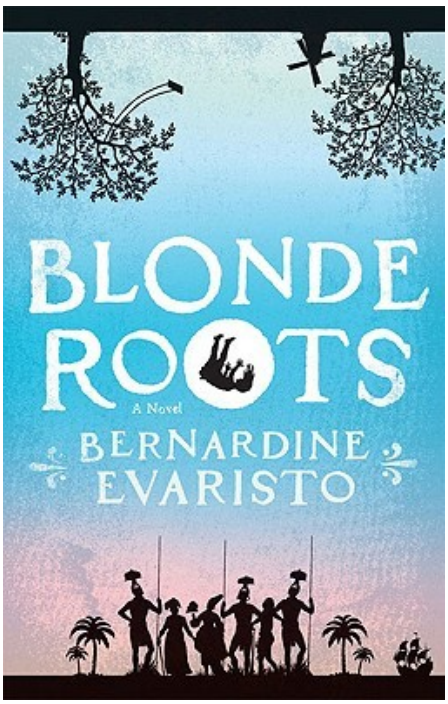

Blonde Roots

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The most provocative debut novel of the year, "a dizzying satire" (The New Yorker) that "boldly turns history on its head" (Elle).

What if the history of the transatlantic slave trade had been reversed and Africans had enslaved Europeans? How would that have changed the ways that people justified their inhuman behavior? How would it inform our cultural attitudes and the insidious racism that still lingers today? We see this tragicomic world turned upside down through the eyes of Doris, an Englishwoman enslaved and taken to the New World, movingly recounting experiences of tremendous hardship and the dreams of the people she has left behind, all while journeying toward an escape into freedom.

A poignant and dramatic story grounded in provocative ideas, Blonde Roots is a genuinely original, profoundly imaginative novel.

Blonde Roots Details

Date	:	Published January 22nd 2009 by Riverhead Hardcover (first published July 31st 2008)
ISBN	:	9781594488634
Author	:	Bernardine Evaristo
Format	:	Hardcover 288 pages
Genre	:	Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Science Fiction, Alternate History, Fantasy

From Reader Review Blonde Roots for online ebook

Charlotte says

Blonde Roots is set in a parallel universe, where African, not European, cultures use shipping and weapons technology to create colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean, and to kidnap millions of people and enslave them to work on sugar plantations. Residents of the Atlantic coastal fringes of Europa - the English, Irish, Spanish, Portuguese, and Scandinavians - are particularly at risk of being stolen away from their families, regardless of rank or priviledge, and crammed into slave ships bound for the New World. The reader knows from the outset that this is not alternate history of our own universe, because the author has included a map showing Aphrika in the North, Europa in the South, and the Caribbean islands unchanged, but renamed the West Japanese Islands.

The idea is interesting, and has been explored by other authors (such as Mallory Blackman, in whose Noughts and Crosses series it is taken for granted that the dominant culture is that of black people, and white people are treated as inferior). Unfortunately, in White Roots the execution of the idea is rather muddled and extremely illogical. For a start, why is there any need to have altered geography? The slave/sugar trade triangle could just have easily worked with geography unchanged, but Africa as the pivotal point of power. Linguistically, the novel is very puzzling; the slaves speak a kind of Patois, but the author seems to assume that in the White Roots universe there would be little difference from real life Caribbean Patois. We are repeatedly told that the slaves are from a mixture of European countries, and logically therefore the Patois would be an blend of Abrossan combined with elements of grammar and vocabulary from Germanic and Hispanic European languages, but there is no evidence of this at all, and we get a phonetic representation of what sounds to me like contemporary Jamaican patois. Even when two slaves discover that they are from the same country, they do not speak their native language together - even when this is English.

Most puzzling of all is the question of when the novel is supposed to be set. Various pointers (not least the "what happened next" postscript) suggest the early twentieth century at the latest; the slave ships appear to be sailing boats, and there is no electricity, although there is a disused Londolo Underground. The turns of phrase used by high status Aphrikans echo 18th or early 19th century real life discourse on slavery, and the Europeans clearly operate a system of workers on land-owners' estates. Yet characters use skateboards; they "airpunch"; and the young male Whyte slaves call themselves names such as "Bad Bwoy" or "Totallee Kross." Evaristo appears to be trying to cram current issues of identity and social exclusion among black youth in modern day Britain or America into a analysis of 18th/19th century attitudes to race and colonialism, and it simply doesn't work.

