

# CHANGING KENYA'S LITERARY LANDSCAPE

## *Part 2: Past, Present & Future*

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## Introduction

*'Tick-tock, I want you to remember me  
Tick-tock, but the day don't have no memory.'*  
- 'I'm Coming' (song), entrance music of WWE wrestler, 'MVP'

A cocktail party at the British Council, then. This one is to celebrate the successful conclusion of the 2012 StoryMoja Hay Festival. I have arrived *unfashionably* late. I had gone to the wrong venue. When my sister, Caroline Nderitu (*Play Your Own Drum*), and I used to stage productions at the British Council, at the dawn of the millennium, it was inside town, along Kenyatta Avenue. I had left Nairobi for some years – in which I wrote a couple of books and co-founded A.C.T Theatre/Film Group – and I didn't know that the Council had since moved. I called up Moraa Gitaa (*Shifting Sands*) who gave me instructions to the new location in Upperhill, near the British High Commission; and even then, I had difficulty finding it in the darkness. Still, I was not the only one making a late arrival – Sitawa Namwalie (*Cut off My Tongue*) and others were streaming in, no-hurry-in-Africa-style, when I arrived.

So here I am, finally. There are some short speeches as the attendees are served drinks and *hors-d'oeuvres*. The StoryMoja founder, Muthoni Garland (*Attack of the Shidas*), stands humbly off to one side and doesn't say much.

After the speeches, I do a little mingling. There are a lot of foreign visitors in attendance, like Giles Foden (*The Last King of Scotland*) who was the main draw during the festival. I have a chat with a really tall Welshman who tells me he is working on a novel. I take this opportunity to present him with UK comedian Rhod Gilbert's theory that the Welsh language is killingly difficult to learn, even for natives of Wales. No, it's not that hard, Tall Guy asserts. But, yes, it does have 'mutations' (The spelling of a word can change depending on context, tense etc).

The Welshman is rejoined by some effervescent British friends and they all move off. Looking across the room, I spot my friend, motivational speaker Bonnie Kim (*Born Without A Choice*), talking to a middle-aged *mzungu* woman in a flowery green sun dress. He's smiling like a politician on the campaign trail. I join them. Bonnie introduces me as an e-book writer. The lady, who appears to have sunburn on her upper body, informs me that she also has an e-book on [Lulu.com](http://Lulu.com). No, she's not a professional writer – she works for an NGO based in Malindi at the Coast (That explains the sunburn!) As we discuss literature, and e-books in particular, she suddenly asks, to wit: 'What is your overall objective with your books?' I pause, an *hors-d'oeuvre* half-way to my mouth, and gaze at her Kazuri Beads necklace as if it is a charm that can link me to my wisdom-spouting African ancestors for answers.

I have never actually thought about this before. Writing books for me is like giving birth – I just feel there's something big in me and eventually I have to let it out one way or another. I wrote my first novel when I was only 19. I have since engaged in every kind of writing – from scripts to poetry to web content – but I have never actually had an 'overall objective.' **'I guess I just want to be remembered as one who made a major contribution to literature,'** I tell the Malindi lady, and she seems satisfied.

Even now, having had time to think about it, I believe I would still give the same answer if asked a similar question. It is part of the reason why I wrote [\*Changing Kenya's Literary Landscape \(2012 Onwards\)\*](#) – a blueprint for aspiring Kenyan writers - and released it for free. And it is also my motivation for compiling this second part of a non-fiction series of 'papers'.

This collection of essays, research material, quotes and pictures covers some of the subjects that I either skimmed on or didn't address at all in the first volume of the series – things like political literature, humour writing, Swahili literature, deaths of authors etc. I trust that university students/lecturers, journalists, researchers, publishers and writers from all walks of life will find something of value here.

It is my pleasure to present you with this information. I enjoyed researching it, I enjoyed writing it and I hope you will enjoy reading it. Given the enthusiastic reception of [\*Changing Kenya's Literary Landscape \(2012 Onwards\)\*](#), there's no doubt in my mind that these non-fiction documents are bringing me ever closer to achieving my dream of making a major contribution to world literature, something that will outlive me. Some people want money. Some people want power. Some people want to be loved. Me, I want to be remembered.

## **Writers in Politics**

*'I have always been part of the proletariat. I lived side by side with the sons of fishermen and smugglers. I was born politicised.'* – Dario Fo<sup>1</sup>, Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

*'You are not a politician. You are not a doctor. You are not a space scientist. You're a writer. How do these perceived threats influence your thinking?'* - John Sibi-Okumu, talking to Binyavanga Wainaina on TV's *The JSO Interview*

*'Politics, in a sense, has always been a con game.'* – Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President*

If there's one thing that Kenya's duelling literary commentators agree on, it is that in 2012, Miguna Miguna's *Peeling Back the Mask* was 'the book of the year.'

