



The Granta Book of the African Short Story

Helon Habila (Editor), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Contributor), Fatou Diome (Contributor), Laila Lalami (Contributor), Rachida el-Charni (Contributor), E.C. Osondu (Contributor), Doreen Baingana (Contributor), Alain Mabankou (Contributor), more... Aminatta Forna (Contributor), Leila Aboulela (Contributor), Yvonne Vera (Contributor), George Makana Clark (Contributor), Mansoura Ez-Eldin (Contributor), Ivan Vladislavi? (Contributor), Alaa Al Aswany (Contributor), Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa (Contributor), Milly Jafta (Contributor), Dambudzo Marechera (Contributor), Zoë Wicomb (Contributor), Abdulrazak Gurnah (Contributor), Manuel Rui (Contributor), Camara Laye (Contributor), Alex La Guma (Contributor), Olufemi Terry (Contributor), Brian Chikwava (Contributor), Henrietta Rose-Innes (Contributor), Uwem Akpan (Contributor), Binyavanga Wainaina (Contributor), Patrice Nganang (Contributor), Maaza Mengiste (Contributor) ...less

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The Granta Book of the African Short Story introduces a group of African writers described by its editor, Helon Habila, as 'the post-nationalist generation'. Presenting a diverse and dazzling collection from all over the continent - from Morocco to Zimbabwe, Uganda to Kenya - Habila has focused on younger, newer writers, contrasted with some of their older, more established peers, to give a fascinating picture of a new and more liberated Africa.

Disdaining the narrowly nationalist and political preoccupations of previous generations, these writers are characterized by their engagement with the wider world and the opportunities offered by the internet, the end of apartheid, the end of civil wars and dictatorships, and the possibilities of free movement around the world. Many of them live outside Africa. Their work is inspired by travel and exile. They are liberated, global and expansive. As Dambudzo Marechera wrote: 'If you're a writer for a specific nation or specific race, then f*** you.' These are the stories of a new Africa, punchy, self-confident and defiant.

Includes stories by:

Rachida el-Charni; Henrietta Rose-Innes; George Makana Clark; Ivan Vladislavic; Mansoura Ez-Eldin; Fatou Diome; Aminatta Forna; Manuel Rui; Patrice Nganang; Leila Aboulela; Zoe Wicomb; Alaa Al Aswany; Doreen Baingana; E.C. Osondu

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From Reader Review The Granta Book of the African Short Story for online ebook

Hulananni says

Loved 85% of this book.

Eric Steere says

One of Africa's most influential literary figures, Helon Habila, has compiled over two dozen short stories in this Granta publication of African Short Stories. They are not organized thematically or regionally, and the reader learns the context of both the time and place as each piece stands alone. Although rather more difficult for the reader unfamiliar with the different ethnic regions and cities on the continent, he achieves a post-Nationalist theme underpinning the anthology's ethos, "If you're a writer for a specific nation or specific race, then &%^\$ you".

The African short story is a relatively recent expression for writers on the continent, and this anthology excludes some of the more prominent voices, such as Coetzee, Achebe, or Soyinka in favor of including more contemporary authors from further afield. Nigeria, as the most populous country on the subcontinent can claim Achebe, the editor, and Soyinka for example, yet he favors opening the anthology with a brilliant story from my one of my favourite young Nigerian writers, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

By perhaps the most well-known authors in this collection, "The Arrangers of Marriage" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores patriarchal and diaspora related tensions in the arranged marriage of a young Nigerian couple in America. Her husband had been living in America for some time, and was a "medical professional". When the narrator of the story arrives, he is living in relative poverty in medical school. He has "integrated" and gets frustrated with her inability to embrace her new culture. To her, "he sounded different when he spoke to Americans...and he smiled, the eager smile of a person who wanted to be liked". The man's repeated dismissive and sexually exploitative behavior coupled with the narrator's own simple remembrances of her little village and its chaotic simplicity and honesty are two worlds tugging. Still, so invested in her new life she has no way to return "Do you know how many women would offer both eyes for a doctor in America? For any husband at all", she meets another more "Americanized" Nigerian woman who grabs the narrator's interest and is a kind of model to her of how a Nigerian born woman can embrace America, with make-up, acrylics, etc. The narrator's captive abuse comes to an end when she packs her things and runs to her new girlfriend's apartment. Innocent ignorance leads her to the final conversation with her new Nigerian woman friend, "I fucked him [her husband]"... she realizes the severity of the comment, and then the narrator is instructed, once again, to get real: "You can wait until you get your papers and then leave, you can apply for benefits while you get your shit together, and then you'll get a job and find a place and support yourself and start afresh. This is the US of fucking A for God's sake". This is true captivity.