It's a pity, because there are sections of the novel which are much more thought-provoking, but these are lost in the overall lack of logic. Book Two, in which Chief Kaga Konata Katamba gives us his memoirs of his first trip to the Heart of Darkness which is the Cabbage Coast, and describes his first encounters with the backwards-seeming natives of England, is well done. It reminded me somewhat of Body Ritual Among the Nacirema in its ability to dismantle our own cultural assumptions with the eye of the outside, and I couldn't help feeling that had the novel as a whole been writted in this vein, it would have been much harder-hitting.

Overall, however, if you want to read about the real horrors of slavery from the point of view of a slave woman, I'm afraid you are much better off grabbing a copy of Andrea Levy's The Long Song.

Bookmarks Magazine says

Part alternate history and part biting satire, Evaristo's new novel plays fast and loose with geography, history, language, and culture as it restructures the world in a successful bid to reimagine the institution of slavery. Evaristo also includes several chapters narrated by Doris's master, who justifies the practice of slavery on pseudoscientific grounds and even congratulates himself on saving the brutal "whyte" heathens from lives of savagery. The world Evaristo creates is wholly foreign, yet bone-chillingly recognizable. The critics were surprised that there could be anything left to say on the subject, but Evaristo's scathing novel does just that by ripping away readers' comfort zones and turning stereotypes on their heads. Transcending labels and genres, *Blonde Roots* is an enthralling, eye-opening story.

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Diriye Osman says

A stunning, stunning novel. Beautifully written with a sense of precision and stylistic flair. I love this book.

Susan says

Blonde Roots has an epigraph by Nietzsche: "All things are subject to interpretation: whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth." After reading the book, I'm still thinking about the implications of the epigraph. Bernardine Evaristo imagines a detailed alternate world where blaks have enslaved whytes and imposed their culture on the world, and in doing so she not only makes an anti-slavery message, but also a striking anti-imperialism message.

The main problem with the book is that it's a little too concerned with the horrors of slavery and its ramifications, and because of that, sacrifices some plot and character development. Granted, it's completely arguable that two of the things slavery eliminates from victims' lives are the chance to develop steady relationships, and the opportunity to pursue passion. However, it seemed that all the elements were in place for Evaristo to make her slaves live fuller and more interesting lives rather than be placeholders for elements of the "what if Europeans were the slaves instead of slavers?" premise. And because there was so much promise in the book, I can't help but feel disappointed in spite of the book's having the intended effect of making me feel disgusted by slavery and uncomfortably aware of white privilege.

The basic plot of the book is that Doris/Omorenomwara, the main character, is taken from her life of eating and growing cabbage in Europa, and becomes the personal assistant of the former captain of a slaver, Bwana, in urban Great Ambossa. After an escape plan goes awry, she is forced into field work, which allows her to meet slaves resigned to slavery, and other members of plantation society.

And it's when you get to the plantation society that you begin to perceive weakness in the choice of telling the story of Doris and her escape. The plantation society is rather interesting (to the point of being a possible setting for a whole slew of plots for other books), and the Viking-descended Ye Memé could have carried the

book on her own. Whereas Doris has lost much of her vitality since her brutal whipping, Ye Memé and her friends have compensated for their pain in life by doing everything even more spiritedly. Ye Memé talks a blue streak, dreams for her children's futures, and keeps her house perfectly in order. Her friend is an amazing cook raising Ye Memé's teenage son, who's falling in with the wrong crowd. The life of Bwana's whyte mistress and mother of his mulatto sons also could have been more interesting for a book than Doris's. In fact, almost anyone on the plantation could possibly have been a more magnetizing figure than Doris (except for the guy she starts to shack up with, who has about one moment of cool to his twenty of boring).

There's really no reason why an unusually well-educated whyte slave like Doris could not have been a good main character, though. Doris actually has the glimmer of an incredibly interesting story, but Evaristo doesn't pursue it. The love of Doris's life, a city slave named Frank with whom she had three children, is sent to the fields after the owner's wife lusts after him and he rejects her. Frank then escapes and becomes a Harriet Tubman/Robin Hood figure. The time when Doris is planning an escape from the plantation would be a wonderful point to introduce Frank as an actual character (rather than a memory), and deal with all the changes that fifteen or so years of separate lives tinged by slavery could create. Sadly, what happens is nowhere near as expansive. Frank gets about a sentence. Doris, as a narrator, fails yet again to seize hold of the tantalizing story in her life.

