

"A Caribbean drama told on a huge scale that still manages to be achingly personal and intimate."
—Marlon James, winner of the Man Booker Prize

EVEN ELIZABETH
IN NUNEZ
PARADISE



PRESS KIT



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Acclaimed author Elizabeth Nunez presents a *King Lear* for 2016 in this retelling of Shakespeare's classic set in the Caribbean—and just in time for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

CONTACT: SUSANNAH LAWRENCE | 718.643.9193 | SUSANNAH@AKASHICBOOKS.COM

“THINK’ST THOU THAT DUTY SHALL HAVE DREAD TO SPEAK / WHEN POWER TO FLATTERY BOWS?” In this retelling of *King Lear*, award-winning author Elizabeth Nunez masterfully illuminates the timeless complications of familial relationships and the immense tragedies that can arise when the jealous and greedy are presented with an opportunity to secure power and wealth, even at the expense of family ties.

- Set between Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados, ***Even in Paradise* encapsulates the polyglot nature of the Caribbean, exposing how the inhabitants of the islands interact with each other in light of the region’s collective history.** Nunez does not sugarcoat the societal tensions that influence contemporary Caribbean life, but instead brings her laser-sharp cultural observations to the page, deepening her Shakespearean source material and proving the lessons of *Lear* are applicable to all.
- As in *King Lear*, the prime point of contention between Peter Ducksworth and his daughters is the question of the youngest girl’s loyalty to her father compared to her sisters’ dedication (or manipulation) of him. The tipping point for Ducksworth comes in the form of a photograph of his most beloved daughter, clothed in a dashiki and wearing her hair in cornrows, surrounded by a Rasta family in Jamaica’s infamous Tivoli Gardens. By positioning this photograph as the tipping point in a white Caribbean family’s familial unrest, Nunez encourages **an examination of cultural appropriation and the too-common “white savior” motif.**
- Nunez’s *Lear*, Peter Ducksworth, was born and raised in Trinidad and **considers himself Trinidadian through and through, though he and his three daughters closely resemble their colonizing British ancestors.**
- Nunez does not limit her observations of contemporary cultural hostilities to black/white barriers; **the Caribbean characters of *Even In Paradise* are of African, Indian, Chinese, Syrian, and Lebanese descent (among others), and prejudices among all of these groups are brought to light.**
- Elizabeth Nunez **received the 2014 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in Nonfiction for her memoir, *Not for Everyday Use*.** Her two latest novels, *Boundaries* and *Anna In-Between*, were *New York Times* Editors’ Choice selections. In 2012, Nunez was presented with a NALIS Lifetime Literary Award from the Trinidad & Tobago National Library. In addition, her work has been long-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and she has received an American Book Award, a PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award, a Writers for Writers from Poets & Writers, Barnes & Noble, and more. **Her previous Shakespearean adaptation, *Prospero’s Daughter* (inspired by *The Tempest*), was a *New York Times* Editors’ Choice and a *Black Issues Book Review* Novel of the Year.**



EVEN IN PARADISE | a novel by Elizabeth Nunez | Publication Date: April 5, 2016 | 320 pages | Fiction/Literature

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EVEN IN PARADISE

A NOVEL BY ELIZABETH NUNEZ



A modern-day *King Lear*, a novel of greed, resentment, jealousy, betrayal, and romance set in Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados.

