African and Africanist Fiction

**Please note:** I have (rather arbitrarily) classified these according to the place the story takes place (which does not necessarily match the author’s country of origin). The publication date is the date the book was first published in original language.


**West Africa**

**Côte d'Ivoire**

Ahmadou Kourouma (2007), *Allah Is Not Obliged*. A fictional account of a West African civil war from the point of view of a child soldier. Far away from all those very bad sensationalist accounts, a great read.

Ahmadou Kourouma (1998), *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Over the course of five nights, a storyteller tells the life story of Koyaga, President and Dictator of the Gulf Coast.

**Ghana**


Ama Ata Aidoo (1997), *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories*. These stories illuminate the struggles that women face in post-independent Ghanaian society. Also read *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories* (1970) by the same author.

Ayi Kwei Armah (1968), *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. This beautiful novel, set in Ghana, expresses the frustration many citizens of the newly-independent states in Africa felt after attaining political independence.

Amma Darko (2003), *Faceless*. A middle class woman coming into contact with street children in Ghana’s capital city Accra.


**Guinea**

Camara Laye (1953), *The Dark Child: The Autobiography of an African Boy*. The Dark Child is Camara Laye's autobiography, tracing the development of his cultural and personal values as a young man coming of age within the Malinke tribe of Upper Guinea during the 1930s.

Tierno Monenembo (2008), *The King of Kahel*. Loosely based on the life of Olivier de Sanderval, a man who journeyed to Guinea to build an empire by conquering the hostile region of Fouta Djallon, this novel brilliantly underlines the folly of the colonial project.
Mali


Maryse Condé (1984-1985), *Segu*. Based on real events, this historical fiction follows the life of Dousika Traore, the king’s most trusted advisor, and his four sons, whose fates embody the forces tearing at the fabric of Segu and its people, the Bambara.

Nigeria

Chinua Achebe (1958), *Things Fall Apart*. One of the most widely read novels from Nigeria's most famous novelist, Things Fall Apart is a gripping study of the problem of European colonialism in Africa. The story relates the cultural collision that occurs when Christian English missionaries arrive among the Ibos of Nigeria, bringing along their European ways of life and religion.

Chinua Achebe (1966), *A Man of the People*. A bleak satire set in an unnamed African state which has just attained independence, the novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu from the village of Anata who opposes a corrupt Minister of Culture named Nanga for his Parliament seat.


Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2003), *Purple Hibiscus*. When Nigeria is shaken by a military coup, Kambili’s father, involved mysteriously in the political crisis, sends her to live with her aunt. In this house, noisy and full of laughter, she discovers life and love – and a terrible, bruising secret deep within her family.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006), *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In 1960s Nigeria, a country blighted by civil war, three lives intersect.

Biyi Bandele (2008), *Burma Boy*. A Nigerian soldier is sent to Burma to fight on the Allied side during the Second World War.

Buchi Emecheta (1979), *The Joys of Motherhood*. Nnu Ego is a woman who gives all her energy, money and everything she has to raising her children – leaving her little time to make friends.

Buchi Emecheta (1974), *Second Class Citizen*. The struggle of Adah and her survival, moving from a high class position in her native Nigeria to a very poor class in England.

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani (2009), *I Do Not Come To You By Chance*. Desperate to help his father, Kingsley turns to his mysteriously wealthy uncle and gets drawn in to the bizarre world of the email scammer.


Senegal

Mariama Ba (1979), *So Long a Letter*. As the novel begins, Ramatoulaye Fall is beginning a letter to her lifelong friend Aissatou Bâ. The occasion for writing is Ramatoulaye's recent widowhood.
As she gives her friend the details of her husband’s death, she recounts the major events in their lives.

Mariama Ba (1981), *Scarlet Song*. Mireille, whose father is a French diplomat gets married to Ousmane, son of a poor Senegalese Muslim family. Moving back from Paris to Senegal, their marriage is threatened.

