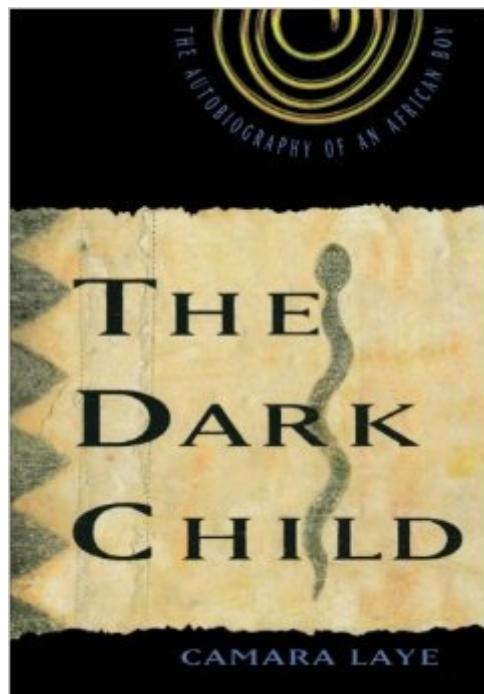


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The Dark Child: The Autobiography Of An African Boy



Synopsis

The Dark Child is a distinct and graceful memoir of Camara Laye's youth in the village of Koroussa, French Guinea. Long regarded Africa's preeminent Francophone novelist, Laye (1928-80) herein marvels over his mother's supernatural powers, his father's distinction as the village goldsmith, and his own passage into manhood, which is marked by animistic beliefs and bloody rituals of primeval origin. Eventually, he must choose between this unique place and the academic success that lures him to distant cities. More than autobiography of one boy, this is the universal story of sacred traditions struggling against the encroachment of a modern world. A passionate and deeply affecting record, The Dark Child is a classic of African literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Camara Laye was one of the first sub-saharan writers to become well-known outside of Africa. "L'Enfant Noir" or "The Dark Child" (also titled "The African Child"?) was published in 1953 when the author was twenty-five and living in France. It is a pleasantly nostalgic memoir of a childhood spent in the town of Kouroussa (French Guinea, now Guinea) and the village of Tindican, his mother's birthplace. Chapter by chapter Camara recounts his childhood memories: his father's work as a goldsmith and his position in society, his parent's magic, village life, the rice harvest, elementary Koranic education, circumcision and young men's secret society, secondary education in Conakry, girls and courtship, and his departure to continue his studies in France. After almost half a century in print, this deserves to be called a classic. [Note: some authorities state that his family name is Camara (also spelled Kamara) and his given name is Laye; the text supports this at one point. If

using search engines to look for information on this author it may be useful to try both versions of his name.]

A beautifully textured, fluid and organic autobiography, Camara Laye offers readers a piece of his life in *The Dark Child*. As part of the Malinke community in Upper Guinea, Laye captures the layered tradition and culture of his community, deemed, perhaps by most, to be simplistic or primitive compared to today's modern standards. Yet it is exactly from Laye's descriptions of the traditions of his community that we can begin to understand the psychology of the author. Each chapter is rich with imagery, and his words smack of sincerity and innocence, bringing about an effortless quality and flow to his work--it is as if we are there with Laye experiencing his many transitions, from boyhood to manhood. His descriptions of the communal lifestyle of his people is remarkable. Laye's works like other modern African authors reveal the realities of colonization, and help readers to appreciate and celebrate indigenous African traditions.

I first got this book in junior high by a family friend but never bothered to read it until I entered high school. Not having anything to read, I took it upon myself to read the book. I found myself intrigued by the author's way of life during colonialism and his upbringing in a village and his graduation from high school. It was sad that one of his classmates died unexpectedly. Wanting to find out some more about this author I looked up a book of African authors. Unfortunately he passed away in 1980. He is a great writer and wished that I had read it soon as it was given to me.

The Dark Child also known as "The African Child" is a childhood account of a Guinean writer, Camara Laye. In the very sentimental book the author writes about his childhood in Kouroussa, a village in Guinea. He credits his father for his foresight in giving him a western education despite knowing that their ties will be altered soon. He writes lovingly about his mother for her excessive protection as he embarked into adulthood and also his doting grandmother who viewed her grandson as above faults. His father realizing the changing environment of Africa opted to send his son to school instead of spending time in the forge. His mother on the other hand is tearful when Laye departs to France for a study leave. He also writes about his friendship with Fanta on their way to school. As a grownup man living with his uncle in Conakry, he develops a relationship with a half-caste lady, Marie Lorifo. *The African Child* replaced *The Narrow Path* by Francis Selormey as my favorite African autobiography. When Laye returned back from France, he married Marie Lorifo. But his life took a drastic turn later on in the sixties when he went on exile to Senegal to escape

Sekou Toure. His parents died during his years in Dakar. His wife was unjustly imprisoned for seven years by Toure while arriving at the Guinean airport to visit her ailing dad. When she was released seven years later, she divorced Laye because he had married a second wife. Theirs is the saddest love story that I have read and I cant understand why such tragedies would have befallen one of my favorite authors. Laye died in 80. Echoing the writeup of one of the reviewers, I ask in a similar vein, "Must every book written in Africa deal with the negative influence of colonialism"? Reason why I asked this is that Laye's novel was savagely and unjustly attacked by some of his contemporaries in Africa. Another great read is *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba.

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