

Open City: A Novel

By Teju Cole

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Open City: A Novel By Teju Cole

A *New York Times* Notable Book • One of the ten top novels of the year —*Time* and NPR

NAMED A BEST BOOK ON MORE THAN TWENTY END-OF-THE-YEAR LISTS, INCLUDING *The New Yorker* • *The Atlantic* • *The Economist* • *Newsweek*/The Daily Beast • *The New Republic* • New York *Daily News* • *Los Angeles Times* • *The Boston Globe* • *The Seattle Times* • Minneapolis *Star Tribune* • *GQ* • Salon • Slate • *New York* magazine • *The Week* • *The Kansas City Star* • *Kirkus Reviews*

A haunting novel about identity, dislocation, and history, Teju Cole's *Open City* is a profound work by an important new author who has much to say about our country and our world.

Along the streets of Manhattan, a young Nigerian doctor named Julius wanders, reflecting on his relationships, his recent breakup with his girlfriend, his present, his past. He encounters people from different cultures and classes who will provide insight on his journey—which takes him to Brussels, to the Nigeria of his youth, and into the most unrecognizable facets of his own soul.

"[A] prismatic debut . . . beautiful, subtle, [and] original."—*The New Yorker*

"A psychological hand grenade."—*The Atlantic*

"Magnificent . . . a remarkably resonant feat of prose."—*The Seattle Times*

"A precise and poetic meditation on love, race, identity, friendship, memory, [and] dislocation."—*The Economist*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Starred Review. Possibly the only negative thing to say about Cole's intelligent and panoramic first novel is that it is a more generous account of the recent past than the era deserves. America's standing in the world is never far from the restless thoughts of psychiatry resident Julius, a Nigerian immigrant who wanders Manhattan, pondering everything from Goya and the novels of J.M. Coetzee to the bankruptcy of Tower Records and the rise of the bedbug epidemic. In other words, it is an ongoing reverie in the tradition of W.G. Sebald or Nicholson Baker, but with the welcome interruptions of the friends and strangers Julius meets as he wanders Penn Station, the Upper West Side, and Brussels during a short holiday, and amid discussions of Alexander Hamilton, black identity, and the far left--a truly American novel emerges. Julius pines over a recent ex, mourns the death of a friend, goes to movies, concerts, and museums, but above all he ruminates, and the picture of a mind that emerges in lieu of a plot is fascinating, as it is engaged with the world in a rare and refreshing way. (Feb.)
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From Booklist
Nigerian immigrant Julius, a young graduate student studying psychiatry in New York City, has recently broken up with his girlfriend and spends most of his time dreamily walking around Manhattan. The majority of Open City centers on Julius' inner thoughts as he rambles throughout the city, painting scenes of both what occurs around him and past events that he can't help but dwell on. For reasons not altogether clear, Julius' walks turn into worldwide travel, and he flies first to Europe, where he has an unplanned one-night stand and makes some interesting friends, then to Nigeria, and finally back to New York City. Along the way, he meets many people and often has long discussions with them about philosophy and politics. Brought up in a military school, he seems to welcome these conversations. Upon returning to New York, he meets a young Nigerian woman who profoundly changes the way he sees himself. Readers who enjoy stream-of-consciousness narratives and fiction infused with politics will find this unique and pensive book a charming read. --Julie Hunt

Review

Winner of the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for a distinguished first book of fiction

Finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award

"Reminiscent of the works of W.G. Sebald, this dreamy, incantatory debut was the most beautiful novel I read this year—the kind of book that remains on your nightstand long after you finish so that you can continue dipping in occasionally as a nighttime consolation." –Ruth Franklin, *The New Republic*

"A psychological hand grenade." –Alexis Madrigal, *The Atlantic*, Best Books I Read This Year

“A meditative and startlingly clear-eyed first novel.” –*Newsweek*/Daily Beast Writers' Favorite Books 2011

"This year, literary discovery came, for me, in the form of Teju Cole's debut novel, *Open City*, a deceptively meandering first-person narrative about a Nigerian psychiatry resident in New York. The bonhomous flâneur who strolls Manhattan from top to bottom, reveals, in the course of his walking meditations, both more about the city and about himself than we – or indeed he – could possibly anticipate. Cole writes beautifully; his

protagonist is unique; and his novel, utterly thrilling." –Clare Messud in the *Globe and Mail*

“On the surface, the story of a young, foreign psychiatry resident in post-9/11 New York City who searches for the soul of the city by losing himself in extended strolls around teeming Manhattan. But it's really a story about a lost nation struggling to regain a sense of direction after that shattering, disorienting day 10 years ago. A quiet, lyrical and profound piece of writing.” –*Seattle Times*, 32 of the Year’s Best Books

“[Open City is] lean and mean and bristles with intelligence. The multi-culti characters and streets of New York are sharply observed and feel just right…Toward the end, there’s a poignant, unexpected scene in a tailor’s shop that’s an absolute knockout.” –Jessica Hagedorn, author of Toxicology in Salon.com “Writers choose their favorite books of 2011”