So what is left is a somewhat typical Slavery is Evil book with the twist being which continent is enslaving the other. The description of the slaver ship is absolutely horrifying, the punishment of runaway slaves is sickening, and the systematic putting down of Europan culture is unsettling. Most of the troubling images and ideas came directly from Evaristo's research, and Evaristo renders them so skillfully that I can't help but wish she had wanted more from her book.

The publisher, Penguin, interpreted *Blonde Roots* to be a humorous satire, and seem to have marketed it as a fun read. The book has humor, but it often (justly) seems tinged with sadness for the suffering of millions of slaves. I'm guessing that the Penguin people were a lot more amused than I was by the willful anachronisms Evaristo uses. For me, a timeless world where people have stopped using the Londolo underground train but still transport slaves in slavers simply is confusing. As is the map at the beginning of the book. Seriously, what's going on with the Equator on the map? Why not just turn a normal map upside down and move Great Britain to the African coast? Not that this truly matters. The anachronism and alternate world map can't hide the fact that slavery as an institution is just not funny, regardless of how inane efforts to justify it are.

But, of course, the humor of slavery is subject to interpretation too.

Trin says

What if Africans had been the ones to enslave Europeans instead of the other way around? That’s the premise Evaristo uses to launch this harrowing alternate history, which in general does a fantastic job shedding fresh light not just on the horrors of slavery—which, even if we are all generally aware of them, it can never hurt to be reminded of in stark, brutal, *specific* detail: people *did these things* to *other people*—but also on slavery’s ongoing ripples and aftereffects, exposing the very white, Eurocentric way we may still consider the natural way to view the world.

When Evaristo sticks to these aspects of her story, I think it works amazingly well; however, she makes some odd auxiliary choices. There’s a map at the beginning of the book that physically alters the way Earth’s continents are arranged, putting Europe where Africa is, and part of Africa where Europe is, but leaving the

British Isles alone, so Londinium is one of the great seats of power of the African Empire, but it still has its Roman name—why? Europe is described as cold and grey, and Africa balmy, as if they were still located in their usual hemispheres—huh? And to confuse things further, at times Evaristo seems to be setting her story in the 18th or 19th centuries, when comparable events took place in our history, but there exist aspects of technology that are utterly modern—her protagonist escapes at one point on an Underground Railroad that is *literally* the London Underground. I found all of this incredibly confusing and needlessly distracting. Why complicate things so? To me it seems completely unnecessary—just off-putting.

Anyway, if you can manage to handwave Evaristo's seemingly bizarre world-building decisions—as I was eventually able to do—this is well-worth reading. And if you can explain to me the purpose behind said decisions, I would love to hear your theories!

Elaine says

A little bit of cleverness goes a long way. Too much -- jumbled anachronism, twisted geography, transplanted London place names, and a literal Underground Railway (hah!) -- makes a supposedly thought provoking novel more like a spin through a clever blog.

The central race flipping premise isn't thought out. It wobbles between crude stereotypes and simple re-hashing of other people's books about slavery. Reading it so soon after the Book of Night Women, an entirely passionate, serious, heartrending and hair raising book about Caribbean slavery, this too clever by half superficial retread especially grated.

Erin says

This book was so clever and enjoyable to read! I do think it's satire, no matter what any moms say. The one question I am left with and I wish the book explored -- why was the world's geography different? Did slavery arise from the way the world was laid out? I don't know enough to answer this question. Was hoping that it was touched on in the book but wasn't.

The joy in this book are the tiny, obsessive details. African slavers freezing on the shores of England b/c they refuse to wear "european" clothes. Making fun of the body shapes of clothes. Justifying slavery b/c the feudal lords were just going to do it anyway -- then enslaving the feudal lords.

Basic plot synopsis - What if instead of Europeans enslaving Africans, the opposite happened?

Lina says

I couldn't read this anymore. I am sure that Bernadine Evaristo is a great writer with good intentions with this satire, I just could not handle reading this book. I mean, the overall story of Blonde Roots is slavery is bad no matter who does it.

Well, duh. It's called history. We have seen in the past that slavery, regardless of who does it is horrible. That doesn't mean that the African Slave Trade has to be race-bent in order to show that. Especially when the

results are not equal at all. I mean there is more to slavery, especially slavery in this country, than just standards of beauty. I don't think that this book captured the essence slavery through satire.

Elizabeth says

Critics would have you believe that Ms. Evaristo has written an "astonishing," "clever," and "beautiful" novel about an alternative history scenario to the slave trade.