Some of my favourite stories in this collection come from North Africa and Muslim communities across the continent. It is important to this collection that their voices too, are heard, especially given the ethnic and religious conflict from Darfur to Yoruba. Accounts from the continent as well as by those who travel beyond it are recognized for their African origin, but not for any consistent political or social theme.

Some of my favourite stories came from North Africa and Muslim communities in Africa, Mansoura Ez-Eldin's "Fairies of the Nile" comes to mind here, it is not explicitly political or even a social commentary, it is just a great piece of imaginative literature, sensible of Williams wistful poem "Widow's Lament in

Springtime”, but with saturated, dripping rich prose in a dry landscape.

The brutality and base are depicted in the horrific dramas of street kids in Sierra-Leone (“Stick-Fighting” by Olufemi Terry), the young prostitution and drug addiction of a family denied the fabric of social exclusion, there is no alternative than for the eldest sister (at 12 years old) to be a call girl for family income with hopes of sending the younger brother and narrator to school (“An Ex-Mas Feast” by Uwek Akpan). The scenes rupture into moments revelatory doubt and disillusionment.

Another of my favourite stories in the collection is by South African writer Henrietta Rose-Innes, in which the fragility of human life, that of a virile boxer as observed by an older man exercising on the “Promenade” recalls the cruel and often random (or as observed by the narrator as destined from his own failures) death card.

Also depicted here are the ignorance of even the most prepared European and American visitors to the continent. If you think you are going to get by alright in your African adventure, read “Ships in High Transit” by Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina, the unfortunately pegged and exemplar of African authenticity due to his provocative *How to Write About Africa*. He’s sick of being asked how to engage with Africa, how to ethically involve. His story is one of a well-intentioned literary couple, culturally educated and with significant travel experience. They don’t get it! Is it impossible then? Are these stories purposeful? He writes in a response to African anthologies and by extension perhaps, with respect to this volume, “I was responding to Granta’s “Africa” issue, which was populated by every literary bogeyman that any African has ever known, a sort of “Greatest Hits of Hearts of Fuckedness.” It wasn’t the grimness that got to me, it was the stupidity. There was nothing new, no insight, but lots of “reportage” — Oh, gosh, wow, look, golly ooo — as if Africa and Africans were not part of the conversation, were not indeed living in England across the road from the Granta office. No, we were “over there,” where brave people in khaki could come and bear witness. Fuck that”

Well Mister Wainaina, if intercultural understanding is impossible and the works of its most talented creative writers relegated to doom and gloom “reportage”, then I’m afraid the continent’s expressive potential is in worse condition than I thought. His voice is exclusionary and comes to bear on the contributors in this volume, their constellation of disparate voices could never agree on anything, because Africa has nothing to communicate. This makes sense, imagine a Granta anthology of contemporary European short stories. Would it, in its totality, help us to understand Europe as a whole? There is the danger of a homogenization of voices, a monolithic African voice looking for common themes to define the continent. I don’t think this was Habila’s intention, and I don’t think his efforts have been in vain. This volume contains great stories that transcend national borders in their imaginative breadth of creative writing, the responses and expressions of Africa’s heavy-weight writers to not just the African problematic, but of lived experiences regardless of geography.

Wilson says

There were a number of short stories within this collection that I thought were very fine, thought provoking and beautifully written. Most of these good stories occur in the first half of the collection. However, I found that the collection became repetitive about half way through, and the second half of the collection was noticeably weaker than the first half; there are a number of stories in the second half that revel in mawkish brutality, and little or nothing beyond that. I still enjoyed the collection, but it easily could have five stories shorter, and all taken from the back end.

andrea freud says

I loved every story, which is very rare for me in an anthology. Outstanding book. If I were still teaching I'd definitely use it.

