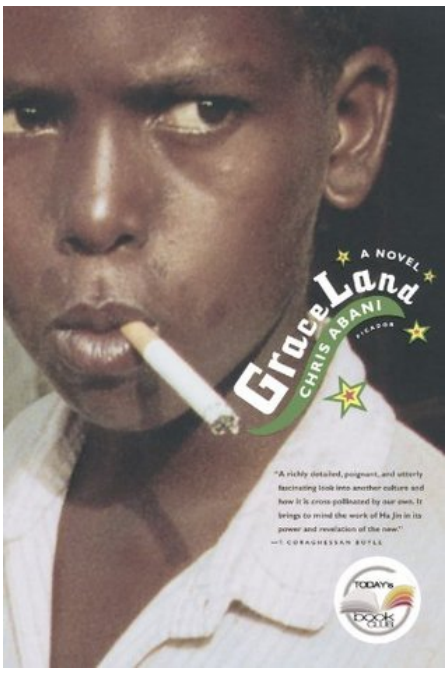

GraceLand

Chris Abani

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This novel is set in Maroko, a sprawling, swampy, crazy and colorful ghetto of Lagos, Nigeria, and unfolds against a backdrop of lush reggae and highlife music, American movies and a harsh urban existence. Elvis Oke, a teenage Elvis impersonator spurred on by the triumphs of heroes in the American movies and books he devours, pursues his chosen vocation with ardent single-mindedness. He suffers through hours of practice set to the tinny tunes emanating from the radio in the filthy shack he shares with his alcoholic father, his stepmother and his stepsiblings. He applies thick makeup that turns his black skin white, to make his performances more convincing for American tourists and hopefully net him dollars. But still he finds himself constantly broke. Beset by hopelessness and daunted by the squalor and violence of his daily life, he must finally abandon his dream.

With job prospects few and far between. Elvis is tempted to a life of crime by the easy money his friend Redemption tells him is to be had in Lago's underworld. But the King of the Beggars, Elvis's enigmatic yet faithful adviser, intercedes. And so, torn by the frustration of unrealizable dreams and accompanied by an eclectic chorus of voices, Elvis must find a way to a Graceland of his own making.

Graceland is the story of a son and his father, and an examination of postcolonial Nigeria, where the trappings of American culture reign supreme.

GraceLand Details

Date	:	Published January 26th 2005 by Picador (first published 2004)
ISBN	:	9780312425289
Author	:	Chris Abani
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From Reader Review GraceLand for online ebook

Michelle says

A captivating story that is marred by really poor structure. A simple, straightforward narrative would have been much better than the flashbacks, African recipes and random quotes that begin every chapter. What was the editor thinking?

Jon says

I have mixed feelings about this book and while I'm glad I read it, it's a difficult book to recommend to anyone. I'd say one of the main weaknesses is an inconsistency in tone throughout the book. Abani veers all over the place and the book alternates between passages that are broadly satirical and comical to lurid and disturbing passages that involve incest, child rape, and torture. There are also times when Abani's anger towards the corruption and oppression in his native country results in didactic dialogue as he uses the characters to express his feelings and political beliefs.

The book is at its best when it sticks to the coming of age story of its protagonist, Elvis Oke. The book alternates chapters between Elvis' early life in rural Nigeria where his father was a man of some importance and his teenage years in the slums of Lagos after his father's fall from grace. Elvis is well drawn and his story is iconic as he struggles to make his way into adulthood and often feels alienated from his culture and those around him. Abani is also very good at writing satirical and humorous passages. In the beginning of the book, Elvis tries to support himself by doing his version of an Elvis impersonation for American tourists. His impersonation consists of putting on white face, a wig (accidently worn backwards), singing (badly), and dancing (very well), while the baffled tourists try to figure out what he's doing. When Abani keeps the satire subtle, like in these passages, the book is far more effective than in some of the over the top plot points that occur later in the story.

