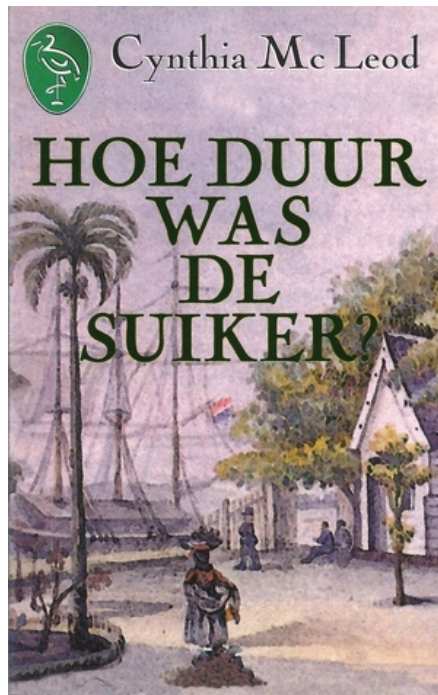




Hoe duur was de suiker?

Cynthia McLeod

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Hoe duur was de suiker? Cynthia McLeod

Wij schrijven de achttiende eeuw: het is de bloeitijd van de suikercultuur en ook de periode van de Boni-oorlogen. Plantage-eigenaren leven in voortdurende angst voor de aanvallen die marrons onder leiding van de Boni uitvoeren op de plantages.

Cynthia McLeod beschrijft in meeslepende stijl het leven van Elza en Sarith, dochters uit een joodse plantersfamilie, en hun slaven. In de onrechtvaardige slavenmaatschappij die de kolonie Suriname is, ervaren meesters en slaven dat de suiker duur wordt betaald.

Hoe duur was de suiker? Details

Date : Published 1999 by Ooievaar (first published 1987)

ISBN : 9789057133626

Author : Cynthia McLeod

Format : Mass Market Paperback 292 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review *Hoe duur was de suiker?* for online ebook

Chichikov says

Picked this up last year on a trip to Paramaribo and finally got around to reading it. It's an historical novel, set in mid- to late-18th century Suriname, dealing with the sugar plantations, the cruelties of the institution of slavery, and the wars between the Maroons (escaped slaves) and the whites. Though dealing broadly with these issues, the book focuses primarily on two sisters, Elza and Sarith, who go from best friends to worst enemies after Sarith seduces Elza's husband. From there erupt all sorts of jealousies, seductions, intrigues, etc. To me, book resembled a Surinamese 'Gone With the Wind', and I found it interesting, page-turning reading. If you speak any Dutch, the book is written at quite an easy-to-understand level, but there's also an English translation (which I haven't seen).

Heather says

This is the second novel that I have read by Cynthia McLeod. She is a hard author for me to review. On one hand I love the stories that she tells. She gives you a look into life in colonial Suriname, on the northeast coast of South America. She tells stories that I haven't heard from any other author. The previous book I read of hers, *The Free Negress Elisabeth*, is a story that has stayed in my mind because it is the type of women's history that is so often overlooked. I want to put her books in everyone's hands and tell them they have to hear about this.

On the other hand though, the writing in the books just isn't very good. Clunky is the word that keeps coming to mind. I'm reading an English translation from the Dutch but I don't think that is the whole issue. She is so careful to have so much documented historical fact in the books that she info-dumps continuously. That doesn't usually bother me in a story but these passages aren't blended into the fictional story that she is telling well. She even has footnotes. I'm not sure what the footnotes were about because many of them weren't translated. The untranslated ones appeared to be quotes.

I've had this book for a long time before reading it. I tried to start it a few times but the writing style made me stop after a few pages. I decided to knuckle down and read it for Women in Translation Month. Once I decided to power through, I read it in less than a day. The story carries you through.

