



The Lights of Pointe-Noire: A Memoir

By Alain Mabanckou

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The Lights of Pointe-Noire: A Memoir By Alain Mabanckou

Alain Mabanckou left Congo in 1989, at the age of twenty-two, not to return until a quarter of a century later. When he finally came back to Pointe-Noire, a bustling port town on Congo's southeastern coast, he found a country that in some ways had changed beyond recognition: the cinema where, as a child, Mabanckou gorged on glamorous American culture had become a Pentecostal temple, and his secondary school has been renamed in honor of a previously despised colonial ruler.

But many things remain unchanged, not least the swirling mythology of Congolese culture that still informs everyday life in Pointe-Noire. Now a decorated writer and an esteemed professor at UCLA, Mabanckou finds he can only look on as an outsider in the place where he grew up. As he delves into his childhood, into the life of his departed mother, and into the strange mix of belonging and absence that informs his return to Congo, his work recalls the writing of V.S. Naipaul and André Aciman, offering a startlingly fresh perspective on the pain of exile, the ghosts of memory, and the paths we take back home.

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The Lights of Pointe-Noire: A Memoir By Alain Mabanckou Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #813647 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-03-01
- Released on: 2016-03-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

Winner, 2015 French Voices Award

Praise for *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*

"The author's real achievement is to capture a universal experience, one ever more common in the age of mass migration: what it means to come home after a long absence. . . . Few books about Africa will find it easier to attract readers far away."

—*The Economist*

"*The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is a thoughtful, lyrical meditation on homecoming that artfully explores the paradoxes of a narrator torn between his new life and the roots of his childhood—and a worthy addition to a rewarding body of work."

—*New Statesman*

"Sparklingly translated, this compact and artful memoir illustrates the universality of the maxim: you really can't go home again."

—*Financial Times*

"An unusually generous memoir. The book invites the readers in, allowing us to accompany the writer at every stage of his trip home. Snapshots of the people and places in the book make Pointe-Noire seem close and familiar by the time the memoir ends. Indeed, by the end of the book . . . it is hard to say good-bye."

—*Words Without Borders*

"A tender, poetic chronicle of an exile's return."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"This is a beautiful book, the past hauntingly re-entered, the present truthfully faced, and the translation rises gorgeously to the challenge."

—Salman Rushdie

"A dazzling meditation on home-coming and belonging from one of 'Africa's greatest writers.'"

—*The Guardian*

"Alain Mabanckou's joyous, vivid narrative style brings to life a frank, tender memoir."

—*The Independent*

"His voice is vividly colloquial, mischievous and...outrageous."

—Marina Warner, Man International Booker Prize Judge

"One of Africa's liveliest and most original voices."

—*The Times* (London)

"At the end of this journey, the conclusion is clear—the country that lives within him is no longer his own, but Mabanckou remains loyal to his mother's last wish: 'Never forget that hot water was once cold.'"

—Télérama

About the Author

Alain Mabanckou was born in 1966 in Congo. An award-winning novelist, poet, and essayist, Mabanckou currently lives in Los Angeles, where he teaches literature at UCLA. Among his acclaimed novels are *African Psycho*; *Broken Glass*; *Black Bazaar*; and *Tomorrow I Will Be Twenty*, a fictionalized retelling of Mabanckou's childhood in Congo. In 2015, Mabanckou was a finalist for the Man Booker International Prize. **Helen Stevenson** is the author of three novels and has worked as a translator for Faber & Faber and Serpent's Tail. Since taking up full-time writing, she regularly reviews for *The Independent*. She now lives in London.

Users Review

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Brittany Belliveau:

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