One of the best passages in the book describes movie night in a Lagos slum. The movie is "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" and movie night is a weekly event put on by an American tobacco company. In the spirit of Western capitalism, free cigarettes are handed out at the beginning of the movie. The movies are all shown un-dubbed and those in the audience that can't speak English just make up their own dialogue and story while watching (though the projectionist shouts out his version of dialogue throughout the movie on a bullhorn). Every hero in every movie is called "John Wayne" and all the other characters in the movie are simply referred to as "Actor":

"They simply invented their own stories, resulting in as many versions as there were people. Still, for him. It was magical.

The screens were dirty, hole-ridden, once-white bedsheets stretched between two wooden poles. The projectors, archaic and as old as many of the silent stars, sounded like small tanks. Moody, they tended to burn films at the slightest provocation, melting the plastic into cream and brown cappuccino froth. They vibrated so badly, the picture often blurred and danced insanely from side to side, sometime spilling out onto a nearby wall.

At first, Elvis found it was dizzy work just trying to keep focused, until he learned the popular trick was to

sway from side to side while squinting off to the left. Barring the occasional bout of motion sickness, this worked quite well, and Elvis often wondered what it would be like to stand above and look down. He was sure the crowd made quite a sight: hundreds of people swaying from side to side, chattering away like insane birds, worshipping their new gods. They drowned out the commentary provided by the projectionist, who, undeterred, continued his litany on a battered megaphone”

The humor in these passages is well done and the satire is subtle as Abani pokes fun at Western influences. This would have been a far better book if he could have kept that tone of gentle parody up for the length of the novel.

Abani also does a good job of representing daily life in a Lagos slum and the vast inequality of wealth in a country that’s rife with corruption and poverty. Many of the slums in Lagos are makeshift structures built above swampland:

“Half of the town was built of a confused mix of clapboard, wood, cement and zinc sheets, raised above a swamp by means of stilts and wooden walkways. The other half, built on solid grounds reclaimed from the sea, seemed to be clawing it’s way out of the primordial swamp, attempting to become something else”

Overall, I’d say this is a flawed first novel, but with enough redeeming value to make it worth reading.

Hafeez says

If you want to see Nigeria through the eyes of a disenfranchised kid trying his best to survive in post independent Nigeria, set during the late 70's and early 80's. This is your book. Also has recipes on great traditional Nigerian meals

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Rod-Kelly Hines says

This novel blew me away! Abani has written such a harrowing story that just yanked on my emotions. I really can't describe the story because there was so much contained in its 300 pages. It's certainly not for the faint of heart!

Twodogs333 says

This is the book selection from Nigeria for the World Cup of Literature. So far this is my favorite selection. I'm not going to lie, this book isn't a happy one but the story is touching and the language Abani uses is gorgeous. The realism of life in the slums of Nigeria is heart-wrenching, but reading this made my eyes open to things that we don't ever see on the glitz and glam of American news.

Christine says

A new writing mentor–someone I really admire. I picked up GraceLand because I was curious and hopeful about its novel structure. And I was rewarded.

Notes on it structure–the main story is set in 1983…but in Book 1, every other chapter is set in the past until the timeline intersects at the end of Book 1 (i.e., Chapter 1: 1983…Chapter 2: 1972…Chapter 3: 1983…Chapter 4: 1974, etc., etc.). The beginning of Book 2 moves forward from that point, staying in 1983. Bam.

In addition to structure, I found the climax riveting and terrifying. Wow. I feel grateful for this book. It came to me just in time.

And…you'll love Elvis.

