

READING AFRICA

Reading Africa is created by SABDET (Southern African Book Development Education Trust) with financial support from Arts Council England. SABDET is working in partnership with the British Council and Book Aid International on a programme of promotions and events throughout 2004 to increase awareness of the quality and diversity of African writing and to encourage the development of links between readers in the UK and in Africa.

Reading Africa developed from an event organised by SABDET promoting the list of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century produced by the Zimbabwe International Book Fair Trust. More than 70% of the books included in this booklet are titles in the list of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century or are by authors included in the list. Citations in the text of this booklet from this list are marked A100BB.

The complete list of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century including descriptive text and full bibliographic information is available on the African Books Collective website:

www.africanbookscollective.com

Further information on Reading Africa and related activities can be found on the following websites:

SABDET

<http://homepages.poptel.org.uk/sabdet/>



BOOK AID
International

www.bookaid.org



www.encompassculture.com

READING AFRICA

Outstanding books from Africa's finest authors



Kenya

A Grain of Wheat
Ngugi wa Thiong'o

0-14-118699-2
Penguin

It is 1963 and Kenya is on the verge of Uhuru – independence day. The mighty British government has been toppled, and in the lull between the fighting and the new world, the colonized and colonizer alike reflect on what they have gained and lost. In the village of Thabai the men and women who live there have been transformed irrevocably by the uprising. Kihika, legendary rebel leader, was fatally betrayed to the white man. Gikonyo's marriage to beautiful Mumbi was destroyed when he was imprisoned, while her life has been shattered in other ways. And Mugo, brave survivor of the camps and now the village hero, harbours a terrible secret. As we learn of their tangled histories, a masterly story of myth, rebellion, love, friendship and betrayal unfolds, confirming Ngugi's status as a giant of African writing.

'In this novel, Ngugi moves away from the Christian literalism of his first books while retaining respect for the moral values which religions instil. His rich characterisation, complex narrative and deep humanity weave together to form one of the most ambitious and fully achieved African novels – one which is widely studied and admired in Africa and beyond.'

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's 12 best books.



South Africa

A Question of Power
Bessie Head

0-435-90720-4
Heinemann AWS

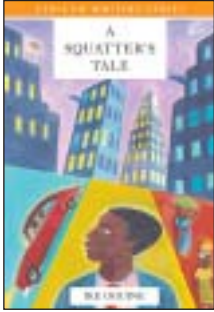
'Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy who was a native.' It is never clear to Elizabeth whether the mission school principal's cruel revelation of her origins is at the bottom of her mental breakdown. She has left South Africa with her son and is living in the village of Motabeng, the place of sand, in Botswana where there are no street lights at night. In the darkness of this country where people turn and look at her with vague curiosity as an outsider she establishes an entirely abnormal relationship with two men. A mind-bending book which takes the reader in and out of sanity.

'She brilliantly develops ascending degrees of personal isolation and is very moving when she describes the abating pain. Her novels have a way of soaring from rock bottom to the stars.'

Ronald Blythe, Sunday Times

'Receptive readers will be retrieving treasures of new understanding for decades to come.'

Lionel Abrahams, Rand Daily Mail



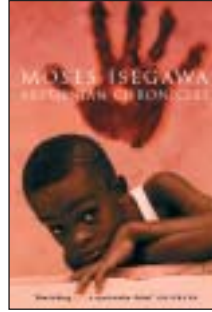
Nigeria

A Squatter's Tale
Ike Oguine

0-435-90655-0
Heinemann AWS

Young financier Obi enjoys life in the fast lane in 1990's Lagos. He walks tall in designer suits with his girlfriend at his side, enjoying the envy of those with empty purses. When his finance company collapses, Obi's decadent lifestyle comes to an abrupt end and he is forced to flee to the United States. There he has to live on the margins of society. Obi wants money, he wants a woman and he wants to live the good life.

This fast-paced novel, by turns comic and moving, reveals what success and failure mean for the young Nigerian at home and in exile. Ike Oguine explores the alienation experienced by today's economic refugees under the cover of light-hearted comedy.