Paul says

The content of Africa has inspired so many epic novels and travel books that the short story genre has often been overlooked.

Granta have decided that this omission needs to be addressed, and have released this collection of short stories written by African authors. They are set primarily in Africa, but there are other stories set in different parts of the globe.

As with any collection there are the good, the bad and the indifferent. Some are really well written, others less so, but they all deal with issues that affect the African people, from unwanted pregnancies, living in the West, superstition religion and even a piece of speculative fiction set in pre war Berlin.

Overall not a bad collection, and a good starting point for those wishing to discover the literature that Africa has to offer.

Bonnie Brody says

This is a truly wonderful collection of the "third generation of African writers, who, until now, have rarely been anthologized." The editor, Helon Habila, states that his goal is to catch "the range and complexity of African short fiction since independence". She calls the writers in this anthology the 'post-nationalist' generation. Many of the writers live outside of Africa, several of them residing in Europe and the U.S.

"It's a sad but apparently undeniable fact that the short story has always taken second place to the novel in Africa. Some of the best African writers simply don't write short stories." Included in those who don't write short stories are Coetzee, Soyinka, Galgut, and many more. The editor believes that currently we are witnessing a renaissance in African literature. A boost to the short story is the Caine Prize for African Writing which originated in 2000. Many of the writers in this anthology have won this prize or have been short-listed for it.

The editor asks a valid questions: "How can you gather together the stories of a continent that is larger than China, Europe, and the United States put together? How can you 'anthologize' fifty-three countries, a billion people and over a thousand ethnic groups?" The anthology is organized "generationally, starting with the youngest writer and ending with the oldest". "Africa's strength is not, contrary to what most people like to think, its homogeneity, but in its diversity of cultures and languages and religions and skin colours. It is a large place; it contains multitudes." These multitudes are reflected in the stories included in this wonderful anthology.

My favorites, alphabetically, are the following:

The Arrangers of Marriage by Chimamda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie is one of my favorite writers and this story was included in her published work, *This Thing Around My Neck*. Ms. Adichie is Nigerian and is the author of two novels and a short story collection. She is a MacArthur Fellow. The story is about a Nigerian woman who enters into an arranged marriage with an American physician from Nigeria and feels like her identity is slowly being stolen from her.

An Ex-Mas Feast by Uwem Akpan was included in his collection *Say You're One of Them* which I have read previously. He, too, is Nigerian but now lives and works in the U.S. The story takes place in the slums of Nairobi where a family tries to survive by living off the proceeds of the oldest daughter, Maisha, a prostitute. She is planning to leave home and this turns the whole family dynamic upside down.

Street of the House of Wonders by Rachida el-Charni was new to me. Ms. El-Charni is from Tunis and continues to reside there. In this very short story, a woman is the victim of a thief who steals her necklace right off her neck. She chases him down and confronts him while others cowardly watch and offer no assistance.

Abdulrazak Gurnah is the author of *Cages*. He hails from Zanzibar and currently teaches at the University of Kent in the U.K. He is the author of seven novels. In *Cages*, Hamid works in a small bodega in exchange for his room. One day a woman begins to come in as a new customer. Hamid is smitten with her and sees her as someone "to be sung to, to be won with display and courage" unlike some women who can be bought with a few shillings. Hamid obsesses about her and feels shame because of that. Ultimately, she is not as he has imagined.

Alex La Guma is the author of *Slipper Satin*, the last story in the anthology. Born in Cape Town, South Africa, he was a political figure in his nation. He has written several novels. In *Slipper Satin*, Myra returns home after four months in jail for having an affair with a white man. This was against the law. The women in her village call her names and say she brought shame upon them. Myra is filled with bitterness and loss. The only redeeming thing in her life is the upcoming marriage of her sister Addie.

Laila Lalami is from Morocco. She has won several awards for her writing and currently teaches at the University of California at Riverside. Her story, *Homecoming*, is about Aziz who leaves Casablanca and his wife for five years to work in Spain. His plan is to earn enough money and then return to Casablanca to start a business. When he returns, things are very different than he had anticipated.

