

Fiction & Cie

Alain Mabanckou
Petit Piment

roman



Alain
MABANCKOU

Rentrée littéraire 2015 • Seuil

Petit Piment

Alain Mabanckou

Download now

Read Online 

Petit Piment

Alain Mabanckou

Petit Piment Alain Mabanckou

Jeune orphelin de Pointe-Noire, Petit Piment effectue sa scolarité dans une institution placée sous l'autorité abusive et corrompue de Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako. Arrive bientôt la révolution socialiste, les cartes sont redistribuées. L'aventure commence. Elle le conduira notamment chez Maman Fiat 500 et ses dix filles, et la vie semble enfin lui sourire dans la gaité quotidienne de cette maison pas si close que ça, où il rend toutes sortes de services. Jusqu'à ce que ce bonheur s'écroule. Petit Piment finit par perdre la tête, mais pas le nord : il sait qu'il a une vengeance à prendre contre celui qui a brisé son destin.

Dans ce roman envoûté et envoûtant, l'auteur renoue avec le territoire de son enfance, et sait parfaitement allier la naïveté et la lucidité pour nous faire épouser le point de vue de ses personnages.

Finaliste du Man Booker Prize International 2015, Alain Mabanckou est l'auteur d'une dizaine de romans dont Verre Cassé (2005) et Mémoires de Porc-épic (prix Renaudot 2006). Son œuvre est traduite dans une vingtaine de langues. Il enseigne la littérature francophone à l'Université de Californie-Los Angeles (UCLA).

Petit Piment Details

Date : Published August 20th 2015 by Seuil

ISBN :

Author : Alain Mabanckou

Format : Kindle Edition 288 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Africa, France, Novels, Literature

 [Download Petit Piment ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Petit Piment ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Petit Piment Alain Mabanckou

From Reader Review *Petit Piment* for online ebook

Eugénie says

Si la lecture de *Petit Piment* était relativement agréable, il me semble que justement, c'est de piment que ce livre semble manquer. Le narratif de l'enfant des rues africain, il me semble, a été travaillé avec beaucoup plus de puissance chez d'autres auteurs (Monémembo, Kourouma). Je pourrais cependant comprendre comment ce livre offre une vision d'un pays d'Afrique qui n'est pas plongé dans un bain de sang, contrairement à *Allah n'est pas obligé* et *L'aîné des orphelins*.

Néanmoins, il est difficile de ne pas faire de rapprochements entre *Petit Piment* et *Chronique des sept misères*, bien que ce dernier soit un roman antillais plutôt qu'africain. Tous deux racontent la vie d'un enfant du marché qui jardine et finit par développer une certaine démente. Un goût de déjà-vu reste sous la langue pendant la lecture, et les caractéristiques formelles des *Chroniques* étaient bien plus intéressantes. En effet, pas de mots africains, pas d'oralité, mais plutôt un français international standard, même dans la bouche de la petite racaille du marché de Pointe-Noire, et un récit qui se déroule de façon très linéaire, très conventionnelle. Je ne pense pas que les auteurs francophones africains doivent absolument mettre une dose massive de folklore dans chacune de leurs phrases, mais ce récit manquant d'originalité aurait peut-être bénéficié d'un peu plus d'audace formelle.

Jill says

Black Moses may not be for everybody. If unwieldy character names put you off, for example, you'll be put off right from the start with this one: Tokumisa Nzambe po Mose yamoyindo abotami namboka ya Bakoko, or, in shorthand "Moses." If you're not familiar with the repressive politics of the Congo and feel that you're missing out, you may want to brush up on it first (and even then, you won't truly catch every reference).

Have I frightened you off yet? Hopefully not, because this is a surprisingly accessible book. Our feisty protagonist, Moses, left at an orphanage age 13, when he sets out with the twin "bad boys", Songi-Songi and Tali-Tali, is sort of a coming-of-age story and sort of a romp through Congo-Brazzaville and Zaire upheavals. Throughout this romp, colorful characters emerge: the octogenarian embalmer, for example, whose proclivities are a little...ummm...slanted, the secretive cleaning woman with a Cuban soldier father and a surprising past, the madam of a house of ill repute, the kindly orphanage priest who vanishes one day, and, of course, scores of corrupt politicians.