One early wave of settlers to Suriname were Portuguese Jews who migrated from Brazil. They set up large plantations and did well for themselves. Subsequent waves of settlers from Holland though were anti-Semitic and over time the Jewish families found themselves not at the top of society anymore. This is the story of two half-sisters, one had two Jewish parents and one had only a Jewish father so was not considered Jewish herself. The story shows how their lives diverge as Suriname begins to deal with the effects of people living too far in debt for them to maintain.

White people in Suriname did nothing for themselves. There were so many more enslaved people than white people that whites gave all responsibilities for running their lives to the slaves. With nothing to do, they entertained themselves with lavish parties that lasted for weeks. Gossip was rampant. There wasn't a single rich white person that I didn't want to slap at some point in this book.

The Cost of Sugar refers to all the lives wasted in the plantation system - the enslaved people, the white landowners, the Dutch soldiers brought into protect the plantations, the escaped and free blacks living in the jungle. It was a system that hurt everyone.

"It now occurred to Elza that her family was in fact a model for all Suriname society. Wasn't everyone and everything totally dependent on the slaves? Just as she felt so completely lost without Maisa, so the colony would be totally lost without its slaves. They did everything and knew everything, and the whites knew nothing and were incapable of anything. The whites needed the negroes, but the negroes didn't need a single white person"

This review was originally posted on Based On A True Story

Suzanne says

4.5 sterren

Ik was mij er nauwelijks van bewust hoe weinig ik over de geschiedenis van Suriname en de andere voormalige Nederlandse koloniën wist, voor ik in aanraking kwam met "Hoe duur was de suiker". Op de een of andere manier is het boek ook altijd aan me voorbij gegaan. De film vestigde er echter mijn aandacht op. Ik ben dol op historische verhalen, en vind het altijd verfrissend als ik er nog iets van kan leren wat ik nog niet wist, doordat het zich bijvoorbeeld in een plaats of tijd afspeelt waar ik nog weinig over gelezen of gezien had. Die film, die moest ik dus zien. Ik was gefascineerd door het Sranan dat men in de film spreekt, en beschaamd over hoe weinig ik over de slavernij bleek te weten (iedereen weet natuurlijk wel over de handel, en die was al vreselijk zat, maar de dagelijkse details van het leven van de slaaf - waar leer je daar over?) Ook had ik geen idee van de Joodse samenleving die er destijds in Suriname was (al komt dat in het boek duidelijker naar voren dan in de film).

Het boek moest ik vervolgens ook lezen. (Laat ik eerlijk zijn, het boek had ik al eerder voor mijn verjaardag gevraagd, nog voordat ik de film had gezien. Vanwege eerder genoemde voorkeur.) Het leest heerlijk snel weg door dat in wat kortere stukken opgedeelde hoofdstukken (ik houd daar van) en blijft boeien door de totaal andere werkelijkheid waarin deze mensen leefden. Wie de film heeft gezien hoeft ook niet bang te zijn dat het boek niet meer kan verrassen, want meermaals zie je dat wat 1 persoon is in de film, 2 personen zijn in het boek, en bovendien gaat het laatste deel niet helemaal hetzelfde. Ik raad ze daarom allebei aan (eerst de film, dan het boek, dat lijkt me de beste volgorde.)

Er zijn twee dingen die ik aan het boek (ISBN13: 9789054293484) zou willen veranderen; een landkaartje zou heel fijn geweest zijn, en ik zou het veel leuker hebben gevonden als de zinnen in Sranan niet vertaald zouden zijn geweest in de hoofdttekst. Nu stonden deze zinnen er in het Nederlands, en kon je achterin het boek opzoeken hoe dat in Sranan zou zijn geweest. Je blijft maar bladeren. Ik had het veel toffer gevonden als het gewoon twee talen doorelkaar zouden zijn geweest (zoals het in het echt zou zijn en hoe het ook in de film was) en je dan onderaan de bladzijde (niet achterin het boek) de Nederlandse vertaling zou hebben (dit is wel met enkele ons wat onbekende woorden gedaan overigens.)