Every morning I'd repeat an uplifting mantra to myself while looking in the mirror. I may be fair and flaxen. I may have slim nostrils and slender lips. I may have oil-rich hair and a non-rotund bottom. I may blush easily, go rubicund in the sun and have covert yet mentally alert blue eyes. Yes, I may be whyte. But I am whyte and I am beautiful.

Slaves are also referred to as *wiggers*. I just felt gross writing that.

I get satire but this just felt uncomfortable & wrong.

Ron Charles says

My only complaint about Bernardine Evaristo's alternate history of racial slavery is that it's 150 years late. Imagine the outrage this clever novel would have provoked alongside Harriet Beecher Stowe's incendiary story or Frederick Douglass's memoir! But now, amid the warm glow of 21st-century liberalism, with our brilliant black president, what could we possibly learn from a new satire of slavery?

Plenty.

Blonde Roots turns the whole world on its nappy head, and you'll be surprised how different it looks -- and how similar. In the reverse-image past that Evaristo imagines, civilized Africans have built a vibrant culture and economy by capturing primitive Europeans and using them as slaves. This ingenious bit of "what-if" speculation provides the backdrop for a thrilling adventure about a "whyte" woman named Doris Scagglethorpe who works as a "house wigger" for Chief Kaga Konata Katamba. (She's branded with his initials: KKK.)

The story dashes off the first page as Doris makes her escape during the annual celebration of Voodoomass. Recapture could mean death by torture for "the crimes of Ungratefulness and Dishonesty," but she's done waiting for freedom. "Deep down I knew that the slave traders were never going to give up their cash cow," Doris tells us. "It was, after all, one of the most lucrative international businesses ever, involving the large-scale transport of whytes, shipped in our millions from the continent of Europe to the West Japanese Islands, so called because when the 'great' explorer and adventurer Chinua Chikwuemeka was trying to find a new route to Asia, he mistook those islands for the legendary isles of Japan, and the name stuck."

Historical anachronisms along with a weirdly distorted geography contribute to the novel's through-the-looking-glass atmosphere. As a rare literate slave, Doris enjoys a privileged position in her master's house, but she snatches a chance to ride Londolo's Underground Railroad -- the city's abandoned subway system -- out of the glamorous "Chocolate City" and into the seedy "Vanilla Suburbs." As we follow her perilous

escape, Doris tells us how she was abducted from a poor English cabbage farm where she lived with her parents. She describes the gruesome Middle Passage, during which half her fellow captives expire or are murdered; the vicissitudes of the slave market, where traumatized family members are sold off in different directions; and the rape and humiliation that keep whyte people laboring on the sugar cane plantations. This is, in other words, a story whose basic elements we already know from Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Stowe, Alex Haley, Toni Morrison and others whom Evaristo alludes to throughout Blonde Roots, but even the most colorblind readers will be unsettled by seeing these horrors with the colors reversed.

As always, the values of the dominant culture reflect its power structure; the black master's body and attitudes are the desired norm, even the ideal. "Privacy was a foreign concept to all Aphrikans," Doris says. "They said that the Europane need for solitude was further proof of our inferior culture." An expert explains that "over millennia, the capacious skull of the Negroid has been able to accommodate the growth of a very large brain within its structure. This has enabled a highly sophisticated intelligence to evolve." Are you listening, James Watson?

Standards of attractiveness are similarly upended. Whyte people try to tan themselves into black beauties, and those who can afford it have surgery to flatten their noses. After giving Doris a proper name -- "Omorenomwara" -- her African owner expects her to look respectable, which means wearing her straight blonde hair in plaited hoops all over her head and going barefoot. And topless. As a "fully paid up member of the most loathed race in the history of the world," Doris admits that she has "image issues." Every morning she secretly repeats affirmations that some whyte Steve Biko must have preached: "I may be fair and flaxen. I may have slim nostrils and slender lips. I may have oil-rich hair and a non-rotund bottom. I may blush easily, go rubicund in the sun and have covert yet mentally alert blue eyes. Yes, I may be whyte. But I am whyte and I am beautiful!"

The daughter of an English mother and a Nigerian father, Evaristo is a poet whose previous three novels were written in verse. This time, although she's writing in the colloquial speech of her narrator, she's still extremely attentive to the function of language, the power of words to shape reality. Blonde Roots is spiked with witty cultural references that detail the pervasiveness of racism. As she flees, Doris passes advertisements for "Guess Who's Not Coming to Dinner" and "To Sir With Hate." She describes popular minstrel shows in which performers in whyte-face "sang out of tune in reedy voices, their upper lips stiff as they danced with idiotic, jerky movements . . . singing music hall songs about being lazy, lying, conniving, cowardly, ignorant, sexually repressed buffoons."