There is laughter here, overlaying years of grief and disillusionment, and there is courage that emerges from so much loss – of fathers and mothers, father and mother substitutes, friendships, and temporary sanctuaries. My lack of historical knowledge of the region meant that certain allusions sailed over my head, but having said that, the book stands on its own, a Dickens-like tale of an orphan and the adventures that none of us should ever be forced to endure.

Kamil says

3.5

I believe that the rating would have been higher if it was the first Mabanckou's book I've read.

Black Moses is sparkling with greatest AM's qualities - satire, dark humour, political absurdities, ability to address heavy issues with irony and wisdom, refers brilliantly to African folklore, Judaeo-Christian tradition, literature...

All that is great however, after reading Tomorrow I'll be Twenty and, exquisite in my opinion, Broken Glass I want more from him than seeing again not only the same motives but almost same characters I've seen in those two books read earlier...

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

- 3.5 stars -

I'm really curious to know the reason behind the choice of the title for the English version (that will be released on June 6th). Indeed I'm pretty sure **there's a wink somewhere for us to see** : from the French *Petit Piment* (literally, 'little hot pepper', which is the main character nickname after some... hmm... *hot pepper affair*, lol) to the English *Black Moses* (which is the name given by a priest to the MC), we seem to embrace all the different parts of our dear boy, contradictions and all.

Petit Piment relates the life of Moïse, a young Congolese, from his childhood in an orphanage to his adventures in Pointe Noire, Congo's capital. We follow him during the time when religion becomes forbidden due to the rise of Socialism, and see how his life is impacted by these changes.

I very much enjoyed how refreshing Petit Piment was. Indeed whilst some readers were disappointed that Alain Mabanckou seemed to give the treatment of several serious issues a glossy shine, on the contrary I found his writing incredibly appealing. **I savored every tiny piece of the discrete humor** used to make fun of - and condemn - the corrupt politics and the violent head of school - which does not mean I merely forgot how unfair and difficult life was for our main character and for some of the other characters.

Moreover, I don't think for one second that the issues dealt with - slavery, abuse, prostitution, poverty, propaganda, to name a few - have been *erased* by the irony and the distance with which Moïse portrayed them. At the end of the day, **Moïse stays a child trying to understand how to interpret the complicated**

world around him, he makes mistakes, he often analyzes situations with a certain *naivety* , but his disapproval is stated pretty clearly. Some parts made me want to throw up - it involves necrophilia and eating cats, so, yeah, brace your heart ; other made me FURIOUS - oh, the hypocrisy! - and I sometimes smiled so big it hurt - I do like my dark humor, thank you.

Why only 3.5 stars, then?

Well first of all because I rarely felt emotionally invested, not really. I liked Moïse and Bonaventure, but their portrayal often lacked that little something *more* to make them unforgettable.

The last 30% made it HARD for me to suspend my disbelief. I can't go into details, but in my opinion the whole narration crumbled at that time (because *hellooo*, it doesn't make any sense given that it's a 1st POV and narrated from the FUTURE). I did like the ending, though.

Bottom Line : If Petit Piment reads like a farce at times, beware the moment when reality catches up with you, because it hurts. Despite a plot that became a bit nonsensical along the way, Alain Mabanckou convinced me to read his other novels with his compelling writing and the splendid way he wrapped up his story in the end.