In the run-up to the 2013 General Elections, Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga – who was then gunning for the presidency on an Orange Democratic Party (ODM) ticket - dramatically fell out with one of his closest associates: a then-obscure Miguna Miguna, a Canadian-trained lawyer and advisor on legal and coalition affairs. Raila fired Miguna and as hopes for reconciliation dwindled, the latter announced that he was working on a book that would shake the political establishment.

True to his word, Miguna later launched a massive (and very expensive) non-fiction book entitled, *Peeling Back the Mask: A Quest For Justice in Kenya*<sup>2</sup>. The book launch, in a Nairobi hotel, was itself a classic and its various edited versions on YouTube have received massive viewership. At the launch, Miguna claimed that he was not being vindictive and he had in fact left out a lot of damaging information about ODM leading lights, for which they should be grateful. Still, the book portrayed various public figures in an unflattering light. Wasn't Miguna afraid of possible lawsuits and other reprisals? At the book launch, where he spoke with gusto, he said: 'All I can tell you is this – every single leader here, I can take to the Hague (International Court). Mark my word...' Beckoning with both hands, he added: '...And I am saying, *come, baby, come!*...And a stupid idiot is running around town saying that they can take me to court. Come, baby, come.'

The book generated 20,000 hits on the publisher's website within hours of its launch and 'Miguna Miguna' became one the top-five most Googled terms in Africa. 'Come, baby, come' became a national catchphrase. Kenyan netizens were especially fond of using it to create humour or when threatened by others. In later months, a vernacular play entitled, *Ūka Babie Ūka* (meaning the same thing but in Kikuyu) was staged at the Kenya National Theatre.

A section of Raila/ODM diehards accused Miguna of 'betraying' his own people (and their 'kingpin', Raila). Even though political temperatures were high, Miguna was determined to exercise his constitutional rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of movement, and promote his books. In areas where ODM was weak, like Central Kenya, he was able to manoeuvre without issues. In fact, in Nyeri Town (Central Kenyan headquarters), he marched triumphantly down the crowded streets like a visiting pop star. In ODM

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<sup>1</sup> Author of *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Can't Pay Won't Pay*, *Comic Mystery* et al.

<sup>2</sup> ISBN 978-1-908531-21-6

strongholds like Kisumu and Mombasa, however, the picture was very different. Miguna was physically attacked, shouted down, burned in effigy and variously threatened. Promoting the book at a Mombasa hotel, for example, the audience got agitated as the function progressed and eventually began to threaten violence. One audience member was captured by TV cameras trying to shoot the author with a handheld slingshot. Miguna initially tried to stand his ground but as the crowd got rougher, and the police appeared in unable to control them, he was forced to evacuate the area. A front-page image in the *Standard* newspaper the next day depicted Miguna fleeing the hostile crowd, with the caption: 'RUN, BABY, RUN!'



**Miguna Miguna launches his book in Mombasa (left) before being ejected by an irate mob**

*'Fanaticism is the only form of willpower to which the weak and irresolute can rise.'*  
– Friedrich Nietzsche, ultra-famous philosopher

The one thing that stood out for me was how well the book was written. It turns out that Miguna (an Osgoode-trained lawyer) [is very well read and reportedly has an enviable home library](#). He published many articles while he was living in Canada and says that he has always kept a diary (which is how he is able to produce voluminous books in a matter of months). He still writes articles, notably for the Kenyan *Star* newspaper.

A critique that has been brought up repeatedly by journalists is that the supposed 'memoir' appears to be more about Raila than the author. Miguna flatly denies this, saying the parts about Raila and other political honchos are the ones that people prefer to dwell on, but the book is not *about* Raila.

Miguna has had a very interesting life. He is one of the university students that were taken to the now-closed Nyayo House torture chambers, during the Moi era. He was summarily arrested in November 1987 when he was a student leader at Nairobi University and first taken to Central Police Station before being spirited away, blindfolded, to the Nyayo House basement cells. He was released a few days later, under strict conditions. Fearing for his life, he went into exile in Tanzania, Swaziland and later Canada. [He has since sued former President Moi over his detention without trial](#), seeking a declaration that his rights were violated.

In February 2013, still ahead of the elections which were slated for March 4, Miguna Miguna released a second political book entitled, *Kidneys for the King*<sup>3</sup>. The new book contained socio-political analyses and personal observations and postulated various scenarios for the then-upcoming presidential election: 'Is Raila Amolo Odinga a reformer or a renegade? How

<sup>3</sup> ISBN: 978-0-9917962-0-5

about Uhuru Kenyatta, Musalia Mudavadi, Peter Kenneth, Martha Karua, Raphael Tuju, Eugene Wamalwa and James Ole Kiyapi?’