4.5 stars

I have read this book ("Hoe duur was de suiker") in dutch so I have written the above review in dutch. I do not feel like translating all of it, I'm sorry, but for the English speaking readers I would just like to say that I recommend "The cost of sugar", both the movie and the book (in that particular order) as you will learn a lot

about the (Jewish) planters and the slaves in 18th century Suriname. Even though the story is fictional, you will learn about a piece of history that should not be forgotten.

Jantine says

This was one of my first books about the slavery era in Surinam. I had read more about slavery in the American South, but somehow never got to read about slavery in this former colony of my own country, the Netherlands. A school teacher in Surinam advised me this book, when I ask her what Surinamese must-reads are. It was great to start this book while I was still in Surinam. It read like a turn-pager, since McLeod described with incredible detail how life was during those days. I was intrigued by the characters and the intrigues, and was seriously sad when I had finished the book.

Wendy Coen says

A compelling writer with an easy-read style. Cynthia takes the reader inside the intimate lives of her characters, both colonist and slave. A book that reveals the humanity of both slave-owner and slave, without diminishing the appalling effects of slavery.

Maud (reading the world challenge) says

[#94: Suriname] This is an historical fiction set in Suriname during the 18th century, when it was a Dutch colony (what) mainly occupied by Jewish slave owners from Portugal (*what?!).* Historical fiction is, to me, the best way to learn more about this country that I knew nothing about, except that it was mentioned in Voltaire's *Candide*, so it was a pity that this novel was rather weak. It spans over fifteen years, and the characters come into and leave the narrative oddly. One of the main characters is as passive as a neurasthenic cow watching the train of her life passing by, and the other one is your typical spoiled brat, so I really couldn't feel anything for these characters.

Laure says

Los van de kritiek die ik op dit boek heb, vind ik het ongeloofelijk belangrijk dat er een verhaal geschreven is over de slavernij dat ook nog eens een groot publiek bereikt. Nederlanders weten heel weinig van het koloniale verleden, terwijl dat niet slechts een zwarte bladzijde van de Nederlandse geschiedenis is, maar een bepalende factor. Dit boek geeft een hele duidelijke en overzichtelijke weergave van de geschiedenis van Suriname in de achttiende eeuw, vanuit meerdere perspectieven. Schrijftechnisch vond ik het boek echter af en toe tegenvallen, het taalgebruik is vrij simpel. Daarnaast was het niet duidelijk wat McLeod wilde schrijven, een historische epiek of een roman? Er wordt gestrooid met jaartallen en data, er worden overzichten van politieke en oorlogsgebeurtenissen gegeven, maar tegelijkertijd worden de gevoelens van meerdere personen beschreven. Die meerdere personen waren soms ook een beetje warrig, er waren zoveel perspectieven.

Maar ondanks mijn aanmerkingen, vond ik het wel een goed boek om te lezen, dat ook nog heel erg leerzaam is.

Maria says

Zoals ik al eerder schreef, vond ik het boek aanvankelijk een kruising van Gejaagd door de wind en Eline Vere maar ben het zeker boeiend gaan vinden. Het interessante van dit boek zit in de historische achtergronden.

Wie wist bijvoorbeeld dat joden de eerste blanke Surinamers waren? Gevlucht uit Portugal kwam er een hele groep via Brazilië al in de 16e eeuw in Suriname terecht, vestigden zich en startten plantages aan de rivieren. Op de bloeiende suikerplantages waren slaven heel gewoon, maar in de 18e eeuw ontstonden overal opstanden. Weggelopen slaven, marrons genoemd door de blanken, Bosnegers door zichzelf, pleegden regelmatig overvallen op plantages. Zie o.a. [http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boni_\(gu...](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boni_(gu...) Door het gouvernement werden er militairen op uitgestuurd die echter grote problemen hadden in de moerassen en bossen van het Surinaamse binnenland. Ze konden niet tegen de bosnegers op maar vernielden wel hun dorpen, voedselvoorraden en kostgronden.

