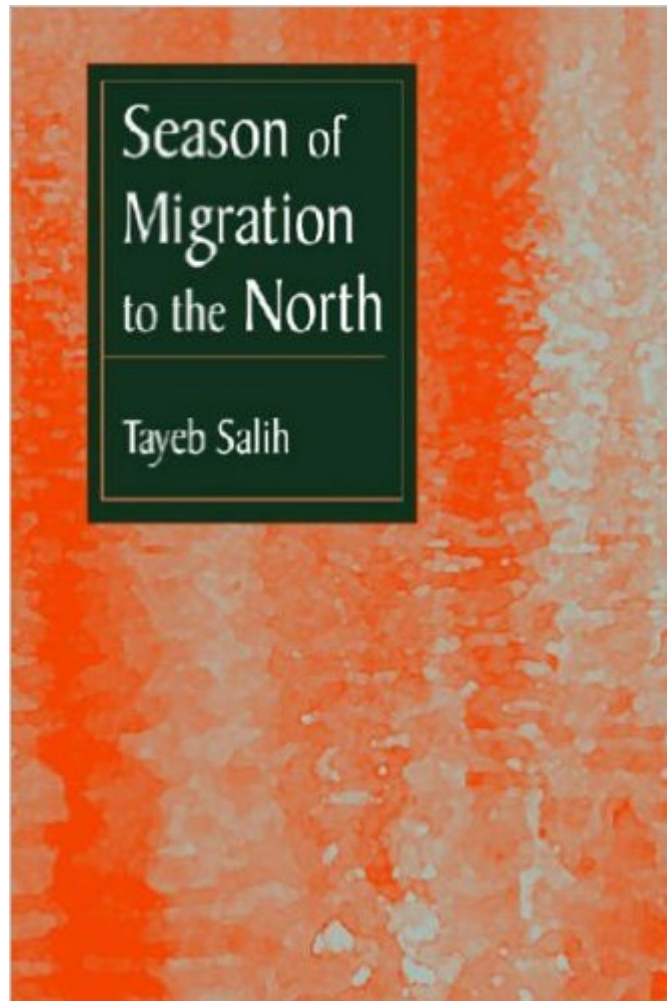


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Season Of Migration To The North: A Novel



Synopsis

Salih's shocking and beautiful novel reveals much about the people on each side of a cultural divide. A brilliant Sudanese student takes his mix of anger and obsession with the West to London, where he has affairs with women who are similarly obsessed with the mysterious East. Life, ecstasy, and death share the same moment in time. First published in Arabic in 1969. Tayeb Salih was born in 1929 in the Northern Province of Sudan. He studied at the University of Khartoum and London University and has served as head of drama in the BBC's Arabic Service and director-general of information for the state of Qatar. Denys Johnson-Davies has published more than twenty-five volumes of stories, novels, plays, and poetry translated from modern Arabic literature. He lives in Cairo.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's interesting to read reviews of this short novel. Half of the readers see it as a satirical version of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". The other half - who perhaps have never read Conrad - think it's a vain, silly (although lyrically written) tale of a sex-maniac guy who likes to seduce and abandon women. This is one of the inherent problems in a novel which is meant to reference another work. If you were to read "Bored of the Rings" (an awesome parody of Lord of the Rings) without ever reading Lord of the Rings you might think it silly. Read them side by side and you realize the brilliance at work. Not only is that true here as well, but I also do think that Season of Migration to the North stands alone as a work in its own right. First, if you've never read "Heart of Darkness", look

it up on the web and read it. It's online in its full text (it is out of copyright now) and you can read it for free. It's a short novel, just like Season, and should only take you an hour or two. It is a brilliant work, well deserving of its high acclaim. Go on, we'll wait for you to come back. Now, having read Heart, you can see the many similarities with Season. Both tell of someone starting from their own civilization and venturing out into the "opposite", and being changed by the experience. In Heart, an Englishman ventured into the Congo. In Season, Mustafa - a brilliant but anchorless student - is sent for education up to Cairo and then to London. Rather than becoming "refined" by the experience, he quickly bores with the women continually throwing themselves at his "exotic excitement". He deliberately lies to them about his background, his country's history, the meaning of his culture, and they don't care - they just want to be held by his ebony hands.

This novel was published in Arabic in 1966 and translated into English in 1969 by Denys Johnson-Davies. It's been called one of the major Arabic novels written in the 1960s as well as an important novel on the subject of a non-Westerner's journey to and return from the West. The first 30-odd pages were superb, introducing deftly the world of the present-day village in Sudan and one character's earlier years and travel to Europe. Throughout the novel, the atmosphere of the village was conveyed well, particularly -- as mentioned by an earlier reviewer -- in the earthy bantering of a group of old villagers. After the beginning, though, the novel developed in ways that this reader just couldn't find credible. The body count in England seemed laughably high, and I was thrown by the author's skipping over the decades of the older man's life and education in England, schematic accounts of his adventures, and the lack of a firm conclusion of his part of the story presented in his own voice. The younger man functioned well as a narrator, but why he ended up where he did was also beyond me. The author seemed to be setting up parallels between travel to the West and the journey inward, between the local village and Western ones, between the two men, and between the behavior of the foreign and local women. Yet many of these were too subtle for this reader to see exactly what the author might be suggesting in each case. That some people risked misfortune if they entered the West without a firm grounding in their own culture? That some wasted their potential if they went abroad without bringing back something of value to their own culture? (And yet the older man seemed to do fairly well for the village for a time after returning.

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