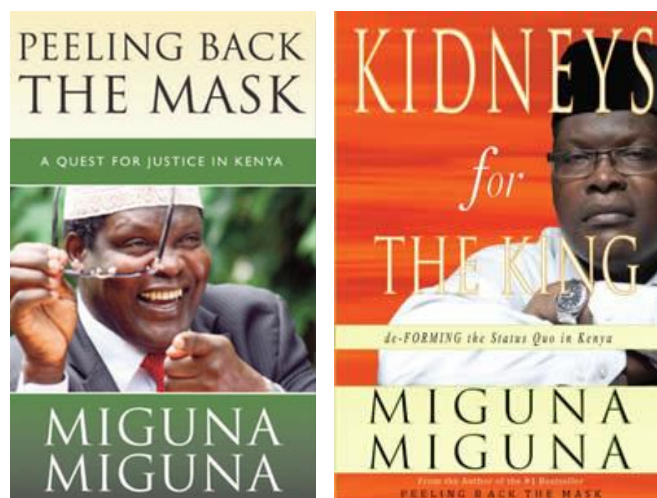
Miguna has claimed to have evidence that could ‘send Raila to the Hague’ (where the International Criminal Court is based). In Chapter 3 of *Kidneys...* (entitled ‘Of "Mad Men" and Fascism’), the author alleges bias in the manner in which some leaders were picked for prosecution at the ICC, following 2008 post-election chaos in Kenya:

‘Later, however, as I met the investigators in Nairobi when the ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, visited Kenya in October 2012, they suddenly showed no interest "in evidence that will not help us nail the four accused persons". They weren't interested in any evidence against Prime Minister Raila Odinga. It was quite clear to me that a decision had been made (somewhere) to extend immunity to the two coalition partners. Yet I knew that under the Rome Statute, no one, not even a sitting president like al-Bashir of Sudan, was entitled to immunity. "Why are the rules being bent in the Kenyan case," I asked myself...’

Ever since his first book launch, Miguna has complained bitterly about Raila’s ‘sycophants’/‘goons’/fanatics. The curious title of his second book is a reference to the bloodthirsty ‘sycophants’:

‘They called me and said that they would come for my kidneys and thus the name of the book.’

Or as a friend explained it to me, ‘What Miguna is saying is that these people are barbaric: it’s as if they want to take his kidneys and give them to their king to eat in order to appease him.’ Naturally, Raila would beg to differ. In a Press Release dated 27/08/2012, an entity calling itself ‘Raila For President’ called for ‘members of the public’ to ‘allow Mr.Miguna to enjoy his freedom’ with regard to his ‘self-inflicted tribulations, as he ostensibly tries to popularize his book in different parts of the country.’



**LEARNED COUNSEL: Books by Miguna Miguna**

It is hard to quantify the exact amount of damage Miguna’s books did to Raila’s campaign, but Raila did lose to Uhuru Kenyatta (of The National Alliance party, TNA) in the March 4, 2013



poll. Miguna said that this only proved his conviction that Raila would never be president of anywhere. Most analysts argue that while Raila was 'the man to beat' in that particular presidential race (exemplified by numerous opinion polls/surveys), he had lost many key allies from his previous ODM lineup. These included William Ruto (from the voter-rich Rift Valley), Mudavadi (who was also in the running for high office), Najib Balala (from the Coast) and Charity Ngilu (from Eastern Kenya). Ruto, Balala and Ngilu threw in their lot with Uhuru and later became Deputy President and cabinet ministers, respectively.

- In late 2013, Raila Odinga released his own book: an autobiography, entitled *The Flame of Freedom*. Publishers had reportedly gone into a feeding frenzy over the publishing rights, but the author eventually went with the relatively small Mountain Top Publishers. The memoir contains over 900 pages but Raila said that he actually started documenting his life many years ago, after being detained without trial by the Moi government. Raila is believed to be Kenya's longest-held political detainee (a total of 8 years). During the book launch, at the historic KICC building in Nairobi, one of Raila's sons revealed that he never met his father until he was 9 years old. Among the dignitaries present at the launch were former Kenyan Attorney General Charles Njonjo; former Kenyan Vice President, Kalonzo Musyoka; and former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo.



Images: Royal Media Services

**RAILA ODINGA'S BOOK LAUNCH: (L – R) Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, Raila Odinga, Raila's wife Ida, TV anchor Jacque Maribe with the book**

In *The Flame of Freedom*, Raila goes down memory lane, narrating his life and times, from his childhood to his education, family and entry into politics in the footsteps of his father. Readers were eager to see if he would conclusively explain his role, if any, in the failed 1982 coup against Moi's government, which led to his (Raila's) detention. In the book, Raila asserts, once again, that he soundly defeated Mwai Kibaki in 2013 presidential election but his victory was stolen.

