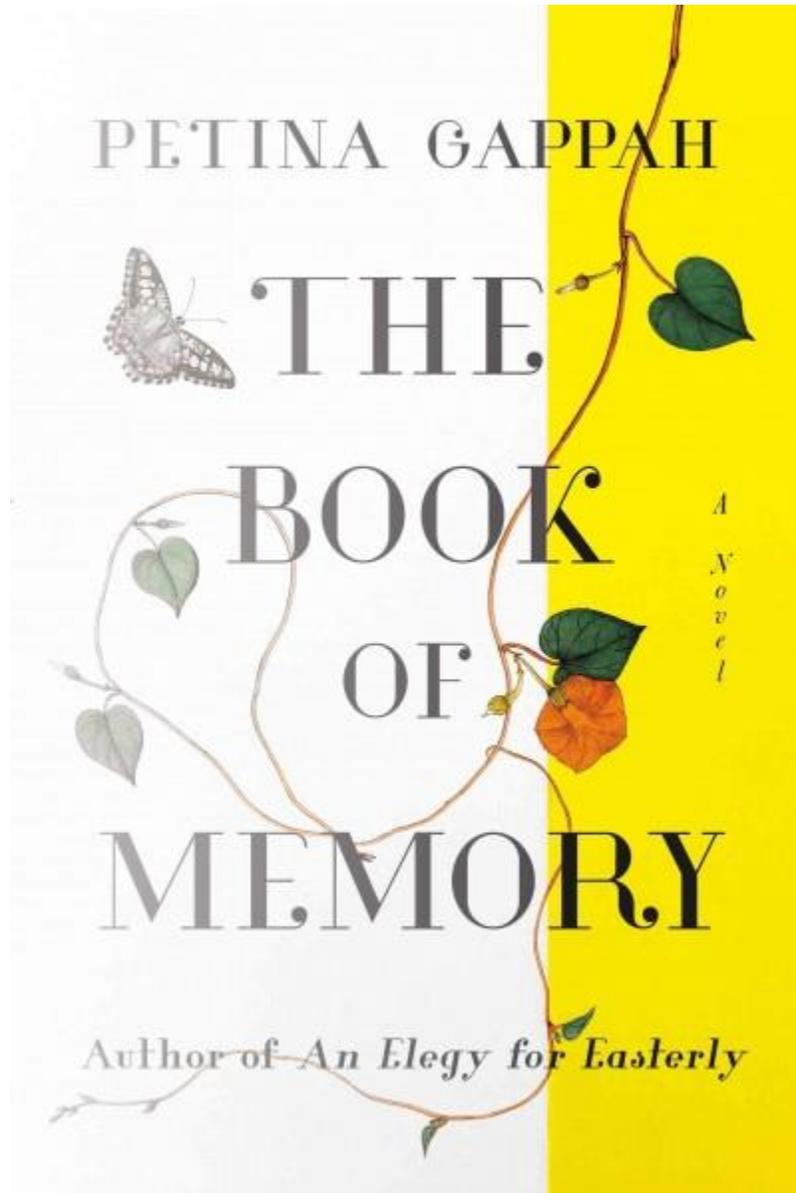


Tompkins County Public Library Book Kit

The Book of Memory

by Petina Gappah



Book Kit Guide Index

Book Summary	Page 3
Author Biography	Page 4-7
Book Reviews and Article	Page 8-9
Discussion Questions	Page 10-11
Further Reading	Pages 12-14

Tompkins County Public Library Book Kit

The Book of Memory

By Petina Gappah

SUMMARY

The story that you have asked me to tell you does not begin with the pitiful ugliness of Lloyd's death. It begins on a long-ago day in August when the sun seared my blistered face and I was nine years old and my father and mother sold me to a strange man.

Memory, the narrator of Petina Gappa's The Book of Memory, is an albino woman languishing in Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare, Zimbabwe, after being sentenced for murder. As part of her appeal, her lawyer insists that she write down what happened as she remembers it. The death penalty is a mandatory sentence for murder, and Memory is, both literally and metaphorically, writing for her life. As her story unfolds, Memory reveals that she has been tried and convicted for the murder of Lloyd Hendricks, her adopted father. But who was Lloyd Hendricks? Why does Memory feel no remorse for his death? And did everything happen exactly as she remembers?

