home island of Grenada and escape by ship back to Martinique on Christmas Eve 1765. They even bear a written deed that apparently gives the French permission to take back their property.

Of course, it was never going to be as simple as just walking up and taking what they want. Lucien and Emile have many perils to face. While I read the whole novel with interest, I felt the chapters set on Grenada were awfully slow; Harris could easily have lost 100 pages and streamlined the preparations for the slaves' exodus. Also, the book turns rather dark. I'd liken it to Carol Birch's *Jamrach's Menagerie*, which similarly starts off as a lively adventure story that then goes bleak. Here the editor's note helps to brighten the picture a bit, but don't expect a happy-go-lucky story where everyone gets off scot-free.

Favorite passages:

"Having despatch a good slug of tawny liquor, Bianco cork the jug and began to rummage in his lower garments, presently pulling out a long knob, both fleshy and scaly, deformed by protuberances. The sight of

this thing emerging from his britches pocket unsettle me greatly until I realise with relief that it was not attach to his person. Thuswise was solve the mystery of what had cause the bulge in his inexpressibles: only a large hand of root ginger.”

“Say what you like about my brother but his eyes so sharp he could see two flea fornicating on a rat in the dark.”

(this line in particular reminded me of *Slave Old Man*) “Years hence, some fellow might stumble upon the huddle of my bleach bones and wonder who I had been in life.”

Allison M says

5 stars for this novel about slavery in Grenada and Martinique.

I don't think I can convey how good this novel is. Jane Harris is the writer of *The Observations* and *Gillespie & I*, both of which are memorable and wonderful, so I had very high expectations for *Sugar Money* - and my expectations have been surpassed, by a country mile.

It is 1765. Our narrator is Lucien, who may be thirteen or only ten years old but hopes to pass for sixteen. He is a slave, living on Martinique with his French masters after they are forced to leave Grenada by British forces. Lucien's voice is incredible: I read and re-read passages to drink in his words; usually I devour good books in greedy gulps but this novel I needed to savour. Lucien talks a beguiling mix of French, English and Creole, in a juxtaposition of idioms with some stiffly formal language into which he breathes life. As well as this, Lucien's narration comprises a mixture of the jealousies, pride and imagined slights of a child or adolescent alongside more adult concerns and thoughts. Lucien's is a forthright, hotheaded and utterly authentic narrative voice (and he is utterly loveable too).

Sugar Money recounts Lucien and his older brother Emile's near-impossible mission to bring back slaves left behind on Grenada, some forty people who are now enslaved by the British. Lucien and the other slaves are owned by les Freres de la Charite who want slaves to replace those who are sickening and dying, in order to tend the sugar plantation and start a distillery. Unwilling to risk their own lives, they send the brothers. And so begins what Lucien hopes will be an adventure that allows him to spend time with the brother he idolises. The brothers' relationship is exquisitely drawn, with Emile's inarticulate, paternal worry and love for Lucien contrasting with Lucien's need for admiration and love from Emile. Much of the beauty in the book comes from the relationships between the brothers, and between the slaves as a family they construct for themselves under 'grandparents' Angelique and Chevallier.

The book also looks unflinchingly at ugly inhumanity. There is an examination of the treatment of slaves, involving immense physical punishments and cruel tortures driving some slaves to mental breakdown. The abuse and rape of female slaves is exposed as commonplace, with resulting paler-skinned 'mulatto' children. I was particularly moved by the story of Miss Praxede, who was made housekeeper and mistress of Dr Maillard until he replaced her with Zabette, a teenage girl. Praxede, aged 'near fifty', was sold on to one of 'those new Scotchmen - Mister Mac-Something', and when she ran away from her new owner was killed by being shot in the back. This is one of many atrocities. The French slavers treat their slaves very badly but time and again we are told and shown that 'the Goddams (the English)' are even more cruel. And in fact many of these 'English' in *Sugar Money* are Scots: there are Scottish plantation owners, overseers and soldiers in the book.

Sugar Money is based on a true story. It is a story that is saddening and sickening but it is told with great beauty, with an outstanding narrative voice, and it is an important story.

Even the cover of Sugar Money excels, with its eye-catching, gorgeous design. Buy this book!

I received this book free from Faber & Faber.