Uganda

Abyssinian Chronicles
Moses Isegawa

0-330-37665-9
Picador

The narrator is Mugezi, a wise, quick-witted interpreter of his life and times. Through him we witness the everyday richness, wildness and humour of Ugandan life, and meet an impressive cast of friends, family and other characters. But this tale also has a darker side, for Mugezi's life story cannot be separated from the despotism and tragedy of Idi Amin's reign and its chaotic aftermath. Ambitious and explosive, the book is a spectacular debut and an extraordinary African story.

'Vibrant and sombre...seamlessly integrates positive, workaday Ugandan lives with Amin's murderous regime...sharp and bitterly funny storytelling.' Independent



Cote d'Ivoire

As the Crow Flies

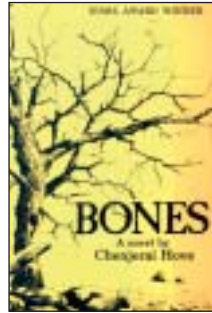
Veronique Tadjo

0-435-91203-8

Heinemann AWS

An illicit love affair that turns sour is the starting point in this lyrical and moving exploration of the human heart which weaves together a rich tapestry of voices to tell stories of parting and return, suffering, healing and desire. Like a bird in flight, the reader travels across a borderless landscape composed of tales of everyday existence, news reports, allegories and ancestral myths, becoming aware in the course of the journey of the interconnection of individual lives.

A new consciousness of the links between self and other, today's society and that of future generations is revealed as the key to creating a more just world and more understanding and fulfilling relationships, for 'love is a story that we never stop telling'.



Zimbabwe

Bones

Chenjerai Hove

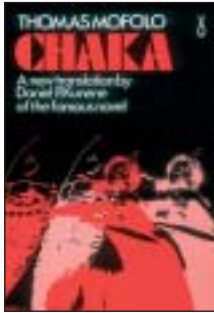
0-908311-03-6

Baobab

Provides a sensitive evocation of Marita, a farm worker, whose only son joined the freedom fighters in Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Marita's courage and endurance is reconstructed through the memories of those who knew her, in a poetic language rich in Shona idiom. Every recollection gives texture and weight to the portrayal of a woman whose 'simple life' was a battlefield of hardship and oppression. Hailed as 'a work of great generosity, humour and affection' the book poignantly reminds us that so many of our moral choices are often contained in the minutiae of everyday life.

'A powerful, moving and ambitious novel, written with exceptional linguistic control, plumbing the depths of human suffering but having the wisdom to hope.' Noma award citation

Noma award winner



Lesotho

Chaka
Thomas Mofolo

0-435-90229-6
Heinemann AWS

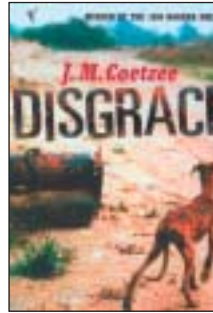
A classic novel which takes Chaka, the great Zulu leader, king and emperor, as its subject. It is a study of human passion, of an uncontrolled and then uncontrollable ambition leading to moral destruction and inevitable punishment.

'Given the contemporary state of modern African politics, it is not difficult to imagine why this novel, in fact the whole Chaka story, continues to exert a powerful hold on the imagination of both the African writer and reader. Like all good art, it offers a mirror in which we can see not only the past, but the present and perhaps even the future.'

Caryl Phillips

'This truly continental masterpiece explores the theme of power and its effect on those who have too much of it. In the hands of Mofolo the Sesotho language reveals its natural poetic beauty. Published in 1925, the novel has inspired generations of African writers across the continent. Its abiding quality is its evocative beauty and its insight into the relationship between character and history.'

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's 12 best books.



South Africa

Disgrace
JM Coetzee

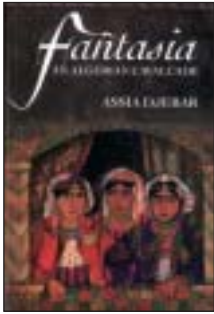
0-099-28952-0
Vintage

After years of teaching Romantic poetry at the Technical University of Cape Town, David Lurie, middle-aged and twice divorced, has an impulsive affair with a student. The affair sours; he is denounced and summoned before a committee of inquiry. Willing to admit his guilt, but refusing to yield to pressure to repent publicly, he resigns and retreats to his daughter Lucy's isolated smallholding. For a time, his daughter's influence and the natural rhythms of the farm promise to harmonise his discordant life. But the balance of power in his country is shifting. He and Lucy become victims of a savage and disturbing attack which brings into relief all the faultlines in their relationship.