Rona Fernandez says

This book is one of those books that, no matter how intense and devastating its content, is written so well that you just don't want it to end. Abani's prose is so effortless and fluid, you can't help but be drawn into the world he's created. In this case, Lagos, Nigeria in the early 1980s, with flashbacks a few years earlier. We follow Elvis (his real name), a Nigerian teenager who longs to dance and do his Elvis impersonation (what commentary on internal colonization in that one characteristic!), but instead is faced with a brutally violent environment, a father struggling to make sense of his own disappointments and grief, and an array of other male characters that have their own agendas. If you choose to read this book, get ready for an experience unlike any other. I found myself not wanting to tear my eyes away, even during scenes that were so gruesome that I found myself cringing as I read. But it's worth it, if only to witness the brilliance that one writer can achieve within the space of 321 pages.

Frances says

I think you can judge this book by its cover. The ten year old smoking the cigarette says as much about Chris Abani's over-stated portrait of poverty in Lagos as any of the prose within. While I certainly think it's about time a mass-market paperback about the current conditions in industrialized West Africa, Abani presents his critique of American imperialism within a whole lot of artistry or subtlety. It's Things Fall Apart, Part Deux, without the poetry that Chinua Achebe brings to his characters. Jumping back and forth between rural and urban settings, Abani seems chronologically and spatially confused, not completely committing to any character as he traces the "progress" of his protagonist, an adolescent boy named Elvis living in the slums of Lagos. Though Abani seems to be celebrating the fragmentation that apparently characterizes the postcolonial world (per Partha Chatterjee), his overstatement of that very fragmentation renders him a rather cliched version of the postcoloniality his book promises to portray.

Matt says

It was nice reading about the life of a youth living in Lagos. The richness of the traditions and the complexities of the extended African family don't always translate well into a western "lexicon". The writer wonderfully describes the significance of the Kola, the importance and power of traditional medicines and those that practice them, and the recipes are fun. I even had a couple of them while in Ghana!

He talks about the concept of the African extended family, saying so much in his description of a distant cousin still being Elvis' "brother".

The tale about Elvis' life in Lagos, his relationships with his family (esp. his father) is both tragic and funny and always interesting. Unfortunately, like many "African" books, the characters fall under the will of corruption and violence. He points out that the majority of people are honest and poor and either unable or afraid to fight against the dishonest who have power. Also, plenty of mention of the west's apathy towards actually doing something in Africa, despite it's colonial past.

I wonder how much of Elvis' story is autobiographical of Mr. Abani's own life?

Possibly the most important line in the book is actually a quote from Bob Marley: "A hungry man is an angry man".

Rashaan says

"Writers are dangerous," so says A.S. Byatt, and when you read Chris Abani you see exactly how the truth can kill. Abani's stories show us life balanced on the blade of a knife. His novel, *Graceland*, chronicles a dark page of Nigeria's history as we follow a young boy learning to live and love in the turbulent eighties. *Graceland* opens with a nod to Langston Hughes' "A Dream Deferred." Elvis, our young Nigerian protagonist, desperately wants to be a dancer, and in the midst of war and political revolution, this dream dries up, festers like a sore, and decays with the death that surrounds him.

Graceland, like Jessica Hagedorn's novels *Dogeaters* or *Dream Jungle*, crams fistfuls of characters into bustling Third World nightmares. Whether its Manila or Lagos, each soul, for better or for worse, is forced to angle their own path to survival. *Graceland* is an Inferno on earth, and Abani's hero, Elvis, follows the footsteps of Florentine pilgrim, Dante. As Elvis matures from self indulgent and naive boy to awakened man, he's initiated into the sinful ways of his world, and, like Dante, he sees firsthand how degrees of sin match degrees of survival. Though unlike our Tuscan journeyman, Elvis is granted two guides, Redemption and the King of Beggars. Each play tug-o-war with Elvis' conscience. Redemption, who entangles Elvis into a life of crime, lifts the veil of innocence for us and our hero when he asks, "So are you telling me dat stealing bread from bakery to feed yourself and killing some boy is de same? Everything got degree."

As in *Inferno*, the one pure source of light, our pilgrim's enduring star, is Beatrice, Elvis' mother. Though Elvis strays from his path and is lost in the dark wood of his country in strife, his mother through her written notes on Igbo culture and her record of recipes for sustenance and medicine, reading more like prophecies, keep Elvis sane and compassionate.