De romantische verwickelingen en de familieverhalen lezen lekker weg maar zijn wel behoorlijk melodramatisch en stereotiep. Bijvoorbeeld: twee jonge meisjes (stiefzusjes) waarvan er een (Elza) heel lief en zachtmoedig is, gehoorzaam en trouw aan haar echtgenoot en de ander (Sarith), een verwend nest, grote flirt en gemene bedriegster.

Het taalgebruik, de zinsbouw vond ik niet geweldig. Het is eenvoudig soms zelfs wat onbeholpen en kinderlijk. Dit boek is McLeods debuut dus misschien is dat bij haar andere boeken anders?

Joana Gomes says

I read this book for my Bookclub, it's a classic about Dutch colonialism in Suriname. Sugar was the main source of income of plantation owners who used slaves to work in the fields and this book tells the story of a family that sees their daughters being married to plantation owners, having kids and seeing their families grow...

But between these lines, another story is being told... the story of the slaves, their own families, the punishments and their desire for freedom, the raids to the plantations and the killing of the whites... some bibliographic research was made and it also tells a piece of Suriname's story, which was enlightening... My own country has a history of colonialism and I couldn't stop making the parallel... I love these books, but I hate this piece of our history...

Rianne says

Mijn eerste historische roman. Een boek over het koloniale Suriname rond 1780, waarin slaven de normaalste zaak van de wereld waren.

Op de voorgrond het verhaal van twee meisjes geboren in deze tijd met alle luxe en pracht en praal die daarbij hoorde. Tot het gouden tijdperk afbrokkelt.

Onvoorstelbaar dat blanken er alles aan deden om de negers uit te buiten en dat het doodnormaal was dat zij koopwaar waren. Aan de andere kant ook de gewoontes die daarbij hoorden, namelijk als man het hebben

van een bijzit. Een slavin die mannen in hun behoeften voorzagen en waarin niet alleen getrouwd werd uit liefde.

Een mooi tijdsbeeld waarin gelukkig ook mensen waren die er anders over dachten en hun slaaf de vrijheid of een betere toekomst gunde en ze werden behandeld als een normaal lid van de familie.

Calzean says

This is not a literary tour-de-force but it is one interesting historical novel covering a period in time in a place I know nothing about. Certainly worth the read.

Two step sisters in Suriname during the Dutch hey day of sugar and coffee plantations. There is a good sister and an evil sister, cruelty to the slaves, bad behaviour by the whites, a slave rebellion, forbidden love, tropical diseases, a stock market crash and the double standard of men allowed to have affairs while women who had sexual needs were called sluts.

The bad sister, Sirith, really epitomised the expression "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned".

The book represents the slaves as intelligent, caring and resilient people who can survive without the whites. The whites are represented as greedy, gauche, newbie rich who cannot live without the blacks. In this regard the book is sadly telling a seemingly timeless story.

maraluce addams says

Check out my patriotic read. I've had this novel on my shelf for almost five years and could never bring myself to read it because the title put me off so much. But I finally got around to it!

It's a solid historical novel. McLeod beautifully brings this important piece of Surinamese history to life. I love the details she gives and that so much of the dialogue of the enslaved is in the original Sranan. I liked that the setting was more the focus than the characters. The characters themselves weren't all that interesting. I liked the enslaved people the most; of the others Elza was fine, Rutger was a jackass and Sarith was the worst. Every single time Sarith came onto the scene or, worse, there was a whole part from her perspective, I wanted to punch her. I get that she's a realistic character for that place and time, but I would have loved less of her entitled antics and more of the stories of the enslaved people. What happened to them was so tragic, but most of these characters bear it with incredible dignity.

I loved the ambiguous way the rebels were presented too. They were by turns brave, ruthless, intelligent, monstrous, and compassionate. So much more interesting than if they would have just been presented as heroes.

