



Speak Gigantular

Irenosen Okojie

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Speak Gigantular is a startling short story collection from one of Britain's rising literary stars. These stories are captivating, erotic, enigmatic and disturbing. Irenosen Okojie's gift is in her understated humour, her light touch, her razor-sharp assessment of the best and worst of humankind, and her unflinching gaze into the darkest corners of the human experience.

In these stories Okojie creates worlds where lovelorn aliens abduct innocent coffee shop waitresses, where the London Underground is inhabited by the ghosts of errant Londoners caught between here and the hereafter, where insensitive men cheat on their mistresses and can only muster enough interest to fall for one-dimensional poster girls and where brave young women attempt to be erotically empowered at their own peril. Sexy, serious and at times downright disturbing, this brilliant debut collection sizzles with originality.

Speak Gigantular Details

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Author : Irenosen Okojie

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From Reader Review Speak Gigantular for online ebook

Hannah says

A wonderfully weird collection of short stories, surreal, and magical; stories told in elaborate metaphors that are never what they first seem; stories of loss and love and hatred and bliss and human connection. Those stories that were on the right side of weird were really something else and I am super glad to have read this book. This is why I started reading more short fiction!

I like weird fiction, I like stories that straddle the line of the real and the surreal and thus I absolutely adored this debut collection of short stories. The stories are unapologetically weird and different and never go the way of the expected and the author kept me guessing (wrong) the whole time. There is something different about the way the author constructs sentences that I can't quite put my finger on but that I adored.

While there were some stories that fell slightly flat for me, overall I really enjoyed the collection. The power of the great stories and the wonderful language made me overlook some of the characterisation that wasn't quite on point enough. I cannot wait to see what the authors comes up with next!

I received an arc of this book curtesy of NetGalley and Jacaranda Books in exchange for an honest review. Thanks for that!

Alex Christie says

General Appeal: 1 Star

To someone craving surrealism and/or dark fantasy, this book lives up to expectations.

Use of Language: 1 Star

The author carves excellent images with her words. She makes it very easy for a reader to see what the characters are seeing and feel what they are feeling. "Merlene unveiled her favorite memory: teaching Grace to ride a yellow bike aged eight. It was tucked into her suitcase, folded carefully between clothes."

Theme/Integrity: 0 Stars

Many of the stories ramble on without quite finding a footing. At times it feels like the author is trying to be dark, or trying to be edgy, with ultimately no real purpose to it. Many metaphors don't quite land, and sometimes as a reader you're left feeling a sort of "well that was interesting but I'm not really sure I took anything away from it".

Ability to Hold Interest: .5 Stars

Most of the stories share the same tone, which helps connect them all as part of a whole collection, but ultimately makes it difficult to hold my interest when it's depressing theme after depressing theme and no hope in sight. I began to just assume that something terrible or unfortunate was going to happen in every story. .5 stars because despite this I did read to the end.

Originality: .5 Stars

On the one hand, many of the stories have great twists that the reader won't see coming. On the other hand,

many of the characters in her stories share names, character traits, and voices. This can become confusing when it jumps from one story about a girl named Grace to a story narrated by a different girl named Grace. This combined with the comment I made above about every story becoming predictably depressing is why I give originality a .5.

Total: 3/5 Stars

Nidhi Mahajan says

Charmed by some stories. Not blown away by the collection as a whole.

Whatthelogs says

This short story collection is...odd.

I finished it not an hour ago, and already the stories are starting to slip and slide around my head, morphing into strange black women with jewels for eyes and bloody hearts in their hands.

Magic abounds in Speak Gigantular. If someone was to make a Black Girl Magic reading list (which definitely should be a thing, if it isn't already!), this should feature on it. And not just because there are ghosts and aliens, because there is a deep sense of the particular beauty and empowerment that comes of being a young, black woman. That's probably the one thing that I can see in pretty much all the short stories – not what I really expected, but I'm definitely glad it is there.

