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## **The Sparrow** by Mary Doria Russell

### **From Booklist**

When readers meet Father Emilio Sandoz, he's a wreck, inside and out. His hands are maimed, his body bruised; he suffers from scurvy, anemia, and spiritual devastation. The year is 2059. Although Jesuit missionaries thrive on suffering, something particularly dire has happened to this skilled linguist. Four decades earlier, he proposed an expedition to discover the sentient beings whose strange yet beautiful music had been detected by radio telescope. As the only survivor of this spiritual odyssey to Alpha Centauri (the star system four light years from Earth), Sandoz was found dazed and filled with terror by rescuers who inferred that he had resorted to prostitution to stay alive. Returned to the Jesuit Order, Sandoz is forced to face truths about the godless alien societies on the planet Rakhat that he and his colleagues grew to know, love, and perish at the claws of. Miscommunications, misplaced trust, and tiny mistakes led to their downfall. The dense prose in this complex tale may at first seem off-putting, but hang on for the ride; it's riveting! Russell's first novel is also a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. *Jennifer Henderson* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

### **From Kirkus Reviews**

Brilliant first novel about the discovery of extraterrestrial life and the voyage of a party of Jesuit missionaries to Alpha Centauri. Russell lays down two narratives: One begins in 2059, in the aftermath of the mission; the other in 2019, when a young astronomer intercepts a transmission of haunting songs from Alpha Centauri. In the latter, a linguist and Jesuit priest named Emilio Sandoz swiftly organizes a group of Jesuits and civilian specialists to turn an asteroid into a spaceship. The ship will reach the singing planet, called Rakhat, in four years of passenger time, even though 17 years will pass on Earth. In the narrative beginning in 2059, therefore, the mission's only survivor, Sandoz himself, is only a decade older. But he is a broken man physically and spiritually. The mission began well: Rakhat was beautiful and bountiful, and the men and women from Earth lived peacefully alongside a gentle and dreamy race, rather like the eloi of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, here called the runa. Then, inadvertently, the visitors improve the local diet, causing a surge in births among the Runa; suddenly, another, fiercer race appears to put things right. It seems that the Jana'ata raise the Runa like rabbits. The newborn are slain and eaten, as is the party from Earth, except for Sandoz, who is taken to the strange capitol city and sold into a brothel. There, he is raped repeatedly by the great poet who wrote the angelic songs that fetched the Jesuits in the first place. A startling portrait of an alien culture and of the nature of God as well, since, in his utter humiliation and in the annihilation of his spirit, Sandoz is reborn in faith. Shades of Wells, Ursula K. LeGuin, and Arthur C. Clarke, with just a dash of Edgar Rice Burroughs--and yet strikingly original, even so. (*Book-of-the-Month Club/Quality Paperback Book Club selection*) -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.