'A masterpiece...perhaps the best novel to carry off the Booker in a decade.'
Boyd Tonkin, *Independent*

2003 Nobel Prize for Literature

Booker Prize winner



Algeria

Fantasia
Assia Djebar

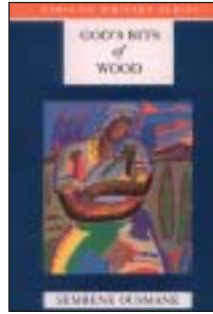
0-435-08621-9
Heinemann US

Intertwines the history of Algeria with episodes from the life of a young girl in a story stretching from the French conquest in 1830 to the War of Liberation of the 1950s. The girl, growing up in the old Roman coastal town of Cherchel, sees her life in contrast to that of a neighbouring French family and yearns for more than law and tradition allow her to experience. Headstrong and passionate, she escapes from the cloistered life of her family to join her brother in the maquis' fight against the French.

*'Djebar is an outstanding contemporary writer and film maker from Algeria. **Fantasia** is a literary work of mixed genres, historical and autobiographical narratives, interlaced with memories of youth and childhood. It speaks of the conquest of Algeria and the war of independence from a woman's perspective and in such a way as to produce a real feminist literary masterpiece.'*

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's 12 best books.

Winner of the Neustadt Prize



Senegal

God's Bits of Wood
Sembene Ousmane

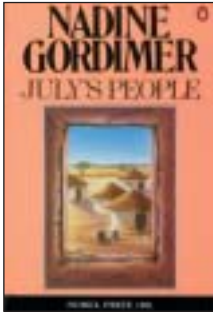
0-435-90959-2
Heinemann AWS

'Ever since they left Thies, the women had not stopped singing. As soon as one group allowed the refrain to die, another picked it up, and new verses were born at the hazard of chance or inspiration, one word leading to another and each finding, in its turn, its rhythm and its place. No one was very sure any longer where the song began, or if it had an ending. It rolled out over its own length, like the movement of a serpent. It was as long as life.'

In 1947-8 the workers on the Dakar-Niger railway came out on strike. This vivid and moving novel evokes all the colour, passion and tragedy of those decisive years in the history of West Africa.

'Every page is vibrant with a variety of life.'
New Statesman

'It still has the capacity to move you to tears as if it all happened yesterday.'
Africa World Review



South Africa

July's People
Nadine Gordimer

0-14-006140-1
Penguin

For years, it had been what is called a 'deteriorating situation.' Now all over South Africa the cities are battlegrounds. The members of the Smales family – liberal whites – are rescued from the terror by their servant, July, who leads them to refuge in his native village. What happens to the Smaleses and to July – the shifts in character and relationships – gives us an unforgettable look into the terrifying, tacit understandings and misunderstandings between blacks and whites.

'This is the best novel Nadine Gordimer has ever written.' Alan Paton

'Gordimer knows this complex emotional and political territory all too well and writes about it superbly.' Newsweek

1991 Nobel Prize for Literature



Mozambique

Neighbours
Lilia Mompote

0-435-91209-7
Heinemann AWS

On the eve of the festival of Eid, Narguiss, who 'never wanted anything to do with politics', is more preoccupied with family problems than with the radio news of kidnappings and killings. But before dawn she and some of her neighbours – ordinary people seeking to lead peaceful lives – are caught up in a vicious South African conspiracy to infiltrate and destabilise Mozambique. Meanwhile, in another Maputo household, Mena prepares a meal for her husband and his suspicious-looking guests and realises to her horror that they are plotting an assassination.

Skilfully weaving together present events and past memories, the drama of a few short hours gives an insight into the consequences of Mozambique's complex history.



Zimbabwe

Nehanda
Yvonne Vera

0-908311-62-1
Baobab

Nehanda, a woman, a legend and a myth: a figure whose symbolic power reaches into the hearts and minds of many Zimbabweans. This beautifully written poetic novel evokes the latent mystery and power, the aspiration and desolation that lie buried in Zimbabwe's history.