Alain Mabanckou, the author of *The Fugitive*, is a Franco-Congolese novelist and teaches at the University of California in Los Angeles. He is the author of several novels. His short story is about a young man who reflects about an incident in his life that took place seventeen years ago when he was a young African man. He did not buy his tickets for the Paris metro and gets chased by three ticket inspectors all through the station. The most angry and vehement about catching him is the black inspector who thinks all Africans should go back where they came from - they are ruining Paris. The young man ends up at the police station, pays his fine and believes that the black inspector "was probably hoping for the death penalty, which would have somehow returned a little dignity to his race. But what dignity? That was the question, and remains the question I feel sure I'll keep asking myself, in every book I write."

Maaza Mengiste was born in Ethiopia and now lives in New York City. She has received several fellowships and her debut novel has been translated into several languages. Her short story, *A Good Soldier*, is about Mesfin who has fled from Ethiopia to Los Angeles with his son. However, he can not flee his personal demons.

This collection really wowed me. I found that there was one common theme in several of the stories. The anticipated outcome rarely ever came to fruition and the protagonist was surprised with what came to pass. The stories are varied in theme and narrative. However, they all carry with them a taste of the life and

ambiance of Africa. I loved the collection and highly recommend it.

Amira Nabilla says

I love the book! I love it so much I want everybody to read it. I love how the book somehow resembles a time capsule. We could see how the themes evolves as time changes.

Since the stories are arranged from present to the past, we could see how some values change with time and some aren't.

The themes in some of the stories are heavy with patriotism and nationalism especially those during the revolutions era while the newer stories mostly revolve about family and moral values.

This book has made me eager to read more of works from African writers as it offers new perspectives and shows how playful these writers are with words. The stories (newer generations) are mostly written with casual tones and is enjoyable to read.

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who'd love to try reading books from African writers.

Leslie Reese says

While I didn't love every story, I enjoyed the range.

Zanna says

Helon Habila has done a damn fine job of selecting a diverse and striking stories for this in my opinion, but he has made one editorial decision that didn't suit me: putting the pieces in reverse chronological order. Cool idea, but... I didn't want to go along with it - what can I say? I'm an unruly kid. So I read the last story first and carried on that way - sorry Helon! Here are a few of my highlights.

Alex La Guma - Slipper Satin

I love this little snapshot of social tensions, patriarchy and (blood) sisterly solidarity. I felt Myra and Ada's lives going on beyond the edges of the frame...

Abdulrazak Gurnah - Cages

As well as Gurnah in *Paradise*, I have to thank Doris Lessing for imparting to me some of the resonance, the deathliness, the complicated awfulness of **the store** as it haunts the literature of African authors, a miserable symbol of colonial expropriation, enforced dependency, embodying white supremacy and the grind of poverty, disappointment, monotony. In this story, Gurnah sketches the store as a quagmire, swallowing health and dignity, binding Hamid in its moribund grip. The flicker of hope that comes is full of ambiguity. What price will Hamid pay to escape?

Milly Jafta - The Homecoming

This story gracefully dramatises a simple gesture to show the resolute strength of social fabric and the

elasticity of family ties. It has the glow of felt truth.

George Makana Clark - The Centre of the World

I love George Makana Clark's expansive, exuberant style (reminding me of Gabriel Garcia Marquez), which draws on all the senses to enhance its vibrancy, and hastens its bounding pace by cramming in details and asides, some of which venerate stories and their tellers. I wanted more, I wanted a whole book...

Leila Aboulela - Missing Out

This story certainly whet my appetite to read the several Aboulela works on my to-read list. I love writers who can render the texture of a certain style of everyday life so vividly that I feel all its complexity, all its conflicts, tensions, consolations. In a simple tale full of incidental details, Aboulela quietly celebrates, without sentimentality: parental support, generosity, routine, faith, against the grain of London's casually practiced religion of freedom from all ties, independence, individualism. It remains to be seen if bridges can be (re)built to a compromise...

Aminatta Forna - Haywards Heath

This tale leads me to smile at the strangeness and melancholy and comedy of growing old and forgetting. It's touching to think that a partial memory can create a mixture of freshness and nostalgia, a source of both pleasure and pain.