Moving between the townships of the poor and the suburbs of the rich, and between past and present, the 2009 Guardian First Book Award-winning writer Petina Gappah weaves a compelling tale of love, obsession, the relentlessness of fate, and the treachery of memory. - (McMillan Palgrave)

Author Biography

Author's website: <https://us.macmillan.com/author/petinagappah>

Author Blog "Vasco Da Gappah" <https://vascodagappah.wordpress.com/>



Petina Gappah

Petina Gappah was born in Zambia [in 1971] in Copperbelt Province. She has said: "My father, like many skilled black workers who could not get jobs in segregated Rhodesia, sought his fortune elsewhere. He and my mother moved to Kitwe, a town on the booming Zambian copper belt."

She was brought up in Zimbabwe, where her parents returned when she was nine months old. After the country's Independence her family moved to a formerly white area in what is now Harare, and she was one of the first black pupils in a primary school formerly reserved for white children.

She started writing aged about 10 or 11, and her first published story was in the St. Dominic's Secondary School magazine when she was 14.

Education and career : She has a law degree from the University of Zimbabwe, then in 1995 went to Austria to do a doctorate in international trade law at the University of

Graz, combined with a master's degree at the University of Cambridge, and since 1998 was based in Geneva, Switzerland, working as an international lawyer. (excerpted from Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petina_Gappah)

PETINA GAPPAH's An Elegy for Easterly (2009) was short-listed for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction, and won the 2009 Guardian First Book Award. She is currently an international trade lawyer in Geneva, and she lives in Zimbabwe. - (McMillan Palgrave)

Petina Gappah is a Zimbabwean who lives in Geneva and who, for most of her adult life, has worked as a lawyer, advising developing countries on trade. She speaks five languages – Shona, English, Ndebele, French, German – and ... says she's learning Swahili. She translates from English into Shona (romantic poetry, Animal Farm) and, less frequently, in the opposite direction. She collects Livingstone memorabilia and is collaborating on a musical. And in her spare time, she has always written fiction. (Skidelsky, William, "Rotten Row by Petina Gappah – law and disorder." Financial Times, 11/11/16.)

Petina Gappah on Zimbabwe, Language, and "Afropolitans": An Interview with the author of The Book of Memory by Julie Phillips, February 22, 2016
<http://lithub.com/petina-gappah-on-zimbabwe-language-and-afropolitans/>

Excerpts from Interview

Julie Phillips: What effect did going back to Zimbabwe have on your writing?

Petina Gappah: I had a very fortunate experience that I didn't handle in a fortunate manner. My first book was a critical success; it was widely praised, and I read every review. And I got completely freaked out. Because I came to writing so late—I've always wanted to be a writer but I ended up being a lawyer. And so when this book got this incredible reception, I felt that I had somehow pulled a con. I had defrauded everybody and they were going to find me out.

Part of what helped me was to go back to Zimbabwe for those three years. That made me see Zimbabwe as a normal place. Because from outside, it's an extraordinary place. You've got a 91-year-old president who's been in power since 1980, ridiculous levels of inflation, a huge HIV/AIDS crisis, poverty... From the outside it's very easy to see Zimbabwe as just a story of extremes. And then you go there, and you go to a wedding, and people are quarreling over which car to use, and you go to a school, and the children are telling you their dreams about what they want to be, and they're convinced they're going to be it. Right? They don't see the country of extremes. They just see their reality.

And so I was able to see Zimbabwe, I want to believe, in its proper context. There's still a lot of kindness, there's humanity, there's laughter. I did bring that out a little bit in my first book, but I think this book is much more rooted in the reality of what Zimbabwe is.

What those three years did for me is that I no longer feel like an outsider. I have a stake in Zimbabwe. It's mine, as well as Geneva is mine.

JP: In calling this novel *The Book of Memory*, what do you want Zimbabweans to remember?

PG: I'm a frustrated historian, which is probably clear from the book. I'm interested in excavating the social histories of Zimbabwe. For instance, Zimbabwe was built on a very unjust system of racial segregation; I know that. But I also know that there were amazing stories of love across the races. And there were some really nasty white

people in Zimbabwe. But there were white people like Peter Garlake, who lost his job because he argued that the Great Zimbabwe ruins were built by black people and not by Phoenicians.