Paul Falk says

This is one of those saddening times in history, specifically, for the inhumane treatment of people (slaves) on the islands of Granada and Martinique. The author allowed me to eavesdrop into the story that contained snippets of Creole (Kréyòl), a sprinkle of French and a dose of clipped English (no past tense, no plurals) of the period. Nicely done. Unthinkable punishment was routinely doled out for even the most minor offenses. Horrifying beyond imagination. This strong character-driven storyline focused on two brothers. Slaves. The younger brother, Lucien, delivered the first person narrative of this well written, heartbreaking tale.

Emile, age 28 and younger brother Lucien, age 12 were slaves in Martinique - French colony of the Western Antilles. They'd been ordered by a friar to voyage by sea to Granada - purpose, liberate many slaves held captive by the English and return them to Martinique. Their Homeland. Easier said than done. Demand for additional labor was desperately needed in Martinique for harvesting the island's major resource - sugar cane. Sugar was money.

Upon reaching Granada, while in hiding, the brothers secretly made contact with many of the slaves destined to be returned home. Their plight was perilous. The time to escape had been carefully planned. It's execution had to go just right in order to succeed. In the end, it was a race against time. A race fraught with much danger. Life or death.

Jane Harris spent considerable time and effort to her research into this rather short period in time. A few weeks in December, 1765. She went to Granada and followed the actual paths, traveled the historic roads and visited the landmark locations that gave rise to "Sugar Money". Pleasing to the senses, I was enraptured with the colloquialism delightfully found within the narrative. To name just two: "quick-sharp" - something done right away. "Kill-Devil" - their honored Island rum. My thanks for reconstructing these historic events and bringing it all to light.

My gratitude sent to NetGalley and Arcade-Skyhorse Publishing for this ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

Anne says

I always say that I don't read a lot of historical fiction, but when I think back, some of my all-time favourite books are, in fact, historical fiction. The Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafon and Jane Harris's first novel The Observations sit there on my 'much-loved books' shelf.

It's almost ten years since I read The Observations but the lead character of that story; Bessy Buckley remains one of my favourite characters ever. This author has such a skilled and thoughtful way of creating

voices for her intriguing characters, and she's done it again in Sugar Money. Lucien and his older brother Emile are wonderfully drawn; characters that the reader cannot help but support, and love and their story is beautifully written.

Beginning in 1765, on Martinique; Lucien and Emile are slaves. Owned by Father Cleophas and descended from the island of Grenada. Father Cleophas dictates that they must return to their homeland and bring back 42 other slaves. He says that they belong to him.

For Lucien, this is an adventure. For Emile, this is a test. Yet they cannot refuse and must set sail with a plan. Their journey is the author's opportunity to tell their back story, and to reveal their characters and their relationship. This really is such a joy to read, even though I'll admit that at first I did struggle with the dialect, it doesn't take long for the reader to be swept along by these voices, and their intriguing and tragic story.

Whilst there is no doubt that this is beautifully written, it is also devastatingly painful to read. The author does not spare the reader from the horrific detail of how the slaves are treated. Rape, torture, oppression; all there, all vividly portrayed, it is breathtaking.

Sugar Money is a powerful, impressively told story. The sense of place is stunning and the reader is transported to a time of deep injustice, of hate and rage. Sugar Money delves deep into the past. The author's eye for detail is so precise, her characters are pure and the story is compelling.

<https://randomthingsthroughmyletterbo...>

Helene Jeppesen says

3.5/5 stars.

When I started reading this book, I thought there was a spelling error. Then I found another one on the same page, and when I found a third one I realized that this was done on purpose. In other words, I quickly realized that the personal tone of voice and the language plays a huge role in "Sugar Money", and I loved it. This book is about two brothers living in Martinique in the 1700s. Emile is 28 years old, and Lucien is only 14 which makes him the youngest and therefore the one to look up very much to his big brother. When the brothers are sent on a mission to Grenada, a neighbouring Island, Lucien views this as a grand adventure that will finally allow for him to outlive his dreams and follow in the footsteps of his pirate idols. However, Emile is very apprehensive because he knows the absolute dangers of this mission, however much he tries to hide that from his little brother.

This book is based on facts, but intertwined with these we get a story about brotherhood and growing up under dire circumstances. I loved a lot about the story, but there were also some things about it that decreased my reading pleasure a tiny little bit. This is mostly due to personal preferences as I'm very hard to please when it comes to adventure stories in general. Nevertheless, this one sat very well with me however devastating it was, and it's one that's definitely gotten me intrigued in reading more by Jane Harris.