Fatou Diome (2001), *The Belly of the Atlantic*. Salie lives in Paris. Back home on the Senegalese island of Niodior, her football-crazy brother, Madické, counts on her to get him to France, the promised land where foreign footballers become world famous.

Marie Ndiaye (2009), *Three Strong Women*. In this award-winning novel Ndiaye describes the plight of three Senegalese women.


**Great Lakes**

**Democratic Republic of Congo**

Ronan Bennett (1998), *The Catastrophist*. A love story between an Irishman and an Italian journalist against the background of Congo’s independence crisis.

Aimé Césaire (1966), *A Season in the Congo*. By a great Martiniquais (French Caribbean) writer, a play about Congo’s independence leader Patrice Lumumba.

Barbara Kingsolver (2000), *The Poisonwood Bible*. The story is told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. A remarkable journey into Congo’s post-independence era.

Mario Vargas Llosa (2010), *The Dream of the Celt*. It is the summer of 1916 and Roger Casement awaits the hangman in London’s Pentonville Prison. Vargas-Llosa takes the reader on a journey back through a remarkable life dedicated to the exposure of barbaric treatment of indigenous peoples by European predators in the Congo and Amazonia.

**Rwanda**

Boubacar Boris Diop (2000), *Murambi, the Book of Bones*. This novel recounts the story of a Rwandan history teacher, Cornelius Uvimana, who was living and working in Djibouti at the time of the Rwandan genocide. He returns to Rwanda to try to comprehend the death of his family and to write a play about the events that took place there.

Jean Hatzfeld (2009), *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda After Genocide* (as well as Hatzfeld’s two previous books on the Rwandan genocide, *Into the Quick of Life* and *A Time for Machetes*). Journalist Jean Hatzfeld talks to victims and perpetrators in the Rwandan genocide and offers a fascinating account, through their voices, of both the genocide and its aftermath. In the midst of a lot of sensationalist literature on the Rwandan literature, this is high-quality testimony.

T. Monenembo (2000), *The Oldest Orphan*. The story is told by an adolescent on death row in a prison in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda
Central Africa

Cameroon

Léonora Miano (2005), Dark Heart of the Night. After three years abroad, Ayane returns to the Central African village of her birth. Now an 'outsider' with foreign ways distrusted by her fellow villagers, she must face alone the customs and superstitions that bind this clan of men and women.

Congo (Brazzaville)

Emmanuel Dongala (1987), The Fire of Origins. The story is unified by the actions of one man, Mankunku, a 'destroyer', who is born in mysterious circumstances in a banana plantation and whose identity is as variable as that of his land. This novel traces his development along with that of his unnamed country, from the pre-colonial era, through the horrors of European subjugation, to independence and the complexities of the postcolonial nation.

Sony Lab'ou Tansi (1979), Life and a Half. The novel takes place in an imaginary African country run by the latest in a series of cannibalistic dictators who has captured Martial, the leader of the opposition, and his family. Though shot, knifed, butchered, and bled, Martial's spirit lives on to guide his followers in their fight against the dictators.

Alain Mabanckou (2006), Memoirs of a Porcupine. When Kibandi, a boy living in a Congolese village, reaches the age of eleven, his father takes him out into the night, and forces him to drink a vile liquid from a jar which has been hidden for years in the earth. This is his initiation and, from this point on, he, and his double, a porcupine, become murderers, attacking neighbours, fellow villagers, and anyone unfortunate enough to cross their path. But now Kibandi is dead, and the porcupine, free of his master, is free to tell their story at last.

Equatorial Guinea

Ferdinand Oyono (1956), Houseboy. The story starts in Spanish Guinea with a Frenchman on vacation, who finds a dying man named Daniel Owusu and a diary. The rest of the story is of the diary (exercise book) that the Frenchman is supposedly reading.

East Africa

Kenya

John Le Carré (2005), The Constant Gardener. When Quayle's wife is killed, his investigation of her murder leads him into a murky web of exploitation involving Kenyan greed and a major pharmaceutical company eager to promote its "wonder cure" for tuberculosis.