Credit for the head pict here

(read the original version in French)

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Aurélie says

Le romancier franco-congolais Alain Mabanckou raconte dans son nouveau roman « Petit Piment » la vie d'un orphelin de Pointe-Noire, capitale économique du Congo. L'enfant a été prénommé par un prêtre « Rendons grâce à Dieu, le Moïse noir est né sur la terre des ancêtres », mais il est appelé Moïse et surnommé Petit Piment par les jumeaux, terreurs de l'orphelinat. Nous suivons avec beaucoup de plaisir et le sourire aux lèvres les aventures du jeune garçon au sein de l'orphelinat religieux de Loango, dans les rues de Pointe-Noire, puis auprès de « Maman Fiat 500 » maquerelle au grand cœur. En arrière-plan, l'auteur évoque les bouleversements politiques du Congo dans les années 1970 et aborde les questions qui secouent le pays. Le roman est émaillé de portraits savoureux, les personnages sont plus attachants les uns que les autres. Il y a à la fois beaucoup de simplicité et de charme dans ce roman. Le tout est servi par une langue inventive et truculente, pleine de poésie et de drôlerie.

Alain Mabanckou prouve une fois de plus avec « Petit Piment » quel talentueux conteur il est.

Isabella says

Meine Meinung

Ich kannte weder den Autor (Anscheinend mehrfach preisgekrönt) noch diesen Roman, bevor ich das Buch

zufällig in der Bibliothek entdeckt habe. Cover und Klappentext haben jedoch sofort mein Interesse geweckt. Der Kongo ist ein Land, über das ich nur sehr wenig weiß, daher fand ich es besonders spannend, mehr über diese Nation und ihre Geschichte zu erfahren. Am Anfang musste ich mich ein bisschen an die Namen gewöhnen, das hat sich dann aber schnell gegeben. Der Autor stellt das politische Geschehen damals, in den 1970er Jahren, schön verständlich dar, sodass man den Roman auch ohne historische Vorkenntnisse lesen kann. Die Beschreibungen sind nicht allzu ausführlich, trotzdem konnte ich mir die Schauplätze gut vorstellen.

Das Buch hat im Grunde zwei Teile, die auch fast gleich lang ist: Im ersten Abschnitt geht es um Moses' Heranwachsen in einem Waisenheim, während sich der zweite um sein Erwachsenenleben in einer nahe gelegenen Stadt dreht. Der erste Teil hat mir wirklich gut gefallen: Für mich war es sehr interessant, einen Einblick in den Mikrokosmos Waisenheim mit seiner klaren Hierarchie, der despotischen Herrschaft des Heimleiters und den ständigen Zankereien der Mitarbeiter (untereinander und mit den Kindern). Spannend fand ich auch, wie sich die Abläufe im Heim während der sozialistischen Revolution im Kongo verändern. Denn der Leiter ist ein gnadenloser Opportunist, der für mehr Macht bereit ist, auf jeden politischen Zug aufzuspringen.

Nach diesen vielversprechenden 100 Seiten konnte mich die zweite Hälfte, nach Moses' Flucht aus dem Waisenhaus, leider gar nicht überzeugen. Ohne echten Spannungsbogen dümpelt die Story vor sich hin, während der Protagonist sich durchs Leben treiben lässt. Manchmal war mir zudem nicht klar, wie viel Zeit eigentlich gerade vergangen ist: Tage, Monate oder sogar Jahre? Am Ende wird der Roman dann völlig wirr und absurd, wobei ich mich mit Moses auch überhaupt nicht mehr identifizieren konnte. Der Schluss hat mir leider ebenfalls nicht gefallen.

Fazit

Fängt in der ersten Hälfte sehr vielversprechend an, lässt dann aber stark nach. Schade!

Simona says

It is a coming-of-age story, where the political circumstances (corruption, nepotism, arbitrariness) are shown with the satirical elements and the story is set in the time from the mid 60s until the 90s. The time period is not explicitly mentioned, but it can be seen from the story (the disappearance of a priest, the mention of Cuban soldiers - consultants, the mention of Brussels, Congolese Party of Labor...) and from the sequence of events.

We follow the life of Moses, at first in an orphanage and later as a member of the gang in the city and how these political circumstances / changes affect his life. The author exposes many problems (prostitution, poverty, propaganda, slavery, dispute between tribes ...) but he doesn't deal with them critically - issues are introduced as fact, as an everyday reality and this reality is seasoned with irony.