What's disturbing and therefore powerful about *Graceland* is knowing that Abani's novel is most likely true.

Though the characters are make believe, anyone who reads the newspapers or watches the BBC news knows that Elvis' journey happens everyday. Pick a country, any country, whether it be Thailand, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Brazil, or Mexico, Abani's work serves as live wire transmissions of today's "urban anonymity" from all the dark nooks of our global metropolises. In that respect, we also see the over-reach of American and Western culture and ideals. As Barthelme's writing reveals, no part of our life is left unadulterated by the media, and, in Abani's novel, we also find that no corner of the earth is left untainted by Western influences. The consequences of this is a protagonist who is hyper self-conscious. His dreams and hopes feed off movies and music, which are then appropriated and made new by his Nigerian culture. The media is constantly recycling and transforming itself, as the lives it influences actively transform and reinvent new identities as new modes of survival.

Graceland is a testament to the shock and awe practice of today's geopolitics. Abani doesn't flinch to bring these stories to light. His writing is dangerous only in that he holds a mirror up to us and asks us to take a hard look at ourselves.

Marieke says

Maybe I took too long reading it. This started out as a five star read but toward the end I began to feel annoyed with the Elvis character. And some other things. Which unfortunately affected my enjoyment of the book. I really struggled to finish, which is a shame, since Abani created quite the grand finale. I'm sad that it fizzled for me.

Rashida says

Any of the beauty of the language in this book was marred to me by the author's seeming desire to pack the novel with the most tragedy he possibly could. I understand that this was a troubling and difficult time in the country's history, but by the end of the book it was like an absurdist comedy, and I just wanted it to be over, as opposed to feeling deeply effected and moved, as I suppose was the intent.

Janaia says

I read Chris Abani's book Becoming Abigail, and was terribly disappointed, but when I saw this title, I gave him another chance. I loved it. Don't peek, but the last line of the book is so insightful! And I mean don't peek! This story made me laugh, cry and kiss my teeth. There were times where I had to close the book and take a moment. Just read it!!!

Carolyn says

This book aspires to more than it achieves, but it is a wonderful and, at times, amazing first novel nonetheless.

Graceland is set mostly in the early 1980's in the Lagos slum, Makota, and the protagonist is a boy for whom

the grandest ambition imaginable is to become an Elvis impersonator. It's pathetic, and that is just what so charmed me about this novel. The author creates incredible depth of feeling and meaning through symbolism and imagery throughout the book, and the central symbol is the tragicomic dilemma of the protagonist, a gifted, largely self-educated boy with a drive to excel in his calling, who, through a combination of circumstance, naivete, and willful self-delusion, settles upon a career so ludicrous and impossible (and so pleasingly telling--I love this kind of writing, which often means so much more than it overtly says) that even while you laugh out loud from time to time, the character is so engaging, and the book so filled with empathy and love, that you more often ache for him and his country, and from time to time are simply dazzled by the beauty of his doomed efforts.

I have never read a better book about Nigeria.

Makota is a terrible place, in which, as you expect, a multitude of horrifying events unfold, but what sets this book apart from others which explore Nigeria's brutal recent history is the honest examination of each excruciating and lovely detail of the protagonist's life. There is a lyrical turning over, and over, and unfolding of each event, and the place each character holds in the story is revealed anew when seen again and again, now from this angle and now from that. And while much of what we see and experience through the narrative is brutal or painful and simply ugly, just as often you take in your breath in wonder, that such a story could be rendered so beautifully.

Abani is a gifted writer. The final chapters, though, did not maintain the breathtaking beauty and sadness of the first half of the book, and the characters, so engaging and full at first, flattened out a bit. I also found that the sudden introduction of the supernatural in the final chapter lifted me out of the story altogether, and diluted the power of the narrative.