'This evocative novel is imbued with a sense of passionate intimacy, a love of her country and her people that gives her language a lyric intensity.'
World Literature Today

'Vera writes with wit, passion, poise and sensitivity consistent only with great minds and great artists.' Moto



Zimbabwe

Nervous Conditions
Tsitsi Dangarembga

0 7043 4707 5
Women's Press

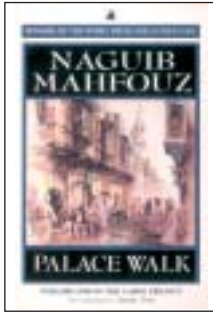
Tambudzai dreams of education, but her hopes only materialise after her brother's death, when she goes to live with her uncle. At his mission school her critical faculties develop rapidly, bringing her face to face with a new set of conflicts involving her uncle, his education and his family. This quietly devastating novel offers a portrait of Zimbabwe where enlightenment brings its own profound dilemmas.

'Compelling... a powerful indictment of cultural imperialism and a moving insight into the complex and often contradictory choices faced by African women today.'
Journal of Southern African Studies

'An impressive and moving book... a fine piece of writing which eloquently reveals the cost in human terms of rapid change.'
Melbourne Age

'An excellent portrayal, exposition and interpretation of an African society whose younger generation of women struggle with varying degrees of success and almost fatal failures, to wrest it from the unrelenting complexity of patriarchal domination and colonialism. Unique in African writing for portraying anorexia, an eating disorder that affects one of the central characters.'

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's
12 best books



Egypt

Palace Walk
Naguib Mahfouz

0-552-99580-0
Black Swan

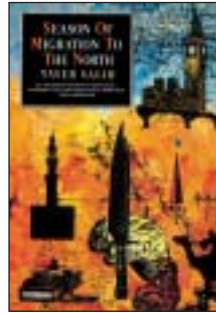
The story of twentieth-century Egypt told through the eyes of the Al Jawad family. Crossing three generations, it is set in the old quarter of Cairo, and spans the decades from the early part of the century to Nasser's historic overthrow of the old regime in 1952. The first book in the trilogy, *Palace Walk* opens during the First World War. Ahmad, a prosperous shopkeeper, is a tyrant at home, who terrorises his devoted wife Amina and keeps her in strict seclusion behind the house's latticed windows. One day, however, Amina is persuaded to venture outside by her young son, but is discovered by Ahmad, who consequently banishes her from his home. As the story unfolds, we discover the sleazier side of Cairo and begin to see Ahmad's behaviour is not quite as moral as he would have his family believe.

*'There is nothing in world literature quite like **Palace Walk**. . . this is writing worthy of a Tolstoy, a Flaubert or a Proust.'* Philip Stewart, Independent

'The Cairo Trilogy is a panoramic three part work written to explain the sensitivity and mentality of the people who lived in Cairo from the 1900s to the 1940s. It gives a rich description of their daily lives while portraying this as part of a wider historical process.'

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's
12 best books

1988 Nobel Prize for Literature



Sudan

Season of Migration to the North
Tayeb Salih

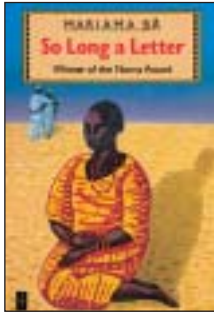
0-435-90974-2
Heinemann AWS

Powerfully and poetically written this is an Arabian Nights in reverse, enclosing a pithy moral about international misconceptions and delusions. The brilliant student of an earlier generation returns to his Sudanese village; obsession with the mysterious West and a desire to bite the hand that has half-fed him, has led him to London and the beds of women with similar obsessions about the mysterious East. He kills them at the point of ecstasy and the Occident, in its turn, destroys him.

'Beautifully constructed novel by an author whose reputation in Arabic is deservedly vast.' Tribune

'An arresting work by a major Arab novelist who mines the rich lode of African experience with the Western World.' Publishers Weekly

'Among the six finest novels to be written in modern Arabic literature.' Edward Said



Senegal

So Long a Letter
Mariama Ba

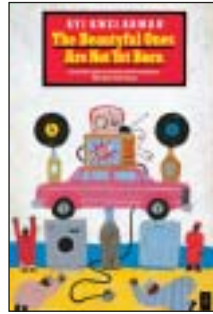
0-435-90555-4
Heinemann AWS

A sequence of reminiscences, some wistful, some bitter, recounted by Senegalese school teacher Ramatoulaye, who has recently been widowed. The letter, addressed to her old friend Aissatou, is a record of her emotional struggle for survival after her husband's abrupt decision to take a second wife. Although sanctioned by Islam, his action is a calculated betrayal of her trust and a brutal rejection of their life together. The novel is a perceptive testimony to the plight of those articulate women who live in social milieux dominated by attitudes and values that deny them their proper place.