All in all I would definitely recommend it, whether you're from Suriname or from one of the countries who colonized us and want to know more about that history.

Lieke Mulder says

Leuk boek om te lezen op vakantie. Het gaat over twee stiefzusjes, Elsa en Sarith en hoewel Sarith een ongelofelijk kreng blijkt te zijn, ga je haar niet haten.

Het boek greep me niet echt bij de keel, maar geeft een mooi beeld van Suriname in de tijd van de slavernij

en de ongelofelijke hypocrisie hoe de Hollanders daarmee om gingen.

Het boek is beter dan de film, want die gaat er te snel doorheen. Het boek is daarentegen wel langdradig af en toe en het is niet heel duidelijk wat de hoofdverhaallijn is. Het is niet spannend, maar wel redelijk boeiend op de een of andere manier. Ik had liever gehad dat er meer vanuit het perspectief van de slaven verteld zou worden, zoals Alex, de slaaf van Rutger die uiteindelijk de vrijheid krijgt, zijn verhaal zou eigenlijk pas echt interessant zijn.

Het is een beetje teveel een meidenroman, dan wat ik had gehoopt dat het was.

K's Bognoter says

The Cost of Sugar er angiveligt den mest solgte og formentlig også mest læste roman fra den tidligere hollandske koloni i Sydamerika, Surinam. Det siger måske ikke så meget, for der er ikke udgivet voldsomt meget litteratur fra Surinam, men alligevel må jeg undre mig lidt. For hvor er den dog jammerligt kedsommelig.

Den følger en sukkende forudsigelig, melodramatisk skabelon, personerne er éndimensionelle og udvikler sig ikke, sproget er kedeligt. Og så er den grim. Men ellers har jeg ikke noget at sige den på.

Læs hele anmeldelsen på K's bognoter: <http://bognoter.dk/2018/04/22/cynthia...>

Marina (Sonnenbarke) says

Not without flaws, but a good book all the same, if you want to know more about life in Suriname in the second half of the 18th century.

My review in Italian is here: <https://sonnenbarke.wordpress.com/201...>

Qaboos says

Je vliegt hier doorheen. Niet omdat het spannend is - integendeel, je ziet de ontwikkelingen mijlenver aankomen - maar omdat het zo eenvoudig en kortademig is opgeschreven. Een prima boek. Ik heb het met interesse gelezen. Maar als ik 'prima' zeg, bedoel ik altijd een boek dat niet zoveel voorstelt.

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

This is a lively, melodramatic work of historical fiction set in mid-18th century Suriname. At that time, the small nation on the northern coast of South America was a Dutch colony consisting of sugar and coffee plantations carved out of the jungle, many of them run by Jewish owners who arrived in Suriname via Portugal and Brazil, and all of them worked by slaves. Unlike in North America, however, proximity to the jungle meant that slaves often escaped to form their own communities, which were in constant conflict with

the colonial government.

The story spans 14 years and has a large cast for under 300 pages, but its protagonists are stepsisters Elza and Sarith, both daughters of Jewish plantation owners. The two are best friends as girls, but soon find themselves opposed, primarily because Elza is a sweet young woman who treats the slaves well while Sarith is short-sighted and willing to ruin the lives of everyone around her in order to get her way. Yes, it's that kind of book. The book focuses on Elza early on, then shifts its attention later in the story to Sarith, Sarith's slave Mini-mini, and a young mercenary named Jan.

Which is to say that there's no single plotline, and characters come and go rather oddly (I expected Alex to become more important than he did, and Amimba, as the first character we meet, to have something more than a walk-on role). But as a story about a place and a society, rather than any single protagonist, it flows well. The plot moves quickly and stays interesting, the translation is fluid, and the characters – if not particularly complex – are sympathetic, except when not intended to be. It presents a detailed picture of a historical era that doesn't feel overly influenced by modern views, though it can be a little ham-fisted. The author has clearly done her share of research on Surinamese history and is able to bring her cultural knowledge to the pages.