Still it's a beautiful book in many ways, and stunning in its ambition.

Tumelo Moleleki says

I loved my journey with this book. I was especially fond of the way Oye speaks. Elvis is a flawed boy that you can't help but love. The story leaves you ramsacked, you feel like a shipwreck. At least that's how I felt while living Elvis' life. An honest account of the flaws of humanity. An unflinching account of the imperfections of human relationships. What a story!

Jeri Rowe says

I had lunch with Chris Abani last week. He came to the university where I work to speak to a room full of international students, and over a delectable plate of Southern soul food, he told stories. And he can definitely do that.

Abani is a professor at Northwestern, a Nigerian native as big as an NFL defensive tackle. But in a soft voice that reminds me of brushed velvet, he can talk forever about the intricacies of language, writing and words. And that's what surprised me. Because after finishing "Graceland," his first book, I was shook by the Old Testament violence he wrote about more than a decade ago.

But that is the world he knows -- and a world where he protested the government and went to prison, I think, three times. In "Graceland," a coming-of-age book about a boy named Elvis, Abani writes about child rape, child torture, child soldiers and his beautiful homeland where violence is an everyday thing.

What I like about the book is the poetry, the sheer grace of the language. I mean, Abani puts together sentences like this: "The alabaster Madonna wept bullet holes." Love short sentences like that. I've always believed, "Jesus wept" is some kind of powerful.

But what bugged me about the book was the back-and-forth time element Abani used. He'd jump from 1983 to 1980 to 1976 in subsequent chapters. For me, it kept the narrative disjointed.

Still, it was a good read. And from that lunch over fried chicken, collard greens and mac and cheese, I would imagine Abani is a helluva teacher. Loved his conversation with the students. So, I expect I'll read more of him. He's worth it. He takes you into a country, a place you have never been and makes you feel it, see it, sense it. And that, I believe, is what good writing is all about.

Bjorn says

It's hard to be a man, Elvis Oké's father tells him. The measure of a man used to be his good name, and he has to be prepared to defend that name - his honour - against anything, from outside or inside.

Names play a part in this, yes. Elvis father is named Sunday, his best friend is named Redemption, and Elvis himself is of course named Elvis. That's about all they have left, it seems; they live in a shanty town in Lagos, Nigeria, and if there's any meaning to the fact that Sunday is a drunk to whom every day is a day of rest, Redemption is a small-time bandit, and Elvis himself a failed dancer, it's nothing they try to think about: names, today, are just words. Sure, Elvis tries to make a living as an Elvis impersonator, dance and smile for the rich white tourists, but nobody wants a 16-year-old black (and tonedeaf) king of rock'n'roll. And so instead, having to make a living somehow, he gets pulled into both criminal and political conflicts - which, in a military dictatorship (the book is set in 1983, with flashbacks to Elvis' childhood) is often the same thing.

In a lot of ways, Graceland is an impressive novel, both playful and harshly realistic in its depiction of life at the (not quite but almost) bottom. Abani has his characters reference both Nigerian (Achebe, Soyinka) and Western (Ellison, Dostoevsky, Marley) writers to create a picture of a world that's become an interconnected web long before modern communications made it obvious; the characters rarely set foot outside their own city, yet thanks to the cultural, commercial and political revolutions of the past centuries they very much live in the Big World Outside. Starting from a, to be honest, fairly cliched story - a young man trying to find his place in a world that doesn't want him - Abani weaves a character piece where the details get to show how it all hangs together, from kingdoms to dictatorship, from Las Vegas to Lagos, where everything you're promised by your name or your background turns to bitter (though often laugh-out-loud funny) irony. A land of grace, as in spending your life at the mercy of someone else's good graces. Abani tackles politics without bashing us over the head with it; things are as they are, men and women do what they do to survive until they leave the building. At best, they get to choose their own encore.