'It is not only the fact that this is the most deeply felt presentation of the female condition in African fiction which gives distinction to this novel, but also its undoubted literary qualities, which seem to place it amongst the best novels that have come out of our continent.' West Africa

'A spellbinding book which paved the way for contemporary women's voices being heard throughout francophone literature. The central character in Ba's novel narrates her life through a letter to a friend, and manages to succinctly capture the everyday frustrations that many women undergo, especially after the death of their spouses.'

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's
12 best books



Ghana

**The Beautiful Ones
are not yet Born**
Ayi Kwei Armah

0-435-90540-6
Heinemann AWS

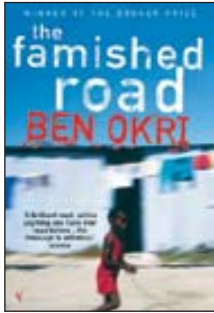
A story of the life of a railway clerk in Nkrumah's Ghana, who unlike his colleagues, refuses to accept bribes and becomes something of a social misfit.

'Impressive...in the way in which it express the disillusion and cynicism engendered in Ghana in the last days of Nkrumah, which his fall only seemed to compound...its description of the vague existential ennui of his unnamed hero recalls Sartre's La Nausée.' West Africa

'His central story of an upright man resisting the temptations of easy bribes and easy satisfactions and winning for his honesty nothing but scorn even from those he loves is most vividly conveyed.' Times Literary Supplement

'Probably the best writer ever to come out of Ghana...a notable achievement.'
Sunday Telegraph

'This is a clever and uncomfortable moral fable, handling human values without withholding sympathy from the clumsy ones and those whom weakness impels to a pursuit of power.' Guardian



Nigeria

The Famished Road
Ben Okri

0-099-92930-9
Vintage

Azaro is a spirit-child who is born only to live for a short while before returning to the idyllic world of his spirit companions. Now he has chosen to stay in the world of the living.

Azaro and his family must contend with hunger, disease and violence as well as the boy's spirit companions who are constantly trying to trick him back into their world.

'Okri is incapable of writing a boring sentence. As one startling image follows the next it begins to read like an epic poem that happens to touch just this side of prose... when I finished the book and went outside, it was as if all the trees of South London had angels sitting in them.'

Linda Grant, Independent on Sunday

'It is a rich, provocative and hopeful vision of the world, stuffed full of drama and surprise... its literary lineage – the ease with which spirits move through everyday life – is from ancient Greece and medieval romances.'

Robert Fraser, Independent

'A dazzling achievement.'

New York Times Book Review

Booker Prize winner



Zimbabwe

The House of Hunger
Dambudzo Marechera

0-14-118715-8
Penguin

'I don't hate being black, I'm just tired of saying that it's beautiful'. Irreverent and uncompromising, Dambudzo Marechera rejected what he saw as the narrow stereotypes of African literature, and was a fearless critic of his own country. In this semi-autobiographical work, the narrator expresses his desperate alienation – from his brutal family, from his student friends, from the squalor of township life and from Zimbabwe itself. This novella and the other short stories portray a world of madness and chaos in an explosive style that flashes with both violence and humour.

'African literature's permanent enfant terrible... at once exquisite and profane, erudite and violent.'
Peter Godwin

Winner of the Guardian Fiction Prize



Nigeria

**The Joys of
Motherhood**
Buchi Emecheta

0-435-90972-X
Heinemann AWS

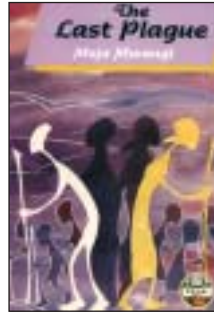
Nnu Ego is a woman devoted to her children, giving them all her energy and worldly possessions, indeed, all her life. This story of a young mother's struggles in 1950s Lagos is a powerful commentary on polygamy, patriarchy and women's changing roles in urban Nigeria.