Interestingly, most of the novel was originally written in Dutch, but slaves at the time were forbidden from learning Dutch, so conversed among themselves and with whites in Sranan, a creole language related to English as well as other European and African languages. The author originally wrote conversations involving slaves in Sranan, which is evidently still sufficiently widely-spoken in Suriname for the original audience to understand. In the English version, the Sranan dialogue is translated, but you can see the original in the footnotes. Helpful footnotes also explain those words or concepts that will be unfamiliar for the English-speaking reader (there's a glossary at the end too, but I didn't need it).

Overall, this is an entertaining work that will likely appeal to those who enjoy popular historical fiction. It's not great literature but doesn't try to be. And props to the author for writing a book for a country she was told "doesn't have a reading tradition" – this book is now apparently beloved in Suriname after all.

Hermien says

Een innemend verhaal in een interessante tijd en omgeving. Ik heb nieuwe dingen over Suriname ontdekt. Het deed me denken aan Isabel Allende's *Island Beneath the Sea*.

Rowizyx says

Interessante... ho dei grossi dubbi sulla struttura del romanzo, nel senso, mi è sembrato di camminare in un corridoio e aprire una porta dopo l'altra. Magari le scene che ho trovato dietro le singole porte erano anche interessanti (una più, una meno), tuttavia pur portandomi a leggere tutto il libro in pochi giorni la storia mi è sembrata debole, slegata. L'autrice ha voluto riportare tante tematiche legate al Suriname del XVIII secolo: il tentativo di creare una colonia ebreo-friendly, le difficoltà delle famiglie miste, le complessità dei rapporti familiari in un contesto in cui era dato per scontato che un uomo avesse almeno un'altra compagna oltre alla moglie ufficiale, la schiavitù, le rivolte degli schiavi, la risposta militare alle rivolte, il difficile rapporto tra i vari gruppi sociali del Suriname, il rapporto tra bianchi e neri... Tantissima carne al fuoco, forse troppa,

soprattutto perché, come ho già detto, questo porta a tante scene magari anche d'impatto ma poco collegate tra loro.

Da questa situazione di troppe scene, i personaggi risultano spesso superficiali: Sarith è l'apoteosi del nonsense e dello stereotipo. È la ragazzina ricca, viziata, bellissima, che si aspetta una vita in discesa di divertimenti e bagordi. Ha un atteggiamento fin troppo libero, considerato che è una ragazza di una famiglia ebrea praticante del XVIII secolo, a mio avviso. Si comporta in maniera egoista a quindici anni come a venticinque, senza mai crescere, anche se attraversa situazioni difficili e molto traumatiche, senza badare ai sentimenti di nessuno se non ai propri. L'altro è Rutger, marito di Elza, che poverino, (view spoiler). Ma una bella padellata sul naso?! È fastidioso perché incoerente con il resto: (view spoiler).

E poi boh, arriviamo al finale a tarallucci. Non lo so, forse sarebbe stato meglio scegliere meno episodi, meno personaggi (specie quelli che vengono buttati lì per una scena o due e poi abbandonati), per concentrarsi meglio sulla caratterizzazione. Poi inspiegabilmente il romanzo ti ipnotizza in maniera incredibile e l'ho letto con piacere, specie per leggere qualcosa di più sulla storia di un paese a me sconosciuto, tuttavia penso abbia dei difetti non indifferenti.

Slymandra says

[Around the World challenge: Suriname] This book was interesting as an historical fiction, but it was too weak for me as a novel. The characters were stereotypical and they don't evolve much before the very end of the story, and it happens all of a sudden and it feels forced. They come and go without a real structure in the narrative so it's hard to get attached to them. But still, it was interesting to learn more about Suriname. Did you know this little Latin American country was a Dutch colony? Did you know the colonists in the 18th century were Jews emigrating from Portugal? Well, I didn't.
