



Measuring Time: A Novel

By Helon Habila

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Measuring Time: A Novel By Helon Habila

A thrilling, epic story from a major new international talent.

Mamo and LaMamo are twin brothers living in the small Nigerian village of Keti, where their domineering father controls their lives. With high hopes the twins attempt to flee from home, but only LaMamo escapes successfully and is able to live their dream of becoming a soldier who meets beautiful women. Mamo, the sickly, awkward twin, is doomed to remain in the village with his father. Gradually he comes out of his father's shadow and gains local fame as a historian, and, using Plutarch's Parallel Lives as his model, he embarks on the ambitious project of writing a "true" history of his people. But when the rains fail and famine rages, religious zealots incite the people to violence?and LaMamo returns to fight the enemy at home.

A novel of ardent loyalty, encroaching modernity, political desire, and personal liberation, *Measuring Time* is a heart-wrenching history of Nigeria, portrayed through the eyes of a single family.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In the late 1970s, twin brothers LaMamo and Mamo Lamang dream of leaving their Nigerian village to find fame and fortune. When they're 16, LaMamo runs away and joins various rebel factions fighting in West Africa, while his sickly brother, Mamo, stays behind with their belligerent father (their mother died in childbirth) and becomes a brilliant student. LaMamo's occasional letters let Mamo live vicariously but, more importantly, lets Habila (*Waiting for an Angel*) reinforce his work's central message—that the biographies of ordinary individuals provide the real stuff of history. As Mamo becomes the history teacher at a local school, LaMamo actually lives history, meeting Charles Taylor and witnessing the anarchic chaos of West Africa in the 1980s and '90s. Mamo embarks on a career as a chronicler of "biographical history" (modeled on Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*), beginning with a history of his village and his culture. Like his wayward brother, Mamo witnesses events that force him to examine his conscience. Habila fleshes out the novel with memorable secondary characters—a thuggish cousin, a damaged idealist love interest, an especially Machiavellian bureaucrat. The fresh, brilliant result contrasts cultural traditions with contemporary bureaucracy and reimagines a country through the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of its citizens. (Feb.)

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From [Booklist](#)

In a penetrating story of contemporary Nigeria, twin brothers want to escape their village of Keti, and war seems the best way to fame and glory. But Mamo has sickle-cell disease, and he must stay home, reading his brother's letters about adventures across the border and, later, about the brutal wars in which he fights. The twins' wealthy politician father rejects the "weak," sickly son, but an uncle inspires Mamo to attend university, read widely, and teach; by the time the soldier returns many years later, Mamo has been offered work as palace biographer, but, instead of the expected hagiography, he writes a true history of his people; inspired by Plutarch, he tells the stories of individual people, "farmers, workers, housewives." Prizewinning Nigerian writer Habila does just that, too, portraying with great immediacy the twins' extended family, their lovers, and neighbors. Best of all is the realistic drama of tradition and modernity--the evils of both but also the rich possibilities that come with their complex interaction. *Hazel Rochman*

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About the Author

Helon Habila is the internationally renowned author of *Waiting for an Angel*, which won both the Commonwealth Writers Prize and the Caine Prize for African Writing, and *Measuring Time and Oil on Water*. He was born in Nigeria and now divides his time between America and Nigeria.

Users Review

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