'A graceful, touching, ironically titled tale.'

John Updike, New Yorker

'She looks at things without flinching and without feeling the need to distort or exaggerate. It is a remarkable talent. She is also humorous against the odds in a story so basically grim.'

West Africa



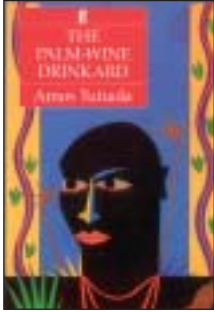
Kenya

The Last Plague
Meja Mwangi

0-9966-25064-6
EAEP

AIDS begins to sweep through the village of Crossroads, killing its villagers one by one. Little attention is paid to Janet, who has been handing out free condoms to the villagers, until her runaway husband Broker reappears, obviously suffering from the disease. Broker the entrepreneur cashes in on the situation and begins selling the condoms. But it is only when the villagers become curious about them and Broker dies that people finally ask: could AIDS be the end of Crossroads?

Meja Mwangi is both a novelist and a filmmaker and has twice won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature. Always topical, the body of his work reflects the major and changing concerns of his country and has moved from early characterizations of social engagement and the Mau-Mau anti-colonial struggle through to thriller and crime genres and contemporary social issues.



Nigeria

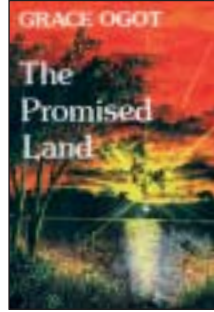
The Palm-Wine Drinkard
Amos Tutuola

0-571-04996-6
Faber and Faber

Drawing on West African, Yoruba folktale tradition, Tutuola describes the odyssey of a devoted palm-wine drinker through a nightmare of fantastic adventure.

'Brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching... nothing is too prodigious or too trivial to put down in this tall, devilish story.'

Dylan Thomas, Observer



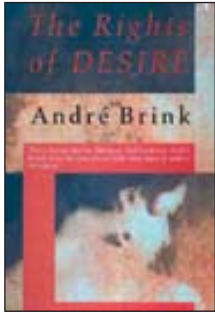
Kenya

The Promised Land
Grace Ogot

0-9966-46771-8
EAEP

Tells the story of a tragedy that befalls a Luo emigrant family in Tanganyika. A young farmer and his wife who have migrated there from Kenya become embroiled in issues of personal jealousy and materialism, and a melodramatic tale of tribal hatreds ensues. Simply and directly told it explores the concept of the ideal African wife: obedient and submissive to her husband; family and community-orientated; and committed to non-materialist goals. Distinctively ironic, gaining power and relevance, it adroitly captures the social tensions of life in rural Kenya.

Grace Ogot has had diverse occupations as a novelist, short story writer, scriptwriter, politician, and representative to the UN and is now an Assistant Minister in the Kenyan Government. This novel was her first full-length work originally published in 1966.



South Africa

The Rights of Desire
André Brink

0-099-28573-8
Vintage

Ruben Oliver's life is coming adrift from its moorings. He has been obliged to take early retirement from his job as a librarian due to 'rationalisation' and the new political realities of South Africa. His wife has died. One of his sons has settled in Australia, the other is about to emigrate to Canada while trying to persuade Ruben that it is too dangerous to remain. The only constraints are his old family home, haunted by the ghost of a young slave woman; and his housekeeper, Magrieta, with whom he has a shared history that goes back more than half his life. When Tessa Butler comes out of the rain one night in response to an advertisement for a lodger, Ruben is captivated by her. She restores passion to his life, but brings with her a turbulent past.

'A story that keeps one guessing until the end... an intelligent and gripping novel.' Literary Review

'Achingly beautiful and moving... this is a splendid novel by a master of the craft.' Scotsman



Sudan

The Translator
Leila Aboulela

0-7486-6257-X
Polygon

Sammar is a young Sudanese widow working as an Arabic translator in a British university. Following the sudden death of her husband, and estranged from her young son, she drifts – grieving, isolated and exiled from the warmth and colours of her home. Slowly life returns when she finds herself falling in love with Rae, a Scottish academic. Twice divorced and a self-proclaimed cynic, to Sammar he seems to come from another world. Separated by culture and faith, but drawn to each other this is a story about love both human and divine.