I've actually read quite a few short story collections this year, and this is definitely one of the best. Okojie has a very distinct voice, which both entrances and repels me. Also, I find that short story collections can often sound quite amateur and undergraduate-y, but I didn't think that at all, in this case.

Stef Smulders says

Being nice for once I give this book 3 stars. Weird stories, weirder writing. Very uneven, from too complex to simple or cliché. Lot of the metaphores do not make sense to me.

Stephanie says

I've never read anything like this. New to the author and new to reading collections of short stories, this book haunts me. Especially the last story Vegas. I had so many questions about Mammoth but the most gut wrenching story was Animal Parts, which gives us a peek into Henri a boy with a tail. The first story Gunk... I can't say say I enjoyed this collection but j most definitely will remember all of them.

Bookmuseuk says

Following on from her Betty Trask winning debut novel, *Butterfly Fish*, *Speak Gigantular* is Irenosen Okojie's first collection of short stories. And it is almost certainly not like any other short story collection you have ever read.

Okojie's writing rarely stays long in the recognisable world of the five senses. In these stories, emotions take on physical form. Loneliness becomes a pet (I pictured it as something like a bearded dragon). The hurt and anger of the deserted wife morphs into a humunculus whom she alternately pets and torments.

Some stories – like 'Nadine', which deals with the disappearance of a young girl with Down Syndrome – are relatively straightforward tales. Others, like 'Animal Parts,' about a community turning against a child who grows a tail, are clearly allegorical. 'Fractures' and 'Jody' feature characters who are (probably) aliens. But then there are stories so profoundly surreal it would take several readings just to grasp at the coattails of their meaning.

The characters in these stores are dislocated, alienated, isolated. We meet a Robin Hood bank robber in a canary yellow chicken costume, a foot fetishist, twin survivors of childhood trauma, a drug addict whose deterioration is captured, Dorian Gray-like, in thumbnail photographs. Oddly, one of the most playful stories deals with suicides trapped in the tunnels of the London Underground.

These are deliberately unsettling tales. Reading them is like walking through one of those trick rooms whose crooked walls make you think the floor is unstable.

Okojie's range is formidable and her imagination extraordinary. *Speak Gigantular* has, not surprisingly, been shortlisted for the inaugural Jhalak Prize.

Selcouth Station says

I like weird fiction. I like fiction that has one foot in reality and the other in some surreal gorgeousness that can disturb, illuminate and expose humanity for what we are: imperfect, often broken, a walking-talking-eating-fucking kaleidoscope of identities that can both create ice sculptures and bomb innocents to ash. I discovered Angela Carter in my college years, quickly I fell down a well of dangerous women, sexual encounters with tree spirits and a good old round of insanity. This was rather quickly followed up by Robert Shearman's wonderful *Tiny Deaths* (and thank you Robert for signing it!) and many other fantastic writers. To me it seems this surrealist, magical-realismesque fiction is most at home in the short story genre, where the restraints of the medium help keep the beautiful craziness contained, channeled - there are rules to the wonderlands. There are many writers who excel at magical realism in longer forms - Leone Ross, Octavia E. Butler, Margaret Atwood, Ray Bradbury, Neil Gaiman etc - but I find the impact is greater when the length is condensed and the topic shifts from story to story, allowing the writer to keep the reader's interest while not losing the effect of what can be a magically disorientating and dizzying form of prose.

Wendy says

I'm not giving this a rating because I'm not sure what I think yet. These short stories are surreal and dark, like Amy Bender mixed with Flannery O'Connor, but both taken to the extreme. Amidst the strange and heart wrenching darkness, though, Okojie's gorgeous use of language shines through. Some sentences stopped me cold, they were so creative and beautiful.

Ruby's Edit says

I thoroughly enjoyed this collection of short stories. My full review is on my blog:
<https://mybookinggreatblog.com/2017/0...>

Here is an extract:

You may have seen this book nominated for the Jhalak Prize (which highlights works by BAME authors of British origin). It is to see why it has made the longlist. Okojie's debut short story collection is nothing short of exemplary. Not one of the stories is similar to the other ranging from topics such as foot fetishes, purgatory (in London's underground network), euthanasia and resurrection.