Evaristo has even reversed the dialects, forcing us to struggle with the plantation whytes' thick patois the way we have to wade through the Nigger Jim's speech in Huck Finn: "Sundays him carve tings fe folk in de quarter an don't charge nuttin but just aks to join famlees fer dinner." Trying to cheer themselves, the slaves sing the old spirituals of their homeland: "Shud ole akwaintaince be forget/An neva bring to mind/Should ole akwaintance be forget/An ole lang zine."

In the middle of Blonde Roots, Evaristo drops in a 50-page essay written by Doris's owner: a "modest & truthful" defense of "The True Nature of the Slave Trade." It's a masterful bit of satire, with a sarcastic nod to Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Breathtaking in its self-pity, self-justification and self-satisfaction, this faux memoir is full of the scientific rationales, cultural insights and moral gymnastics that buttressed 19th-century slavery and remain handy for justifying 21st-century liberations of less civilized nations.

In a moving final section that keeps the excitement pounding till the last page, Doris describes the devastating effects of racism on whyte families: fathers turning violent and oversexed; young men devolving into thugs and ignoring the noble models of their ancestors; women working to death, raising children they

know they'll soon lose. The whole story is a riotous, bitter course in the arbitrary nature of our cultural values. Don't be fooled; slavery might have ended 150 years ago, but you've still got time to be enlightened by this bracing novel.

http://articles.washingtonpost.com/20...

Therese says

I knew I was in for something very different when I chose to read this book, which is basically a switcheroo on the idea of African slavery. Basically in this book the Africans take the whites as slaves from Europe and America and bring them back to Africa.

There are some parts that are a bit contrived or cheesy, but for the most part the author did a really good job of really putting the reader in a slave's place. Also, I hadn't expected to get the viewpoint of the slave owner, so that was interesting as well. I particularly liked the deliberate poking fun of how different each culture turned out because of their lot in life.

The only thing that annoyed me about this book was the fact that it was hard to work out what time period they were in. The way they described England was very much medieval, but I kept wondering if that's because of how in the real life circumstances of slavery the whites would've looked at Africans as being medieval and backwards in their culture too. It's just that when they would describe how people lived and talked in Africa they seemed so much more modern referring to things that wouldn't have been invented for 100s of years if it was indeed medieval times.

Overall I really did enjoy the book and would definitely recommend it for anyone who likes to read what-if scenarios. Very quick, easy read with only a few bits that were quite gritty and brutal.

Sara says

When I read this book’s description, I thought: Wow! What a genuinely interesting, creative, and fresh idea for a novel. And Elle Magazine, my barometer for books I’d probably enjoy, praised it. Yet I was disappointed.

The story is slow paced. It alternates between two points of view, the heroine (a white slave girl) and our antagonist (a black slave trader). But for some reason the heroine is dull at best, and the slave trader is witty making for a disturbing debate of whom to root for.

The author must be commended for creating an entirely new world. A world which is complete with made up words and places. Though the attempt is imaginative, the effect is irritating and confusing. I also couldn’t place a timeline for when these events take place…modern day or two hundred years ago? There are arguments for each both. Finally in order to turn slavery on its ear, the author throws every white and black stereotype I can think of at the reader. All of this treads to an abrupt and anticlimactic conclusion proclaiming a tried message; slavery is bad (well duh).

M says

What began as a cute and somewhat clever 'what if' tale of a reversal in the white folk enslaving the black quickly became a dragged out and horribly graphic story that took too long to end. It also had little more than its gimmick to promote itself.