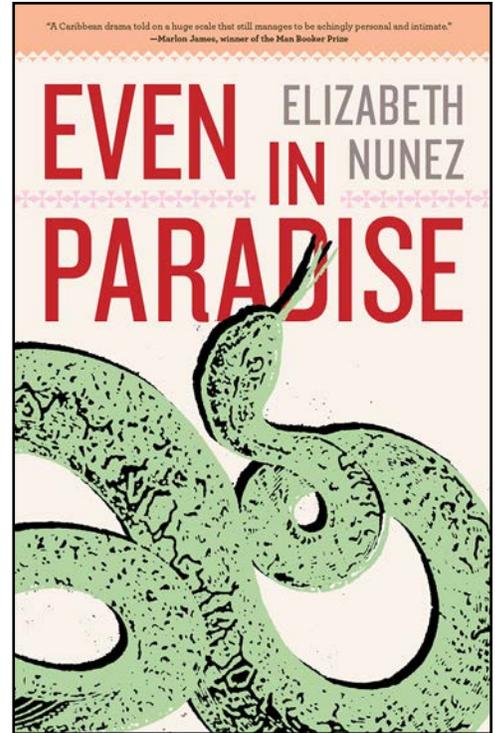
PRAISE FOR **EVEN IN PARADISE**

“*King Lear* in the Caribbean—except in this novel, the flattery and deceit of Glynis (Goneril) and Rebecca (Regan) lose out to the principled, honest love of their younger sister, Corinne (Cordelia).”

—*O, the Oprah Magazine*, 10 Titles to Pick Up Now

“An epic tale of family betrayal and manipulation couched in superbly engaging prose and peopled with deftly drawn characters. In a story structure as rhythmic as the ebb and flow of the water surrounding Trinidad and Barbados, this revisiting of the classic story of *King Lear* becomes a subtle, organic exploration of politics, class, race, and privilege. A dazzling, epic triumph.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred review

“[Narrator] Émile remarks on parallels to *King Lear* repeatedly, but there is much more to unpack here. The issue of racism is woven throughout, as are regional problems such as access to Barbados’s beaches and poverty in Jamaica’s Tivoli Gardens. This is also a celebration of the arts, culture, and natural beauty of the islands. Shakespeare’s work is a tragedy, but for Émile ‘the future shimmers before [him] full of wondrous possibilities.’ Nunez treats her source material with a deft touch, making this story impressive in its own right.” —*Publishers Weekly*



ABOUT **EVEN IN PARADISE**

Peter Ducksworth, a Trinidadian widower of English ancestry, retires to Barbados, believing he will find an earthly paradise there. He decides to divide his land among his three daughters while he is alive, his intention not unlike that of *King Lear*, who hoped “That future strife / May be prevented now.” But *Lear* made the fatal mistake of confusing flattery with love, and so does Ducksworth. Feeling snubbed by his youngest daughter, Ducksworth decides that only after he dies will she receive her portion of the land. In the meantime, he gives his two older daughters their portions, ironically setting in motion the very strife he hoped to prevent.

Beautifully written in elegant prose, this is a novel about greed, resentment, jealousy, betrayal, and romantic love in the postcolonial world of the Caribbean, giving us a diverse cast of characters of African, Indian, Chinese, Syrian/Lebanese, and English ancestry.

ABOUT **ELIZABETH NUNEZ**



Elizabeth Nunez is the award-winning author of nine novels and a memoir. Both *Boundaries* and *Anna In-Between* were *New York Times* Editors’ Choices. *Anna In-Between* won the 2010 PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award and was long-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Nunez also received the 2015 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in nonfiction for *Not for Everyday Use*, the 2011 Writers for Writers Award from *Poets & Writers* and Barnes & Noble, an American Book Award, and a NALIS Lifetime Literary Award from the Trinidad & Tobago National Library. She is a Distinguished Professor at Hunter College, CUNY, where she teaches fiction writing. She divides her time between Amityville and Brooklyn, New York.

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PRAISE FOR **EVEN IN PARADISE**

KIRKUS

February 1, 2016 | **Starred Review** ★

Nunez (*Not for Everyday Use*, 2014, etc.) spins a Shakespearean tale of patriarch Peter Duckworth, a wealthy Trinidadian landowner of European descent who divides his Barbados estate among his three daughters and sets off a disastrous series of events.