Fatou Diome - Preference Nationale

This piece has the style of a barside monologue delivered at a leisurely pace over the span of an evening drinking with a friend, a friend of colour who gets it, who knows what it's like to be treated as a third class citizen. Its wry humour finds the mark.

Binyavanga Wainaina's story **Ships in High Transit** is, unsurprisingly, at least partly a biting satire on the exotification and exploitation of Africa by Euro-USians. Only it's all horribly plausible, and there is no reductive simplification. Rather, Wainaina packs the tale with realistic, sane thoughts and conversations that serve to enhance the cringe-factor several-fold.

Uwem Akpan - An Ex-mas Feast I could hardly bear to read this story of a family living in desperate squalor, told from the point of view of a little boy who seems all too adult. I could not have imagined these lives. Nothing has ever imprinted my consciousness more deeply, more painfully, with the corrosive effects of deprivation, than the portrait here of Jigana's intelligent, resourceful, determined twelve year old sister Maisha and her chest of belongings, cumbersome and precariously preserved at the expense of comfort and trust. Even small hopes, bitter hopes, ambiguous hopes, are terribly expensive.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie - The Arrangers of Marriage This is my favourite piece, blending page-turning, gossipy storytelling with incisive social and cultural critique. How does she do it so naturalistically? I can't get enough of her writing.

Friederike Knabe says

"But I grope after language to describe the feeling I experience on my evening walks, the light in the air and on the sea. This pleases me: that some things remain beyond my grasp..." thus muses the jogger in Henrietta Rose-Innes' "Promenade" about a significant encounter between him, a middle-aged unassuming copy writer, and a young ambitious boxer. The sense of enjoying "things remaining beyond (our) grasp" could be a leitmotiv for many of the stories in the "GRANTA Book of the African Short Story", encouraging us to read with open eyes, mind and heart. Collected and introduced by award winning Nigerian author, Helon Habila,

this new anthology is an outstanding and wide-ranging rich smorgasbord of stories by twenty six writers from nineteen countries all across Africa - stories written in English or translated from French, Portuguese or Arabic.

Habila's highly informative 'Introduction' gives us a sense of his difficulty in selecting stories from the vast available material covering "fifty three countries with more than a thousand ethnic groups". He also comments helpfully on previous efforts to anthologize African writings and explains why his take is somewhat different and more contemporary in its objectives. Rather than highlighting the many common themes pertinent across the vast African continent, his aim is to provide examples of the diverse themes and approaches that have emerged since independence and/or are of importance to the younger, postcolonial generation of writers ("the third generation"). Of course, Habila adds, it is impossible to capture the diversity of African writing, even with the restriction on "the short story" in a "continent the size of China, Europe and the United States put together".

The stories, many selected for this anthology in dialog with the authors, address everything from the intimate domestic to the broad spectrum of social and political tensions, from immigrant/emigrant experience to glimpses into life on the margins of society, from power games and exploitation to racial issues. Some are highly satirical, e.g. Banyavanga Wainaina's "Ships in High Transit" or the re-imagined historical encounter with "The Moustached Man" as presented by Patrice Nganang. We find familiar names, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose story "The Arrangers of Marriage", a touching and profound story about a new immigrant to the USA, already published in her own impressive collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck* opens this anthology.

It is impossible for me to highlight any stories as my favourites, there is none that did not touch me and made me reflect after I had turned the page. Many of the authors live and work outside their country of birth now, for shorter or longer periods, the majority of them in North America or Europe. That in itself gives reason to pause. Reading their brief bios at the end of the book, (followed by some googling) helps us to better appreciate them and their work. Hardly any of the authors represented in this anthology collection are debut authors. More than half have won the prestigious Caine Prize for African Writing, and are known also for their novels and other writings.

Laolu says

The best stories came off very simply. The rest very forgettable

Kaarna says

I'm really hesitant on whether to give this anthology 3 or 4 stars. It's always hard when there are so many authors in one book - I like some of them more than others, and I can't figure out a fair average.