Travis says

Doris Scagglethorpe, the daughter of a cabbage farmer, was ten years old when she's captured by slavers. Now twenty years later, she's trying to escape.[return][return]This is an interesting premise. Blacks (or blaks, as they are inexplicably called in the book (more on that later)) are the dominant race and whites (whytes) are the ones enslaved. It's not an alternate history, nor is it a fantasy set in another world. I'm not really sure what it is, or what it wants to be, and that was the problem for me.[return][return]To start with, from the very first page it seems like the author has just gone through and done a search and replace, like the blaks celebrating Voodoomas as their main holiday, or whytes being derogatively referred to as wiggers. Neither of these make sense! Wigger can only exist as a word if nigger exists, which of course it doesn't in this universe. And why would their celebration be Christmas with "voodoo" pasted on? (The suffix mas comes from mass!) The book is full of stuff like this and it made my head hurt at least once every page or so.[return][return]The other eye-twitchy, headache inducing thing was the world. It's sort of kind of our world, except geography is randomly different (and I don't mean place names, but actual continents and stuff are not the same shape). Stuff is randomly spelled oddly, like whytes and blaks. It makes no sense at all. There's also the technology and...culture, I guess. Like, it's historical mixed with modern. They have carriages and ships, but there's also the Tube under London (Londolo). They have plantations and yet the kids shop at Hot Topic-esque boutiques. The fashions of the Europeans are from hundreds of years ago, yet Doris says that her physique, stick skinny so her bones show, is the height of beauty. [return][return]I just...don't like it! It's all done like a joke and so haphazard. It reads like the kind of fanfic that people label crack because they just want to toss in whatever they think is funny without a care for whether it makes sense to the story. I don't like that sort of fanfic, and I don't like it any better in this book. It just makes my brain go crazy and I can't enjoy the story because I'm getting irked by all the ridiculous inconsistencies every other page.[return][return]As for the story itself...it offered nothing new except the idea of the white/black switch, which I didn't find to be done well. If you've read any accounts of slavery, you won't find anything new or different here. It was a real disappointment.

Paul says

4.5 stars rounded up
A clever satire on race and slavery. Evaristo, who is of Nigerian and British descent, generally writes poetry, but this is a novel about the slave trade. It is the slave trade in reverse; in Evaristo’s language the whytes are the slaves and the blaks are the masters and slave-owners. A number of reviewers have complained about time lines, geography and historical accuracy. My advice would be suspend that sort of judgement. This is a satire. It’s not fantasy, but nor has the historical timeline been smoothly switched, Evaristo does play with technological development and settings. Don’t try and work the geography either; just go along with the poetry of the language and the clever and sometimes funny (yes funny) switches.

The story revolves around Doris, an English slave captured at the age of ten; we pick up her tale about twenty years later and the timeline loves backwards and forwards. At the start she is an educated slave with some privileges in a wealthy household in Londolo, the capital of Great Ambossa. She makes an escape again, is recaptured, severely beaten and sent to do manual work in a sugar cane plantation.
Evaristo works hard to switch all the terms and culture. Whytes are called “wiggers” as a term of abuse. Doris hates the tropical heat and misses the cold, mists and rain of her homeland. She also misses the food, disliking Ambossan food and missing cabbage. Evaristo also switches some patois, usually to good effect. There are also plenty of references to be picked up;
“Naturally, having a whyte skin was all the evidence the sheriffs needed to accost a young man and strip-search him”.
There is a minstrel show where performers “whtye up”, they “whyte up and do Morris Dancing (yes really!); film adverts for “To Sir with Hate” and “Guess who’s not coming to dinner”. Some very neat satire focusses on brain size;
“Over millennia, the capacious skull of the Negroid has been able to accommodate the growth of a very large brain within its structure. This has enabled a highly sophisticated intelligence to evolve.”
And of the Europanes (whytes)
“The narrowness of the skull denotes a brain that is a bit, as we laymen would say, squashed up”.
There are a lot of what ifs and Evaristo weaves in the Maroons, some free working class whytes, slave rebellions, the horrific conditions on slave ships, the sexual exploitation, the selling of slaves and splitting children from families, beatings, poor living conditions: everything would expect. The reversing of geography can be quite inventive;
“Slavers had just arrived or were getting ready to set sail for the various coasts of Europa: the Coal Coast, the Cabbage Coast, the Tin Coast, the Corn Coast, the Olive Coast, the Tulip Coast, the Wheat Coast, the Grape Coast, the Influenza Coast and the Cape of Bad Luck.”
Evaristo by writing in this way critically engages with the slave narrative and shows its limiting and limited nature. She is disrupting history in order to show the ways the Atlantic slave trade is relevant in a contemporary context. There are also, inevitably because of the title, comparisons that can be made with Alex Haley’s Roots. There are also references to Conrad and Heart of Darkness which are very telling. It was worth ploughing through Conrad for this phrase;
“What can I say, Dear Reader, but the horror, the horror…”
And it’s very clever placement within the text.
The novel is brilliantly counterfactual; the first person narration in the first and third parts adds to the effect. It is fascinating and asks questions that still need to be posed. Evaristo does not quite get all the nuances right, but that is quibbling; it’s a novel that is well worth reading.