When narrator Émile Baxter, who's black, meets Corinne Duckworth, he's sixteen and she's twelve, but it's love at first sight. Corinne is well-known as Peter Duckworth's "favorite child, the youngest of three daughters, the apple of his eye." But, after a near-death experience, Peter is bent on leaving Trinidad and fulfilling his dream of moving to Barbados. The Trini islanders, however, see Duckworth's move as an effort to "find white husbands for his daughters." So it's not until Émile arrives at the University of the West Indies, when his Lebanese best friend, Albert Glazal, proposes to Corinne's eldest sister, Glynis, that he meets Corinne again. On the night of Glynis' engagement party, Peter gives his land away to his three daughters. Corinne is given the extravagant mansion and its grounds—but can only take possession after Duckworth's death. "I will not be put out of my house," says Peter, calling upon the fate of that famous Shakespearean king whose actions Duckworth has just repeated. And, immediately, Glynis hatches a plan to evict her father from his house and turn the land into a real estate development. What follows is **an epic tale of family betrayal and manipulation couched in superbly engaging prose and peopled with deftly drawn characters. In a story structure as rhythmic as the ebb and flow of the water surrounding Trinidad and Barbados, this revisiting of the classic story of King Lear becomes a subtle, organic exploration of politics, class, race, and privilege.**

A dazzling, epic triumph.



February 1, 2016

Nunez's (*Not for Everyday Use*) novel riffs on a classic Shakespearean tale, but her handling of the setting and contemporary elements lift it above mere pastiche. Émile Baxter is the son of the most famous surgeon of Trinidad and, as it happens, is of partial African descent. His best friend Albert Glazal is from a wealthy Trinidadian mercantile family, whose Christian Syrian-Lebanese ancestors moved to the islands generations ago. Émile's life also intersects that of Peter Duckworth and his three daughters, a rich family of English stock: the eldest, Glynis, is Albert's fiancée, while Émile is drawn to Duckworth's youngest, the vivacious Corinne. Glynis and Rebecca, the middle sister, are schemers, wanting their father's land and his beautiful house for their own real estate plans. **Émile remarks on parallels to *King Lear* repeatedly, but there is much more to unpack here. The issue of racism is woven throughout, as are regional problems such as access to Barbados's beaches and poverty in Jamaica's Tivoli Gardens. This is also a celebration of the arts, culture, and natural beauty of the islands. Shakespeare's work is a tragedy, but for Émile "the future shimmers before [him] full of wondrous possibilities."** Nunez treats her source material with a deft touch, making this story impressive in its own right.

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PRAISE FOR **EVEN IN PARADISE**

Booklist

March 15, 2016

Nunez's (*Not for Everyday Use*, 2014) textured and engaging novel explores familial discord, along with questions of

kinship and self-identity. Trinidadian narrator Émile is at college in Jamaica when his close friend becomes engaged to the beautiful Glynis, eldest of Peter Ducksworth's three daughters. Émile and Albert travel to Barbados to meet Albert's future in-laws, including the recently eloped middle daughter, Rebecca, and the youngest, eighteen-year-old Corinne. Wealthy, boozy Ducksworth announces that he is dividing his land among the sisters now in order to stave off future conflicts. Corinne, however, won't receive her share until after Ducksworth's death, a slight that causes irreparable harm to their once-close bond and provokes the ire of her sisters. Relationships further spiral down when Corinne pushes back against her family's increasingly nefarious demands. Meanwhile, Émile's postcollege journey has its own challenges, and his bond with Corinne deepens as he struggles to reconcile his relationship with his father. **With a nod to *King Lear*, Nunez crafts an introspective tale as her vividly drawn characters navigate complications of heritage, race, and loyalty.**



April 2016 | One of 10 Titles to Pick Up Now

***King Lear* in the Caribbean — except in this novel, the flattery and deceit of Glynis (Goneril) and Rebecca (Regan) lose out to the principled, honest love of their younger sister, Corinne (Cordelia).**

ESSENCE

April 2016 | One of Patrik's Picks

Even if you're not familiar with *King Lear*, William Shakespeare's great tragedy, you will still enjoy *Even in Paradise* by Elizabeth

Nunez. Like Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, a *Lear*-inspired novel set in the Midwest, the author's drama heads to a new place: the Caribbean. We meet Peter Ducksworth, a widower of English ancestry, who retires to beatific Barbados. I'll spare you the CliffNotes, but Ducksworth's plan to divide his land evenly among his three daughters goes horribly awry when he cuts off his youngest. Having been deceived by the older two, he sees his dreams of a heaven on earth turn hellish. **Nunez inspires with this one.**