History's always distorted to suit a political purpose, but fiction can try to redress the balance. And those are the stories I'm interested in telling—the stories of everyday normal people, who even in this injustice still managed to find their humanity.

Book Reviews

Booklist Reviews

Gappah's vivid first novel, which follows the story collection, *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), is an exploration into the mysterious grip of memory and perception. The narrator, significantly named Memory, is a young albino woman on death row in Zimbabwe's Chikurubi prison, charged with the murder of her white legal guardian, Lloyd. Memory documents her life leading up to her conviction, narrating a nonlinear tale that alternates between her childhood and her incarceration. Growing up in dusty Mufakose Township, Memory is haunted by her mother's unpredictable outbursts and the death of her younger sister, events further complicated by feelings of alienation due to her unusual appearance. Memory's fate is indelibly altered when, at nine, she recalls being sold to Lloyd and thus thrust into a completely new world of privilege. As Memory mines her past, she must also navigate Zimbabwe's tricky political landscape and relationships with fellow prisoners and guards. Eventually, her recollections are challenged as realities come to light. Gappah offers a nuanced, engaging journey as Memory rights the balance between truth and long-held assumptions. Copyright 2014 Booklist Reviews.

In her first novel, ... Gappah returns to her native Zimbabwe. Memory, the smart and often surprisingly witty narrator, begins by describing the abominable conditions of Chikurubi Prison, where she waits on death row. She has been found guilty of murdering Lloyd Hendricks, a white man and her adopted father. Gappah moves readers back and forth in time to reveal the factors resulting in Memory's arrest and conviction. With the slow unraveling of events, the book is structured like a whodunit, but at its heart is the relationship of memory to truth. Memory's recollections are often disputable, calling into question her reliability as a storyteller and forcing readers to wonder about their own remembrance of things past. The narrator's outsider status as an albino, an adopted child, a woman, and a convict further complicates her perspective. But the novel is also strengthened by its investigation of forgiveness, and the author offers fresh insight into Zimbabwe's struggle for independence and Robert Mugabe's rise to power. **VERDICT:** At times, it's not clear whether gaps in the story are owing to Memory's problematic recollections or to occasionally inconsistent narrative development. Overall, however, Gappah delivers her themes successfully, while stimulating all the senses with Memory's vivid descriptions of food, music, heat, colors, and scents. [See Prepub Alert, 8/3/15.]—Faye Chadwell, Oregon State Univ., Corvallis Copyright 2016 Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.

Library Journal Reviews

Winner of the 2009 Guardian First Book Award for An Elegy for Easterly, Gappah again takes us to her native Zimbabwe, where an albino woman named Memory is imprisoned in Harare's Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison for murdering her adoptive father. Copyright 2015 Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.

In her first novel, which follows the successful story collection *An Elegy for Easterly*, Gappah returns to her native Zimbabwe. Memory, the smart and often surprisingly witty narrator, begins by describing the abominable conditions of Chikurubi Prison, where she waits on death row. She has been found guilty of murdering Lloyd Hendricks, a white man and her adopted father. Gappah moves readers back and forth in time to reveal the factors resulting in Memory's arrest and conviction. With the slow unraveling of events, the book is structured like a whodunit, but at its heart is the relationship of memory to truth. Memory's recollections are often disputable, calling into question her reliability as a storyteller and forcing readers to wonder about their own remembrance of things past. The narrator's outsider status as an albino, an adopted child, a woman, and a convict further complicates her perspective. But the novel is also strengthened by its investigation of forgiveness, and the author offers fresh insight into Zimbabwe's struggle for independence and Robert Mugabe's rise to power. VERDICT At times, it's not clear whether gaps in the story are owing to Memory's problematic recollections or to occasionally inconsistent narrative development. Overall, however, Gappah delivers her themes successfully, while stimulating all the senses with Memory's vivid descriptions of food, music, heat, colors, and scents. [See Prepub Alert, 8/3/15.]—Faye Chadwell, Oregon State Univ., Corvallis