The book introduces over 20 modern African writers. The editor calls them the 'post-nationalist' generation, with respect and warmth. The introduction is a good place to start this book, it gives you a lot of good background information on how and why the writers and stories were selected and arranged. Because let's be honest - it's quite an impossible task to collect all the best short stories of an entire continent.

One story that stays with me even though it was at the very beginning of the book, is Olufemi Terry's

"Stickfighting Days". It is brutal, violent, and told in a very every day kind of language and style. It came to life even more when I realized how young the characters are.

On the whole, there were many stories with women as the main character, and with "women's stories" as the focus. Stories of unhappy marriages, stories of pregnancy, stories of sex work. (I'm not saying these are women-only subjects, just culturally more connected to women or literature by women. Please tell me if my text or preconceptions here are sexist, transphobic, or something else like that.) There were also stories with children as the main character, which somehow surprised me. Of course, there were many stories with young men as the main character, and also some with older men.

However, all the characters seemed to be straight and cisgender. Is there a hidden queer African writing that has not made itself to this anthology? I refuse to believe there are not writing queer Africans, and why would they only write straight cis people. The result would probably be the same if "The Granta Book of the European Short Story" were made (or is there one?), I guess. Still, I wanted to see my own people there, in this (to me) foreign continent.

Recommended to people who want a (relatively) quick look at the most important (?) African writers of today. The book doesn't say which country they are from, so if your interest is to read from a specific country, you have to do some googling. Some really amazing stories, some that felt a bit like exercises from a writing class, but all in all a good read and very well worth the time.

Trina Marie says

3.5 / Officially DONNNEEEEE with gen eds and school books for the fall semester. And I applied for May graduation today. READY.

I only read maybe approx half of the stories in this book but the ones I did read were pretty good.

Favorite few lines, pls note it is v out of context:

"I had just won [my freedom], so I took another drag of my Malawi gold and opened my lips to let out a lariat of smoke that caught my bolting thoughts by the neck and brought them crashing down. They accumulated and multiplied in the far corner of the cold floor, like my mother's beads. For the first time, my thoughts were collected. It felt like home." Dancing to the Jazz Goblin and His Rhythm, Brian Chikwava

My favorite story is Promenade by Henriette Rose-Innes; it's about a man who walks to clear his head, who often crosses paths with another human appearing to have the same habit. They're stitching up their days and it's comfortable to pass one another on their respective routes. The narrator, the first man, one day has a flutter of wings in his chest and his routine is broken – the point of the story is timing and the mindfulness of walking and making a connection with a stranger that feels warm and light. I can't spoil the story!!! But it's so well written and I love the words and it is just eloquently put.

"I grope after language to describe the feelings I experience on my evening walks, the light in the air and on the sea. This pleases me: that some things remind beyond my grasp. That they cannot be rendered down."

Grady McCallie says

This is a great anthology of short stories by African authors, some of whom are living on the continent and others who have moved elsewhere. The stories are placed in reverse chronological order, and so I read the book back to front to follow them up through time. There's huge diversity of theme and tone.

I enjoyed virtually all - this was a collection worth buying - but especially Zoe Wicomb, 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town', about a trip to a women's health clinic; Dambudzo Marechera, 'Oxford, Black Oxford', on racism at Oxford, and a gem among gems in this collection; Milly Jafta, 'The Homecoming', on the return of a migrant mother long absent from her village; Ivan Vladislavic, 'Propaganda by Monuments', a drily funny story of correspondence about the disposal of statue of Lenin; Laila Lalami, 'Homecoming', on a Moroccan migrant's visit home from France; and Binyavanga Wainaina, 'Ships in High Transit', on the desire of Westerners to experience an (in)authentic Africa.

Håkan Torevik says

This is a very good introduction to relevant modern african short story writers. The stories range from the brilliant to the thought provoking to the mediocre. Luckily the good ones are in majority.

There is no single theme in the selection but questions of ethnic, cultural and social conflict are centerstage. Some depict the inherent conflicts of tourism to Africa from old colonial powers, while others show us the scars of people living with the memories of war and oppression.

Even if some of the short fiction in this collection is forgettable, over all it has opened my eyes to some very fine authors.