NEW YORK POST

April 3, 2016 | A Must-Read Book

***King Lear* in the Caribbean. Nunez's latest novel follows widower and Barbados retiree Peter Ducksworth, who tests the love and loyalty of his three daughters. Like *Lear*, things fall apart for Ducksworth when he fails to realize that his youngest daughter truly loves him while the older two are simply using flattery to obtain their inheritance. It all takes place on sumptuous white Caribbean beaches and lush gardens.**

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ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR **EVEN IN PARADISE**

“Even as Émile vividly describes the colorful surface of Caribbean culture — its beautiful women, delicious food, vibrant music and sandy beaches — he continually reminds us of what Lear himself finally sees: Appearances can be deceiving. Ditto this book. It can feel at times like a light beach read made for a Caribbean vacation. But it also continually journeys inland . . . Hence Nunez’s frequent, deftly inserted lessons involving Caribbean history. As her title suggests, one can never escape that history, even when sipping rum on a hilltop mansion overlooking paradise.”

—**Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel**

“Fragile father-daughter and father-son bonds, pernicious sibling rivalry, the complexities of race relations: combine that with a Shakespearean element, and there’s the formula for a rich and engaging story. But take note: there is nothing formulaic about this powerful and insightful novel that transports readers to the modern-day Caribbean, where loyalties are tested, truth can become obscured, and antiquated notions can lacerate relationships.”

—**Foreword Reviews**

“Nunez’s ninth novel is a recasting of *King Lear*, with race as the wild card in this classic tale of familial dysfunction. Trinidadian Peter Ducksworth — white but nevertheless “Trin to the bone” — retires with his three daughters to Barbados. He soon feels he has been betrayed by his favourite daughter, Corinne. As punishment, he gives his two older daughters their share of an inheritance now but makes Corinne wait until his death to receive her share.”

—**Toronto Star**

“An epic story that still feels intimate to the reader.”

—**Book Riot**

PRAISE FOR **NOT FOR EVERYDAY USE**

- Winner of the 2015 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in Nonfiction
 - Longlisted for the 2015 OCM Bocas Prize in Nonfiction
- One of Oprah.com’s Best Memoirs of the Year and “Memoirs Too Powerful to Put Down”
 - One of *The Skanner*’s Best Black Books of 2014

“Nunez ponders the cultural, racial, familial, social, and personal experiences that led to what she ultimately understands was a deeply loving union between her parents. A beautifully written exploration of the complexities of marriage and family life.”

—**Booklist** (starred review)

“Through her thoughtful and articulate writing, Nunez offers a valuable perspective on the racism that she experienced, even in America, and the damage the Catholic Church does to women who follow the ‘no artificial birth control’ rule. Recommended for memoir enthusiasts and readers interested in Caribbean literature.”

—**Library Journal**

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AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

ELIZABETH NUNEZ ON WRITING *EVEN IN PARADISE*

The sisters in *King Lear* intrigued me. When Lear cries out, “*I am a man / More sinned against than sinning,*” there can be no doubt what he means by *sinned against*. His two older daughters are heartless, wicked women who threw him out of their castles and left him stranded in a storm. But what was Lear’s sin?

I have five sisters, and when we were young, we would try to trap our father into declaring which of us he loved best. Such was our need to feel special in a crowd of six daughters. We never succeeded; our father always found ways to deflect our pleas, though nevertheless reassuring us that we were each loved. Lear, however, made it clear that his youngest daughter was his joy, his favorite, and when she tells him that she would have to share her love for him with her future husband, he becomes unhinged. His bizarre behavior seals his two older daughters’ conviction that he prefers their young sister, and the seed of resentment and jealousy that had lain coiled in their hearts erupts into a poisonous, twisted plant strangling everything that hinders its growth.

Yes, their “sin” is ingratitude and greed, but it seems to me that at the heart of Shakespeare’s play is also a story about our need to be loved exclusively by our parents and the resentments that arise when we must share our parents’ love with siblings. I wanted to explore that human flaw in *Even in Paradise*.