Discussion Questions

The Book of Memory by Petina Gappah

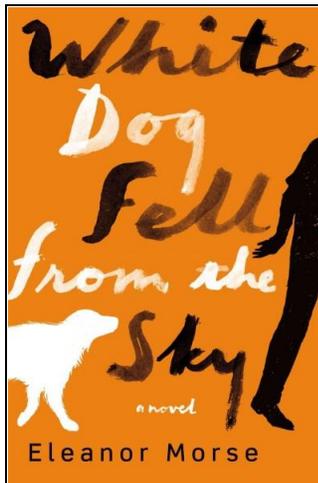
1. How did you like the book?
2. How did you feel about Memory and other characters in the book (Lloyd, her father, mother, sister, the guards, the inmates ...?) Whom did you like or not like and why? Did they seem believable?
3. How does the author combine humor and pathos in her narrative?
4. Did this book lead you to a new understanding or awareness of life in Zimbabwe?
5. Does Memory change or evolve throughout the course of the story? If so, what events trigger such changes, and what was your understanding of the transformation and how it occurred?
6. How effective is the 1st person narrative style for this story? Would there have been a difference if told from a different perspective?
7. Are the characters' actions the result of freedom of choice or of destiny?
8. (From the "Blue Rose Book Club" discussion of The Book of Memory, <https://medium.com/@BlueRoseTechZim/blue-rose-book-club-the-book-of-memory-by-petina-gappah-3d2d446c9ceb>
 - a. Discuss whether Lloyd adopted Memory as a genuine and sincere act of kindness or do you think he could have had more sinister motives. Is it possible that he adopted Memory as some sort of exotic research subject?
 - b. Why did Lloyd hand over an envelope of money to Memory's parents prior to her coming to live with him? How do you interpret that gesture? Could it have meant, for example, that Lloyd was purchasing Memory as a child bride? Or should this envelope be seen as evidence that Lloyd was engaging in some form of human trafficking?
 - c. Who actually killed Lloyd? Was it a suicide, a murder by an intruder or was Lloyd murdered by Memory herself, the latter being a suspect because not only was her version of events that occurred on the day Lloyd died difficult to believe, but she had also previously built a narrative of her life based on an inaccurate perception that she had been purchased by Lloyd and considering that the story is told exclusively from her perspective, we could not conclusively state that she had not killed Lloyd.
9. Discuss the following statements excerpted from Wikipedia's "Petina Gappah", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petina_Gappah.

The Book of Memory was described by Maya Jaggi in The Guardian as "a powerful story of innocent lives destroyed by family secrets and sexual jealousy, prejudice and unacknowledged kinship", and by Anita Sethi in The Observer as "a moving novel about memory that unfolds into one about forgiveness, and a passionate paean to the powers of language".

In a 2016 interview, Gappah said: "I'm a frustrated historian, which is probably clear from the book. I'm interested in excavating the social histories of Zimbabwe.... History's always distorted to suit a political purpose, but fiction can try to redress the balance. And those are the stories I'm interested in telling—the stories of everyday normal people, who even in this injustice still managed to find their humanity."

Further Readings

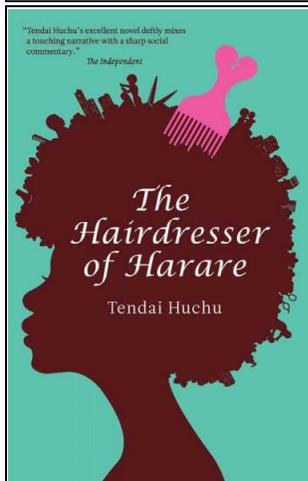
If you enjoyed reading this work by Petina Gappah, you may be interested in any of the titles listed below.



White Dog Fell From Sky

By Eleanor Morse

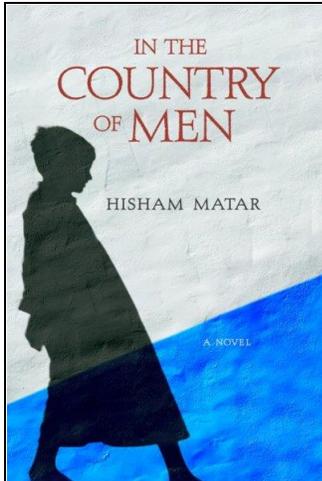
A portrait of 1970s Botswana is told through the intertwined stories of three people, including a medical student who is forced to flee apartheid South Africa after witnessing a murder and an American Ph.D. student who abandons her studies to follow her husband to Africa.