Some people name their children after saints or forefathers in the hope that they will be, well, graced with their good sides. Others are named after rock stars, which may be the modern equivalent. According to some doctors, Elvis - the original one, Presley, that is - died of poverty. Not in 1977, obese and trapped in the Graceland that was to be his palace but got turned into his mausoleum, but when he was young. After

growing up poor and undernourished, his body couldn't handle the comfort food and the drugs he could suddenly afford (after growing rich off cover versions of black artists, heh). He was pretty much screwed from the beginning, if poverty didn't kill him, success would; an irony as bitter as the situation in what could have been one of the richest countries in Africa. But great music was always born from the blues. Graceland isn't quite up there, it's a little too self-conscious and meandering for that, but it's a very good read nonetheless.

...That is, I assume that it is if you read it in the original English. Because unfortunately, I read a poor Swedish translation of it. And when you take characters who speak English like Nigerian street kids (it's part of the theme, too) and translate it into Swedish, it ends up sounding like an old 50s comedy half the time.

David Sasaki says

In the very first scene of the book, when the protagonist Elvis is awoken by a pounding Nigerian rainstorm, we read this:

The book he had fallen asleep reading, Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man", fell from his side to the floor, the old paperback cracking at the spine, falling neatly into two halves as precisely as if sliced by a sword.

That's the kind of first-scene statement that has symbolism written all over it. Here is what Abani tells Tayari Jones about the scene in an April 2004 interview in *The Believer* when she asks for his thoughts on "global blackness". (Jones is African American, but spent a year in Nigeria when her father was a Fulbright scholar there.)

I grew up conflicted about this whole notion [of global blackness]. Especially about Pan-Africanism. Especially since [Nigerian] independence came quickly and was inspired a lot by Ghana's independence, which was led by the Pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah. Also in Nigeria was Nnamdi Azikiwe, who was also very into Pan-Africanism. But it is interesting that these guys were educated mostly in America. These guys had contact with Du Bois and Marcus Garvey long before they came back. You can see this link much more in music. Enslaved Africans brought the roots of the blues with them to the United States and it made its way back to us in Africa. Sailors would come back and teach kids on the docs of Accra and Mali all the American guitar movements, which later produced people like Ali Farka Toure, who plays this hybrid Malian music that sounds so much like the blues. And he influenced people like Fela Kuti. There's that dialogue going on all the time ...

And I see a lot of it happening in literature as well. "Invisible Man" becomes such an icon. In the opening of GraceLand there's that metaphor of the book falling off Elvis' chest and splitting open. This not only represents the splitting of the diaspora but the ability to enter the text in a way that he wouldn't be able to if he didn't share that fundamental racial heritage.

Much of the book works as a collage - a collection of brief accounts of how Igbos offer the sacred kola nut to visitors; horrifying accounts of poverty and exploitation in modern day Lagos; moments of tender love between close friends and complete strangers; and detailed Igbo recipes which come from the diary of Elvis' mother. And throughout the book there is the waning influence of British colonial rule, the loss of indigenous knowledge, and the expanding influence of American pop culture.

What I found most interesting about the book, though, is the almost complete congruence of Elvis and Black,

the protagonist of Abani's later novel, The Virgin of Flames. Both are lower class artists, always with a sophisticated book tucked under their arm, with one dead parent and one abusive one. Their friends are concerned about them, they are self-centered, and yet also completely selfless, always willing to go hungry to help feed a stranger. They are moral anchors in a world that has seemingly lost its moral compass. There are multiple scenes in which they try on make-up and contemplate homosexuality. It is almost as if Abani took Elvis' soul stuffed it into a half-African, half-Salvadorean overweight LA artist. Which begs the question, how much Chris Abani is there in Elvis and Black?