—Elizabeth Nunez

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **EVEN IN PARADISE**

1. In *Between the World and Me*, bestselling author Ta-Nehisi Coates takes on Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow's incendiary question: Where is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? Coates responds with Ralph Wiley's statement: Tolstoy is the Tolstoy of the Zulus. In this novel, Elizabeth Nunez appropriates Shakespeare's *King Lear*, seeming to imply that Shakespeare is the Shakespeare of Caribbean Writers. By what right can she make this assertion?
2. The two older sisters in *King Lear* gang up on their youngest sister. Are there hints in the first chapter of this novel that give you clues as to the possible cause of the conflict among the sisters?
3. The names of the characters in this novel approximate the names of the characters in *King Lear*. Can you find the matches? Do the characteristics of the characters in the novel match the characteristics of the characters in *King Lear*? Can you identify the differences?
4. At one point in *King Lear*, Lear cries out: "I am a man more sinned against than sinning." In what way has Peter Ducksworth been sinned against? In what way has he sinned? Would you say that Ducksworth is a man more sinned against than sinning?
5. What roles do the following secondary characters play in the novel: Henrietta, Alicia, Mr. Lee, Gopaul, and Glazal? Were they crucial for the plot of this novel?
6. What did each of the main characters want? Did they achieve their desires?
7. Do you think Albert was unfairly treated because of his ethnicity? Why were the Ducksworths, and Douglas, in particular, suspicious of Albert? Were they justified?
8. How would you describe the relationship between Émile and his father?
9. There is a diverse cast of characters from different ethnicities in this novel. Can you identify them? From reading the novel or other sources, can you trace the history of the arrival of these various ethnic groups to the Caribbean?
10. The novel touches on the challenges of immigration to the US. What route did Douglas's brother Ralph use to get a US green card? What challenges did he face?
11. The novel comments on the tourist industry in the Caribbean, particularly in Barbados. What are some of the views expressed by the characters in the novel?
12. What does the novel tell us about Dudus Coke and the problem of drugs in the Caribbean?
13. Émile seems somewhat uncomfortable with Corinne's hairstyle and clothes after she begins teaching at Tivoli Gardens. Is his reaction understandable?
14. A newspaper reporter says to Émile: "Journalists stick to the facts . . . We keep our personal opinions to ourselves. We have to be objective, not subjective, when we report the news." Do you agree with the reporter?
15. Did you find the ending of the novel satisfying? Why or why not?

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NATIONAL EVENTS FEATURING ELIZABETH NUNEZ

Saturday, July 23, 1:00 PM
AMITYVILLE, NY
Amityville Public Library, 19 John Street

Wednesday, August 10, 6:30 PM
WASHINGTON, DC
Busboys & Poets Takoma, 235 Carroll Street NW

**Public reading with W. Ralph Eubanks. Part of the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation's 2016 Summer Writers Week.*

Saturday, September 17, 6:30 PM
BROOKLYN, NY
Brooklyn Book Festival Bookend Event
Caribbean Cultural Theatre, 138 South Oxford Street
**"Readings & Reasoning—A Caribbean Book Party." A Brooklyn Book Festival Bookend Event featuring Elizabeth Nunez, Bernice L. McFadden (The Book of Harlan), and Olive Senior. Readings from 6:30–8:30pm, followed by a reception from 8:30–10:30pm.*

Sunday, September 18, Time TBA
BROOKLYN, NY
Brooklyn Book Festival, exact location TBA
**Full details TBA.*

Monday, September 29, Time TBA
WASHINGTON, DC
2016 PEN/Faulkner Awards for Fiction Celebration
Folger Shakespeare Library, 201 E Capitol Street SE
**Full details TBA.*

Wednesday, September 28, 12:00 PM
FAIRFAX, VA
Fall for the Book, exact location TBA
**Full details TBA.*

Thursday, October 6, 6:00 PM
NEW YORK, NY
WNBA's National Reading Group Month Event @ Pen + Brush, 29 East 22nd Street
**Featuring Elizabeth Nunez and others TBA.*

Saturday, October 15, Time TBA
BOSTON, MA
Boston Book Festival, Copley Square
**Full details TBA.*

Saturday, Nov. 19–Sunday, Nov. 20, Time TBA
MIAMI, FL
Miami Book Fair International, Miami Dade College, exact location TBA
**Full program details TBA.*

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