Each of Okojie's fable-like stories end in a twist of fate - sometimes good sometimes bad. Despite my best efforts I could not see a common theme - most are set in London but some are in Europe, some are modern - others aren't and some feature downright magical themes yet others are based on ordinary lives. The only common thread I could muster was that each of them are dark stories. Whether they started or ended that way they all had an underlying tone of nervous anticipation. I suspect that this is what Okojie intended and I loved this collection the more for it.

Makeda / ColourLit says

I really wanted to love this collection; especially as it came highly recommended however these stories and Okojie's style of writing didn't resonate with me.

Some of the stories were really good (Animal Parts, Fractures, Walk With Sleep, Why is Pepe Canary Yellow, Nadine, The Thumbnail Interruptions and The Arrangement of Skin), others I couldn't even finish or had to skim read (Following, Mammouth).

There was definitely promise; most of the shorts started strong but rambled on and got confusing to the point my attention span wavered. In spite of my misgivings I'd still read more from Okojie just not another collection of short stories ?????

Jessica Lewis says

Great read. This is something a little different. I very much enjoyed these edgy, dark stories. Stumbled on this collection, very glad I did. Took it on holiday with me, good for dipping in and out of. Okojie is a highly

imaginative writer. I love her striking, vivid descriptions. Not always a comfortable read but certainly a memorable one.

Veena says

'Darkness motivates men, mobilises armies. Use it. You are a warrior. Show me your roar. People are scared of your power, frightened of what you can do with it.' Irenosen Okojie has a powerful voice which can upturn ships and mellow down racing bulls. The book came to light when the author won Jhalak prize. Not too many Goodreads ratings to its credit, readers are really missing out on a great read. The collection of the short stories is in one word - unpredictable.

Cover page

The cover page displays a curly haired mystic woman who has words, where there ought to be, her mouth. The black and white cover page is a wonderful composition. The font compliments the graphic image. It keeps well the magical realism and the mysticism of the book intact. The book is not to be talked about but to experience from the inside.

Characters

There are several one-of-their-kind characters in each story. Henri Thomsen from 'Animal Parts' is a regular ten-year-old boy from a danish town, except that he has a long furry tail which his mother makes holes in his trousers for. Balthazar from 'Outtakes' knows something about everything, including octopus festivals, chortling volcanoes, and placenta-eating women. He is a wonderful character to fall in love with and assume a future. But there are always twists in most wonderful stories.

Nadine is a black girl missing. But she is not important. Missing black girls are never important. But he has decided to find out what has happened to her. An epileptic boy who can make electricity with his brain, enough to power laptops and start kettles boiling. He gives a damn.

There are several out of the box characters. Some of these characters force you to think. Not just think but move mountains. Some of them just exist like a voice talking to you through half crazy jarring buzz.

All the characters have one thing in common, though. They are all memorable.

Content

The book is a collection of short tales of peculiar people. The collection begins with 'Gunk' where the mother asserts the importance of owning one's own skin and not to be 'a waste of space'. It is a powerful essay which possesses you right from the first sentence when it begins with 'Get up. Try to hold your world. You can't. You let it slip'. It talks about how darkness motivates men, mobilises armies. And how you can use it to start a war. These are all words spoken by a black in the world where the color of your skin defines your destiny and how you can shape it yourself rather than letting the world decide for you. This remains my favourite piece in the entire book.

Then comes 'Animal Parts' where a mother births a child with a long furry tale. The story is magical realism sighed with emotions. There are glimpses of mental illness seen in the stories and this one, in particular, will move you like nothing else.

'Fractures' is about two identical twins who have had a bad past and one blames the other for it. Hilly is bitter towards Grace and a small temptation drags her to wanting to live Grace's life. It is a story with an unexpected ending. An extraterrestrial being and a girl who attracts bad luck.