M. G. Vassanji (1994), The Book of Secrets: A Novel. An Indian-born retired history teacher, Pius Fernandes, discovers a diary written by Alfred Corbin, an English consul stationed in British East Africa (now Kenya) in 1913. Read also The In-Between World of Vikram Lall by the same author.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2006), Wizard of the Crow. By one of Kenya's most talented writers. The story is set in the imaginary Free Republic of Abruria, autocratically governed by one man, known only as the Ruler.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1967), A Grain of Wheat. It is 1963 and Kenya is on the verge of Uhuru - Independence Day…
Tanzania


Uganda

Moses Isegawa (1998), *Abyssynian Chronicles*. At the centre of this tale is Mugezi, a young man who manages to make it through the hellish reign of Idi Amin and experiences first hand the most crushing aspects of Ugandan society.


Horn of Africa

Ethiopia

Dinaw Mengestu (2007), *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. In his run-down store in a gentrifying neighborhood of Washington, D.C., Ethiopian immigrant Stepha Stephanos regularly meets with fellow African immigrants Ken the Kenyan and Joe from the Congo. Their favourite game is matching African nations to coups and dictators, as they consider how their new immigrant expectations measure up to the reality of life in America after 17 years. Also read *How to Read the Air* (2010) by the same author.

Southern Africa

Angola

Pepetela (1980), *Mayombe*. Portrays the lives of a group of MPLA guerrillas who are involved in the anti-colonial struggle in Cabinda.

Botswana

Alexander McCall Smith (1999-2012), *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. Mma Ramotswe, the first and only detective agency in Botswana solves mysteries great and small for friends and strangers alike.


Mozambique

Mia Couto (1992), *Sleepwalking Land*. As the civil war rages in 1980s Mozambique, an old man and a young boy, refugees from the war, seek shelter in a burnt-out bus. Among the effects of a dead passenger, they come across a set of notebooks that tell of his life. Also read Mia Couto’s other two novels translated into English: *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* (2000) and *Under the Frangipani* (2001).

South Africa
Peter Abrahams (1946), *Mine Boy*. Abrahams depicts discrimination in the gold mines, the appalling housing, and a country boy's simple and humanitarian act of defiance in pre-apartheid South Africa.

J. M. Coetzee (1999), *Disgrace: A Novel*. Nobel Literature Prize winner Coetzee explores the downfall of one man and dramatizes the plight of South Africa—a country caught in the chaotic aftermath of the overthrow of Apartheid.

Nadine Gordimer (1994), *None to Accompany Me*. By a Nobel Literature Prize winner, the story of a white civil rights lawyer whose life changes just as post-apartheid South Africa does too.

Caryl Ferey (2008), *Zulu*. A crime investigation set in Cape Town, just as South Africa is experiencing its post-apartheid transition.

Deon Meyer (2011), *Thirteen Hours*. And other books by the same author, all thrillers taking place in Cape Town.

Alan Paton (1958), *Cry the Beloved Country*. The story of the Zulu pastor Stephen Kumalo and his son, Absalom, set against the background of a land and a people riven by racial injustice.

**Zimbabwe**

Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988), *Nervous Conditions*. 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.

Petina Gappah (2009), *An Elegy for Easterly*. In her spirited debut collection, Zimbabwean author Petina Gappah brings us the resilience and inventiveness of the people who struggle to live under Robert Mugabe's regime whilst also battling issues common to all people everywhere.

Doris Lessing (1950), *The Grass Is Singing*. Set in Rhodesia, it tells the story of Dick Turner, a failed white farmer and his wife, Mary, a town girl who hates the bush. Trapped by poverty, sapped by the heat of their tiny brick and iron house, Mary, lonely and frightened, turns to Moses, the black cook, for kindness and understanding.

**North Africa**


**Algeria**


**Morocco**

Fatema Mernissi (1995), *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. Mernissi weaves her own memories with the dreams and memories of the women who surrounded her in the courtyard of her youthwomen who, deprived of access to the world outside, recreated it from sheer imagination.

**Egypt**