“I couldn't stop reading Teju Cole's debut novel and was blown away by his ability to capture the human psyche with such beautiful yet subtle prose.” –Slate.com, Best Books of 2011

“An unusual accomplishment, ‘Open City’ is a precise and poetic meditation on love, race, identity, friendship, memory, dislocation and Manhattan bird life.” –*The Economist*, 2011 Books of the Year

“The most interesting new writer I encountered this year.” –*Books and Culture*, Favorite Books of 2011

"A Sebaldesque wander through New York." –*The Guardian*, Best Books of the Year

“An indelible debut novel. Does precisely what literature should do: it brings together thoughts and beliefs, and blurs borders…A compassionate and masterly work.” – *The New York Times Book Review*

“The cool, concise prose of Open City draws you in more quietly, then breaks your heart. Who knew that taking a long walk in Manhattan could be so profound?” –Jessica Hagedorn, author of *Toxicology* in *New York Magazine*

“[Teju Cole] has a phenomenal voice…prodigious talent, beautiful language.” – WNYC’s *The Takeaway*

“Beautiful, subtle, and finally, original…What moves the prose forward is the prose—the desire to write, to defeat solitude by writing. Cole has made his novel as close to a diary as a novel can get, with room for reflection, autobiography, stasis, and repetition. This is extremely difficult, and many accomplished novelists would botch it, since a sure hand is needed to make the writer’s careful stitching look like a thread merely being followed for its own sake. Mysteriously, wonderfully, Cole does not botch it.” – James Wood, *The New Yorker*

“Nothing escapes Julius, the narrator of Teju Cole’s excellent debut novel…In Cole’s intelligent, finely observed portrait, Julius drifts through cities on three continents, repeatedly drawn into conversation with solitary souls like him: people struggling with the emotional rift of having multiple homelands but no home.”-- *GQ*

“A complicated portrait of a narrator whose silences speak as loudly as his words—all articulated in an effortlessly elegant prose…Teju Cole has achieved, in this book, a rare balance. He captures life’s urgent banality, and he captures, too, the ways in which the greater subjects glimmer darkly in the interstices.”—*The New York Review of Books*

“The most thoughtful and provocative debut I’ve read in a long time. The best first novel of 2011.” – *The*

Daily Beast

"In another novel the city would serve as a mere setting. Cole, though, all but foists it on us in case we might be tempted to narrow our view or even look away."-- *New York Daily News*

"Masterful."—*Kirkus* (starred review)

"Intelligent and panoramic…engaged with the world in a rare and refreshing way."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"One of the most intriguing novels you'll likely read…the alienated but sophisticated viewpoint is oddly poignant and compelling…reads like Camus's L'etranger."—*Library Journal*

"Unique and pensive."-- *Booklist*

"Open City is a meditation on history and culture, identity and solitude. The soft, exquisite rhythms of its prose, the display of sensibility, the lucid intelligence, make it a novel to savor and treasure."

—Colm Tóibín, author of *The Master* and *Brooklyn*

"The pages of Open City unfold with the tempo of a profound, contemplative walk through layers of histories and their posthumous excavations. The juxtaposition of encounters, seen through the eyes of a knowing flâneur, surface and then dissolve like a palimpsest composed, outside of time, by a brilliant master."

—Rawi Hage, author of *De Niro's Game*, winner of the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award

"A gorgeous, crystalline, and cumulative investigation of memory, identity, and erasure. It gathers its power inexorably, page by page, and ultimately reveals itself as nothing less than a searing tour de force. Teju Cole might just be a W. G. Sebald for the twenty-first century."

—Anthony Doerr, author of *The Shell Collector*

"If Baudelaire was a young African, wandering the streets of contemporary New York, this is the book he'd write. A melancholy, beautiful meditation on modern urban life, it has echoes of W.G. Sebald and Walter Benjamin and reveals Teju Cole as one of a talented new generation of global writers, at home in the world."-- Hari Kunzru

"A reader feels the density of [Julius's] mind but also the fragility of his identity." – *Los Angeles Times*

"Magnificent…the trip is as meaningful as the destination. Open City is a remarkably resonant feat of prose." – *The Seattle Times*

"A quiet novel that somehow manages to scream." – *The Boston Globe*

"Quietly powerful." – *O: The Oprah Magazine*

"My favourite novel of the year, dreamlike and meandering, like the best of W G Sebald." –Alain de Botton,

The New Statesman

“[A] remarkable and highly accomplished first novel. . . . exquisitely composed. . . .I have read it twice, and I still cannot pin it down to a theme or a type. At once symbolical and precise, part fiction, part reportage or memoir, it is beyond category.” –Jan Morris, *The Independent*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jennifer Burritt:

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James Harris:

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Leroy Raymond:

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Nicholas McNeal:

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