The story is interesting, some passages are painfully alive and beautiful ... but unfortunately, I didn't feel the book as a whole, especially the third part (the story is divided into four parts) which is crucial for the story development, seems very weak and unconvincing. But the last part is simply brilliant.

The author is unknown to me, but I am interested in his previous works.

Lulu says

I could not connect with this story at all. The last 50 pages or so were the most interesting. I felt like this was the writer's outline to the real story.

Anya says

“Petit piment” or “Black Moses”, as per the English translation, is a novel by famed African writer Alain Mabanckou.

The novel follows the life of a young Congolese orphan by the name of Moses who tries, like all of the other characters in the novel incidentally, to find a better life for himself in a corrupt, dangerous and unjust world.

Moses' childhood years are spent undergoing terrible abuse and deprivation in an orphanage. He later runs away to the big city, where things are just as hard, if not worse...

The colorful cast of supporting characters in “Black Moses” includes ‘evil’ twins, prostitutes, petty bandits, seedy politicians, quacks and sorcerers...

I think the ultimate point of the novel may be a grim reflection on the fact that there is no way out of the circle of misery and oppression in modern day Congo. However, the the tone of the novel itself could also be characterized as light, often mischievous...

There were things that I liked about this novel (e.g., the last few pages), however, I found many sections lacking originality. For example, the parts about the orphans and bandits seemed a poorer cousin to Amado's brilliant “Captains of the Sand”, and I had read better narratives about ‘the habits of the morgue employee’ in other literature.

Bob Lopez says

Solid book about growing up in a Congolese orphanage. First third of the novel concerns Moses and his day to day; second third is about Moses after he and the twins escape, and his relationship with the women in brothel (mostly maternal); the final third of the novel concerns Moses's deteriorating mental health due to malnutrition. I wish the book, rather than going into that final third, had expanded the first two sections because they were so rich and illuminating and interesting, and the last part of the book...wasn't.

Vanessa says

2.5 stars.

Black Moses was yet another of my Man Booker International Prize 2017 Longlist reads, and I can quite

understand why this didn't make the shortlist. Although it is an enjoyable and easy read for the most part, there were issues I had with it and overall it didn't really leave much of a mark on me.

It follows young Moses (whose full name is far too long to type), as he tries to get by in the orphanage he's grown up in as it's taken over by an overtly political director, before making his escape to join a gang of young boys on the streets of the Congolese port town Pointe-Noire.

I don't really have much to say about this book to be fair. If I attempted to go into detail about this book, I would be at risk of spoiling it, and I don't like to do that as you all probably know. What I will say is that I found the pacing of this book **very** odd, and actually detrimental to my enjoyment of it overall. The book is only 199 pages, and the first 100 pages are solely focused on Moses's time at the orphanage. After that, the rest of his story (and life essentially up until the age of 40) are crammed into the remaining pages. I found I couldn't keep up with the passage of time, and felt like this made the story feel very rushed and confusing at points. I also found that a lot of Moses's character was lost in the second half of the book, and that he became less clear in his motivations and less likeable.

Overall I wouldn't say this was a bad read, it was entertaining and quick to get through, but I wouldn't pick it up again and I wouldn't rave about it by any means.

Neil says

There is something strange about the balance of this book. If you read the blurb here on Goodreads, it gives you a break down of the initial plot and then says "What follows is...". This suggests an introduction followed by a longer tale that expands on "what follows". However, the actual book is in two parts of almost exactly equal length. I didn't read that blurb until I reached the end of part one, but I turned to it then because I genuinely felt that I had spent half a book reading the introduction and was wondering when the real story was going to start. The issue for me is that the "real story" that starts in part two then feels rushed. I think I would have felt more comfortable with a part one that was one quarter the length it is and a part two that was 2-3 times longer than it is.

There is also a significant change in style between the two halves with part two being much wilder and weirder, whereas part one is pretty much a standard story.

