From One Reader to Another

An invitation to read internationally

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of its Writers in Translation programme, English PEN is teaming up with The Reading Agency and Free Word to invite book groups to read and discuss titles from the World Bookshelf, a unique online showcase of the most exciting contemporary literature available in English translation.

There are over 100 books on the World Bookshelf but here is a suggested reading list to get you started:

- *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al Aswany (Egypt, Arabic)
- *Dreams from the Endz* by Faïza Guène (France, French)
- *Arab Jazz* by Karim Miské (France, French)
- *Compartment No.6* by Rosa Liksom (Finland, Finnish)
- *The Lady from Tel Aviv* by Rabai al-Madhoun (Palestine, Arabic)
- *Vango: Between Sky and Earth* by Timothée de Fombelle (France, French)
- *The Devil’s Workshop* by Jachym Topol (Czech Republic, Czech)
- *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* (for younger readers) by Fabio Geda (Italy, Italian)
- *Bronze and Sunflower* (for younger readers) by Cao Wenxuan (China, Mandarin)
- *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* by Saša Stanišić (Bosnia-Herzegovina, German)
- *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* by Alain Mabanckou (Congo, French)
- *The Goddess Chronicle* by Natsuo Kirino (Japan, Japanese)
- *Allah Is Not Obliged* by Ahmadou Kourouma (Ivory Coast, French)
- *The Iraqi Christ* by Hassan Blasim (Iraq, Arabic)
- *Morning Sea* by Margaret Mazzantini (Italy, Italian)
- *Sworn Virgin* by Elvira Dones (Albania, Italian)
- *A Perfect Crime* by A Yi (China, Mandarin)
- *The End of Days* by Jenny Erpenbeck (Germany, German)
- *The Sound of Things Falling* by Juan Gabriel Vásquez (Colombia, Spanish)
- *The Whispering City* by Sara Moliner (Spain, Spanish)

Share your thoughts about these books by leaving a comment on the website or by getting in touch on Twitter: @englishpen, @readingagency, @FreeWordCentre
The Lights of Pointe-Noire by Alain Mabanckou

Alain Mabanckou left Congo in 1989, at the age of 22, not to return until a quarter of a century later. When at last he returns home to Pointe-Noire, a bustling port town on Congo’s south-eastern coast, he finds a country that in some ways has changed beyond recognition: the cinema has become a Pentecostal temple; his secondary school has been renamed in honour of a previously despised colonial ruler. But many things remain unchanged, not least the swirling mythology of Congolese culture which still informs everyday life in Pointe-Noire. As Mabanckou 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, he slowly builds a stirring exploration of the way home never leaves us, however long ago we left it.

About the author

Alain Mabanckou was born in 1966 in Congo. An award-winning novelist, poet and essayist, Mabanckou currently lives in LA, where he teaches literature at UCLA. His four novels African Psycho, Broken Glass, Black Bazaar and Tomorrow I Will Be Twenty – a fictionalised retelling of Mabanckou's childhood in Congo – are all published by Serpent's Tail. In 2015, Mabanckou was listed as a finalist for the Man Booker International Prize.

About the translator

Helen Stevenson is a piano teacher, writer and translator, and lives in Somerset. She has translated works by Marie Darrieussecq, Alice Ferney and Catherine Millet, as well as several books by Alain Mabanckou.

For discussion

1. Alain Mabanckou made his name with novels such as Broken Glass and African Psycho. The Lights of Pointe-Noire is a collection of autobiographical essays. How do the essays read differently to fiction stories? Why do you think Alain Mabanckou chose this form?

2. Alain Mabanckou is arguably Africa's most important Francophone writer but, as he describes in the book, he is from an impoverished neighbourhood in the Republic of Congo which most of his family have never left. What tensions does this create and how does Mabanckou deal with them?

3. In many ways the book is about the meaning of 'home' and 'belonging'. What do these words mean for you and can you relate to Mabanckou's story?

4. Discuss Mabanckou's relationship to the memory of his mother.

5. Other writers have written memoirs about returning home as 'boys made good' - for example, stars of post-colonial literature such as Aime Cesaire and VS Naipaul. What do you think books like these contribute to our understanding of the developing world?