'Walk with Sleep' is another magical realism story with a beautiful beginning and even more beautiful end.

'Nadine' is a story of a black girl missing and our protagonist trying to find her since a black girl missing does not attract as much attention. He wants to know what exactly happened to her. This is another story not

to be missed.

'The thumbnail interruptions' is another story with a streak of mental illness. A photographer who is drugging his girlfriend and sending her photos to her colleagues. This is one of my favourite tales in the book.

There are other stories such as 'The Arrangement of Skin', 'Snapper', 'Following' and 'Vegas' that leave you engrossed throughout the story and stunned at the end.

The stories have an acute trace of mental illness sprinkled generously throughout the book. The imagination runs wild and meets all kinds of creatures in the stories.

Language

The author has a great narrative style. You can read minds and swallow emotions like you have dry swallowed a pill. It sticks in your throat till you are jagged by its presence with a little bit of water in your eyes. Such is the writing style.

Good points

The cover page is simple yet meaningful. The characters are one of their kinds. The stories are inventive. The author has a different voice of her own which becomes the voice in the story, very intimate.

Bad points

A few of the stories may need more than one reading to understand.

Overall

I recently started exploring the genre of short stories and this author has definitely piqued my interest. She is definitely one of the best story tellers I have read.

Whom do I recommend this to

Those who like to let themselves loose are going to love this collection of short stories.

Claire says

I have read hundreds of short story collections, but never encountered anything quite like *Speak Gigantular*. This book is filled with luminous prose and harsh realities cloaked in magical realism. There is insight, imagination, and a subtle humour that balances out the persistent thread of darkness connecting these tales.

No two stories are alike. The difference between one story and the next would be disorienting were it not for the sense of marvel Okojie preserves from start to finish. A boy born with a tail, the ghosts of suicides that haunt the London Underground, a relationship so destructive it alters reality (or seems to), a bank robber in a chicken suit, sexual misadventures in which it is near impossible to distinguish between predator and prey... Every word of every story is astonishing.

This book grapples with difficult themes. It touches upon kidnap, rape, death, and makes effective use of magical realism to explore the human psyche's struggle to process trauma. There is a poignant observation that the police do not care about missing Black girls. And then there are thoughtful depictions of how certain struggles manifest in everyday life: absent parents, the specific awkwardness of being an obvious tourist abroad when surrounded by other Black people, being caught in a bad pattern of behaviour. Yet, due to the lightness of the writing, these weighty subjects float through the reader's mind.

I was profoundly moved by the author's consideration of how "invisible and lost" young people can end up

trying to establish a career, the difficulties of finding your niche in the instability of the modern world, the way Black girls internalise the message that positions of power cannot be ours for the taking. *Speak Gigantular* contains many truths, not all of them palatable. Without moralising, it challenges the status quo through highlighting the humanity of those characters caught out by structures of power.

The originality of this book is its greatest strength. Okojie possesses a vivid imagination and a lush way with words, which combine to create a totally absorbing read in *Speak Gigantular*. I recommend this book to short story enthusiasts, fans of magical realism, or readers looking for books that will get under their skin.

Leo Robertson says

Awesome and wild collection of short stories from a cool new talent! Wonderfully defies description as a read, making it difficult to review though I did enjoy the kid with a tail who made jam with his mum and the London underground ghosts (seriously check it for yourself!)

I was fortunate enough to meet Ms Okojie at the Open Pen Summer Party. Rather, I showed her how to get to Jamboree in Limehouse's less-than-intuitive entrance. I didn't manage to chat to her after her electric performance because I'd excitedly invited too many family members and friends to see my *own* performance that night and spent much time running between them like a plate-spinner to make sure, oh God, everything was okay. There was no real need for this of course because they are all civilised and interesting adults who had a ball. Maybe next year, then? Or ever again?! Who knows :p

What I'm trying to say is, my dad bought Okojie's novel and I hope he lets me read it too.