That said, this is an interesting story about a boy growing up in People's Republic of Congo in the 1970s. Part one tells us about his time in an orphanage and part two about his time in Pointe-Noire. As I've already said, to me part one felt like scene setting even though it was actually half of the book. Then, in part two, the author really goes to town with a bizarre, larger-than-life tale that I won't spoil by relating any of here. It's a book about identity and about who we are versus who we make ourselves.

I enjoyed reading this, but I can't give it more than 3 stars because, to me at least, it felt so unbalanced.

Moses Kilolo says

Book 4 of 2019. Set in 1970s Congo – Brazzaville, Mabanckou’s *Black Moses* is a brilliant novel about hope in a world that is quickly losing its grip on the idea of self-governance. Moses, who has an interestingly long name given to him by a priest he adored and lost, must first survive an orphanage in Loango, where his mother abandons him as an infant. He then has to face Pointe-Noire, by all means, an unkind city where he goes in the company of fellow young escapees. He is determined to leave behind the dictatorship, injustice, and nepotism of the orphanage that seems to mirror what was happening in their country.

His escape into Pointe-Noire is, obviously, to no haven. He goes from trying to scrap his way through the day to day survival of street urchins, to the kindness and accommodation of Zairean sex workers and ultimately to ‘losing his mind.’ It turns out that the whole narration is a reflection on his life from a psychotic asylum where he is held by the state, yet, it seems, it’s the country itself that has completely lost it.

Mabanckou’s writing is a joy to read. Its simplicity has a charm to it. This is definitely another addition to my highly recommended reads of 2019. And again, this is a translation that not only won the English Pen Award but was also a Man Booker International Prize 2017 finalist.

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/edit...#>

Paul Fulcher says

It all began when I was a teenager, and came to wonder about the name I'd been given by Papa Moupelo, the priest at the orphanage in Loango: Tokumisa Nzambe po Mose yamoyindo abotami namboka ya Bakoko. A long name, which in Lingala means: 'Thanks be to God, the black Moses is born on the earth of our ancestors' as it still inscribed on my birth certificate today.

Book 11 of 13 for me from the 2017 Man Booker International longlist.

Alain Mabanckou was a finalist in the previous author (rather than individual book) version of the Man Booker International in 2015. Following that I read perhaps his best known novel, his Rabelaisian 2005 book *Verre Cassé* (Broken Glass) – see my review - <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>, a novel consciously influenced also by the classic *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. My review concluded “At face value a rather simple and crude bar-room tale, but there is a lot of literary merit going on underneath, not all obvious to the reader, particularly in translation.”

Now his 2015 novel *Petit Piment* (literally: Little Pepper) has been translated, as *Black Moses* [*], also by Helen Stevenson, and has been longlisted for the 2017 Man Booker International.

[* pet rant – the title character has two main nicknames in the novel – Moses, which he dislikes and, later, he adopts the name Little Pepper – the original title uses the latter so the English translator/publisher has chosen to use the former]

The translation reads very smoothly – perhaps overly so. I noted in my review of *Broken Glass* that what Mabanckou describes as language that stretches French grammar to the limit (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/aud...>) didn’t come across like that in English. That said Mabanckou has praised Stevenson and said “In English, if you’re missing something it’s maybe just...10%” (<http://publishingperspectives.com/201...>) so perhaps my view is unfair. Stevenson’s own perspective on the challenges of translating his writing was:

“Alain's literary voice is so strong, so rhythmic, the words he uses carry it entirely; I find that simply translating them honestly, without strain, with facility, is enough. It's an attempt to let the writer speak, just in my language.” (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/201...>)

Black Moses is set, as with Mabanckou's other novels, in and around Point-Noire the Republic of the Congo / Congo-Brazzaville (NB the former French colony – not the larger Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Belgian, in which Conrad's Heart of Darkness is based).