At the Calabash Literary Festival in Jamaica earlier this year I had a chance to find out. Chris Abani was there looking a little like Jabba the Hutt as he shoveled a plate of food into his mouth while his fiancee looked on across the table. There was something gluttonous about the scene, with the swimming pool in the background, and all the fawning attention. Besides, I've never been one to approach celebrities, literary or otherwise. From my experience, the interactions tend to be recipes for disappointment. Apparently, once you reach a certain level of fame, conversations are easily mistaken for interviews.

But up on stage Abani impressed me more than just about anyone else (with the exception, probably, of Kei Miller). His poems were beautiful, his stories where funny, and the man knows how to play sax.

GraceLand left me satisfied, but I hope that Abani - who was raised in a mansion with cars and servents - doesn't continue to romanticize the poor, abused artist. Now that he's been living in Southern California for some time, I'd love to read a book about LA targeted specifically toward Nigerian readers. ("The Virgin of Flames" was very much not that. And, no, such a book would not produce any money. But it's the type of book that both Black and Elvis would want to write.)

It's interesting, in his interview with Jones, Abani insists that he doesn't think about the Western reader when he writes:

What I do is similar to what Ngugi is doing, operating under that notion that African art must exist in an appreciative context that is outside of the power of Westernization to reduce or empower. We allow access to the Western reader, but also say we don't care about what you think. This is what we are trying to show you. If you get it, fine. If you don't get it, we don't care.

But I think Abani does care, and that actually leads to some of the worst passages in the book, which read more like narrative travel guide than good literature.

"Return de bottles," Redemption said, snatching the cigarette from Elvis's mouth. Empty bottles were valuable because the local Coca-Cola factory washed and reused them. To ensure they got their bottles back, the factory charged local retailers a deposit on the bottles, which could only be redeemed when the bottles were turned in. The retailers in turn passed the cost of the deposit on to consumers if they intended to leave the immediate vicinity of their shops with the drinks. The amount varied from retailer to retailer but was usually no less than the price of the drink.

Those sort of explanatory footnotes are littered throughout the book. As a Western reader I don't mind them, but I think its disingenuous of Abani to not own up to them.

Jay Z says

I fucking hated this book and had to throw it across the room 3/4ths of the way through, but this has more to do with my distrust & dislike of the author than the book itself. The book is just descriptive well-written poverty porn for a western audience that's hungry for evidence that supports its foregone conclusions about african poverty, brutality, filth, rape, hunger, incest, sodomy, squalor, rape, filth, more rape, poverty, and oh, also poverty. (africans are really, really poor guys. they also get raped a lot. by family members.)

Let's get back to the author then. Given the current political and social reality, story-telling the Dark Continent is inextricably tied to the politics of representation, regardless of whether the author's intent is benign or not. In short, if you're brown/black and from the third world, you've got shit-loads more responsibility about what you say and how you say it, and you wouldn't if you were a straight white man from America. Yeah it sucks. But there's absolutely nothing that can be done about it. Chris Abani, then, is incredibly irresponsible. He reinforces stereotypes for an imbecile audience that really doesn't need anymore proof to bolster its racist beliefs. But worse, he's profited off that racism by building his entire literary career on dazzling manufactured accounts of his own brutal captivity in a Nigerian prison. And it's been a raging success. He's America and Europe's little African darling. But his stories just don't add up and a bunch of people, Nigerian and other, have noticed and written extensively about it. Either way, I assume it doesn't really matter to Chris Abani. Because bad press is the best kind of press there is. It makes people curious. Then they buy your book, and you get more money and more fame. Everyone's a winner. Except the poor sods who live in the dark slum that you're describing so lovingly for your audience. But they're all poor and uneducated and dirty and raped. So who cares what they think, anyway.

http://saharareporters.com/article/ch...
http://saharareporters.com/article/tr...
http://xokigbo.wordpress.com/2011/12/...

Isabel says

Story about a young man trying to get by in Lagos slums in the 1980s. I liked the feel vivid sense it gave of Nigeria at that time. I didn't find the main character's voice so probable, though, which is why I think I didn't love it as much as I thought I would.