The Hairdresser of Harare

By Tendai Huchu

"Vimbai is the best hairdresser in Mrs. Khumalo's salon, and she is secure in her status until the handsome, smooth-talking Dumisani shows up one day for work. Despite her resistance, the two become friends, and eventually, Vimbai becomes Dumisani's landlady. He is as charming as he is deft with the scissors, and Vimbai finds that he means more and more to her. Yet, by novel's end, the pair's deepening friendship - used or embraced by Dumisani and Vimbai with different futures in mind - collapses in unexpected brutality. The novel is an acute portrayal of a rapidly changing Zimbabwe. In addition to Vimbai and Dumisani's personal development, the book shows us how social concerns shape the lives of everyday people."--provided by publisher. - (Baker & Taylor)

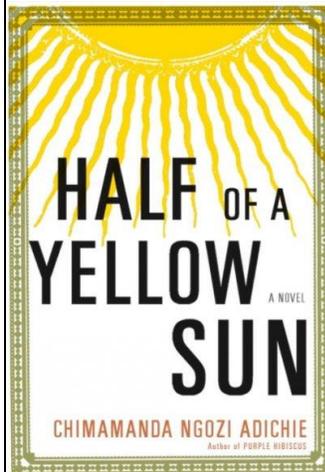


In the Country of Men

By Hisham Matar

Libya, 1979. Nine-year-old Suleiman's days are circumscribed by the narrow rituals of childhood: outings to the ruins surrounding Tripoli, games with friends played under the burning sun, exotic gifts from his father's constant business trips abroad. But his nights have come to revolve around his mother's increasingly disturbing bedside stories full of old family bitterness. And then one day Suleiman sees his father across the square of a busy marketplace, his face wrapped in a pair of dark sunglasses. Wasn't he supposed to be away on business yet again? Why is he going into that strange building with the green shutters? Why did he lie?

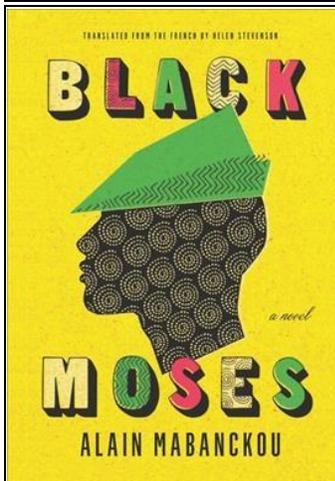
Suleiman is soon caught up in a world he cannot hope to understand—where the sound of the telephone ringing becomes a portent of grave danger; where his mother frantically burns his father's cherished books; where a stranger full of sinister questions sits outside in a parked car all day; where his best friend's father can disappear overnight, next to be seen publicly interrogated on state television. (*Random House, Inc.*)



Half a Yellow Sun

By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

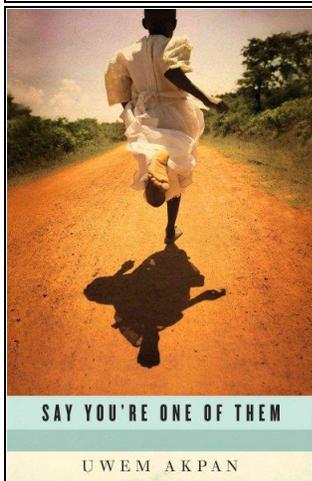
Re-creates the 1960s struggle of Biafra to establish an independent republic in Nigeria, following the intertwined lives of the characters through a military coup, the Biafran secession, and the resulting civil war. - (Baker & Taylor)



Black Moses

By Alain Mabanckou

Moses and twins Songi-Songi and Tala-Tala escape their orphanage and move to Point-Noire where they become petty thieves in the city's underworld, until living under the repressive politics of the Congo of the 1970s and 1980s leads to Moses' mental collapse. - (Baker & Taylor)



Say You're One of Them

By Uwem Akpan

A collection of tales about modern African children in crisis includes "An Ex-Mas Feast," in which an eight-year-old child shares in his family's sacrifices to obtain enough food and enable his education. - (Baker & Taylor)

See complete related books list with links directly to the Library's catalog at library.booksite.com/6631/nl/?list=CNL17&group=EB605.