Moses is aged 13 when the novel starts, living in an orphanage, where he was left at birth by his unknown parents. The orphanage was originally founded by European Christians, but as the novel opens at the end of the 1960s, the country has just been self-proclaimed as the Marxist-Leninist People's Republic of the Congo. The feared Director of the orphanage, Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako, takes advantage of the political situation to ban the eagerly-anticipated weekly visits to the orphans of the priest Papa Moupelo, and to fully embrace the new regime, turning his room into the centre of the *National Movement of Pioneers of the Socialist Revolution of Congo*, praising the new regime in the orphanage's weekly newsletter, and promoting his own family members to senior positions.

As Sabine Niangui, a long-serving helper at the orphanage who goes out of her way to look after Moses, tells him, now *'orphanages are considered laboratories of the revolution.'*

For his first 13 years at the orphanage Moses' closest friend is Bonaventure, who arrived at the orphanage at the same time, and who is convinced his biological father will one day land in a plane and take him away. But latterly Moses becomes, almost accidentally, allied to the fearsome twins Songi-Songi and Tala-Tala (*what was the use of telling them apart when they were constantly together and wore the same clothes*) who rule amongst the boys and even intimidate the wardens, after he laces their food with hot pepper in relation for them terrorising Bonaventure.

Far from taking revenge the twins come to respect him and adopt him as their right-hand man, rechristening him: *We're calling him Little Pepper because he proved his worth with pepper.* As the political pressure on the orphanage increases, the three escape to Point-Noire where they set up a street gang, displacing the previous top-dog who fancied himself as a Robin-Hood type figure.

Later Little Pepper becomes friendly with a Zairian brother owner, Madame Fiat 500, and her girls. But when the political changes in the country impact first the street gangs and then Madame Fiat, Little Pepper's world disintegrates:

I was at my wit's end, I'd lost all sense of time, and it was probably around then that I started to feel gaping holes in my head, hearing noises, like all those people running around inside it, echoes of voices from empty houses, voices not unlike those of Papa Moupelo and Sabine Niangui, the twins, but most of all Madame Fiat 500 and her ten girls. After that, I remembered nothing, not even who I was.

To recover his sanity, Little Pepper visits first a French-trained psychiatrist and, when that fails, a traditional healer who *gave me cricket's piss to drink, and green mamba blood, toad's spit, elephant hair mixed with kaolin and sparrow's turds* and ends the book having come neatly full circle.

While this was an enjoyable read it was also ultimately unsatisfying and one of the weaker books on the MBI longlist in my view. As Neil's review (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>) notes the narrative is rather unbalanced. The orphanage story takes up half the book but doesn't really get anywhere. Another quarter is taken with the stronger part, Little Pepper's adventures in Point Noire, but this is too rushed for it

to get close to the character-depth, lyrical-heights and literary-references of Broken Glass. And the story of his mental disintegration isn't an at-all convincing first person account of mental difficulties (for that see e.g. the excellent *The Storyteller* by Kate Armstrong).

If I took anything at all from the novel it was personal nuggets entirely unrelated to the main story. This line on the twins ran true to my own experience as a twin: *what was the use of telling them apart when they were constantly together and wore the same clothes*, and while I obviously knew that the name of my favourite food Marmite is taken from a French cooking pot (pictured on the label) I hadn't realised that the etymology of the French word came from an old term for hypocrite (the lid on the pot meaning it hides its contents while cooking):

Calzean says

A little book that is quite inventive in its structure and style.

The first half is about life in an Congolese orphanage at Loango. The narrator is 13 years old and things are changing in the country. The teaching moves from the religious to the government slogans of socialism.

Moses escapes with two fellow orphans and they reach Pointe Noire where they run a local gang. Moses meets a local madam and lives with her for a while before moving into a job on the wharves.

He then suffers from some sort of mental illness before, at the age of 40, returning to Loango which is now a prison for the criminally insane.

The book has humour and grief in tons as it covers the lose of friends/peers/mentors, the need to reinvent yourself to survive in a land of corruption and nepotism, and the fate of those who cannot escape.