'A subtle investigation into the meaning of exile and home, doubt and faith, loss and love. Leila Aboulela's writing is always beautifully observed, her voice one of restrained lyricism: she is a writer of rare and original talent.' Duncan McLean

*'Aboulela has an unmistakable style, full of poetry and very moving. **The Translator** is an apt, resonant caution filled with love and poignant understanding of the world.'* Todd McEwen

Caine Prize winner



Nigeria

Things Fall Apart
Chinua Achebe

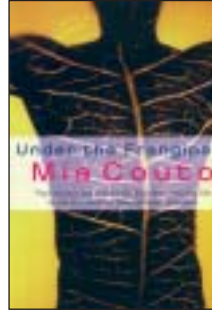
0-14-118688-7
Penguin

Okonkwo is the greatest wrestler and warrior alive, and his fame spreads throughout West Africa like a bush fire in the harmattan. But when he accidentally kills a clansman, things begin to fall apart. Then Okonkwo returns from exile to find missionaries and colonial governors have arrived in the village. With his world thrown radically off balance he can only hurtle towards tragedy. A classic in every sense, Chinua Achebe's stark, coolly ironic novel reshaped both African and world literature and remains an arresting parable of a proud but powerless man witnessing the ruin of his people.

'The founding father of the African novel in English.' Guardian

'This book has moved from its setting in a small Igbo village into universal prominence as Africa's most widely read novel. Its portrayal of the impact of British colonization on the life of a settled African community makes it a classic on the clash of cultures.'

A100BB jury citation as one of Africa's
12 best books



Mozambique

Under the Frangipani
Mia Couto

1-85242-729-9
Serpent's Tail

Pitches us straight into an African world where people can walk through the door separating reality from the spirit world. Coming back from the dead, the narrator inhabits a Mozambican police inspector who is investigating a murder. A murder where all the suspects are eager to claim they alone have killed the victim. It is set in a former Portuguese fort that used to store slaves and ivory, but now offers a refuge to old people such as Little Miss No, who describes how she turns into water as a means of escape, and Navaia, an old man-child cursed by an evil spirit, who grew old the moment he was born. They are all looked after by Marta, a young woman who sleeps naked on the ground so that she can absorb the secret energies of the earth.

Mia Couto blends historical truth, individual dreams and earthy humour into a book that is as unsettling as it is memorable.

'An original and fresh tale quite unlike anything else I have read from Africa.' Doris Lessing



Nigeria

Waiting for an Angel
Helon Habila

0-141-01006-1
Penguin

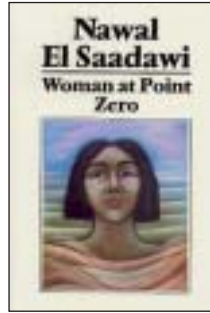
Lomba is a young journalist living in Lagos under Nigeria's brutal military regime. His mind is full of soul music and girls and the novel he's writing. Yet when his room mate goes mad and is beaten up by the soldiers, his first love is forced to marry a man she doesn't want, and his neighbours decide to hold a demo that is bound to lead to a riot, Lomba realises that he can no longer bury his head in the sand. It's time to write the truth about this reign of terror.

'Beautifully judged... a powerful, passionate work.' Observer

'Habila's language is joyous – a celebration of artistic freedom.' Metro

'A powerful, sombre, gripping and humorous novel.' Guardian

Caine Prize winner



Egypt

Woman at Point Zero
Nawal el Saadawi

0-86232-110-7
Zed Books

From her prison cell, Firdaus, sentenced to die for having killed a pimp in a Cairo street, tells of her life from village childhood to city prostitute. Society's retribution for her act of defiance – death – she welcomes as the only way she can finally be free.

'Nawal El Saadawi writes with directness and passion, transforming the systematic brutalisation of peasants and of women into powerful allegory.'
New York Times Book Review

'Saadawi tells this story with the nakedness of truth, passion and pain. Her prose is simple, but sharp and infuriating. It is the story of one woman, but it reads as if it is every woman's life.' Spare Rib