Before *The Flame of Freedom*, there was another book on Raila entitled *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics*<sup>4</sup>. It was written by Nigeria's Babafemi A. Badejo and is considered an 'authorised biography'. Badejo's book *does* address the touchy issue of Raila's rumoured involvement in the 1984 coup attempt, a turning point in Kenyan political history. A couple of excerpts from *An Enigma...*:

<sup>4</sup> Yintab Books (2006), ISBN-13: 978-9783720886

'After the detention of Anyona (an outspoken politician), Raila briefed Sumba on the ferment in the military and the efforts of the Ochuka group to overthrow the government of President Moi. The two agreed that there was a basis for collaboration with the Ochuka group.'

And

'The night of July 31, 1982, was set as the date to strike. Raila had been tasked with the provision of a command post. For this he secured an apartment on Ngong Road belonging to Prof Alfred Otieno fondly called Osanya...'

*Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics* and *The Flame of Freedom* are available in all leading bookshops in Kenya as well as online, at Amazon.com

**'Sycophancy is actually dangerous to democracy.'**

– Raila Odinga, former Kenyan Prime Minister

- Smith Hempstone, a former US Ambassador to Kenya (Moi administration), has a readable autobiography entitled *Rogue Ambassador: A Kenyan Memoir*. In one episode in the book, the ambassador tries to acquire a private plane for President Moi who is insisting that the US gifts him one, partly because Zaire's President Mobuto also 'got one.' Mr. Hempstone takes Moi's message back to US gov't officials:

'Come on, Hank. You could pick up a clapped out C-130 (plane) from the National Air Guard for a couple of a million, slap a fresh coat of paint on it, install a luxury pod and (President) Moi will be pleased as punch...If I can deliver a C-130, it will make it a helluva lot easier to convert the old man to the cause of democracy.'

Memoirs are often suspect (for glorifying their authors) and US democratizing efforts are even more so. From Vietnam in the 1960's and '70's to Libya and the Middle East in the last few years, US gunboat diplomacy and militarized 'democratization' has come under heavy criticism, even from its own citizens. In Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere, US-led military action, 'regime change' and other incursions into the internal affairs foreign nations have also become an increasingly bitter pill for world citizenry to swallow:

'The level of naivety necessary, *before* you can talk about an American plan to bring about democracy...you will not find *that* level of naivety anywhere outside of 1970's porno films.' – Robert Newman, *The History of Oil* (comedy special)

Still, there are points on which Smith Hempstone and even the most ardent Kenyan patriots would agree on, one of them being how dirty Kenyan politics can get. Mr. Hempstone:

'I had come to realize that the currency of Kenyan politics was lies, innuendo and smear.'

Harsh as it might sound, few Kenyans would disagree with that assessment, especially those who have been actively involved in politics. Cries of betrayal, false promises, lies, nepotism, ageism, tribalism, corruption and savagery are often heard in the corridors of power. For

instance, in an interview with writer Kitavi Mutua, Senator Mutula Kilonzo Sr (1948 - 2013) stated that accepting a nomination into parliament was his 'worst mistake, so far'. Prior to his foray into active politics, Mutula Kilonzo was famous for being President Moi's legal advisor. He claims that the then ruling party (KANU) had suggested that he contest a parliamentary seat as far back as 1992, but he turned it down. They later offered him a direct nomination, but he again turned it down because, 'I did not consider myself a politician. I could not figure out how politics would fit in my schedule.' He claimed that after the 2002 elections, KANU nominated him behind his back and this time, he relented. Still, it turned out to be his worst mistake: 'I realized later that the status of Kenyan politics has very little room for independent-minded people. I would have resigned by now had I gone to Parliament through an election.'

But *Rogue Ambassador* doesn't just dwell on politics. The author 'takes in the scenery', illuminating us on the people and their culture. Here is a snippet concerning a little-known hunter-gatherer community living somewhere along the Kenyan coast:

'By sticking his finger into an elephant's droppings and tasting it, an experienced Mliangulo hunter can tell the sex, proximity and state of mind of the beast.'

Moving on swiftly, let us take a look at some of the books written by or about Kenya's founding fathers...

*'At that time, when I am safely (and one would hope) ensconced among my countrymen of bygone centuries, the historians and academics may unseal these files and, perhaps, come in for a shock or two.'* – Winston Churchill, *The Secret Files of Winston Churchill*

- Kenya's founding President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta (father of the current president, Uhuru Kenyatta) has an impressive bibliography, for a politician: *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), *My People of Kikuyu and the Life of Chief Wangombe* (1944), *Suffering Without Bitterness* (biography, 1968), *Kenya: The Land of Conflict* (1971) and *The Challenge of Uhuru: The Progress of Kenya*. Of these, *Facing Mount Kenya* is especially revered for the insights it gives into traditional African life and in particular the culture of the Agikuyu tribe.

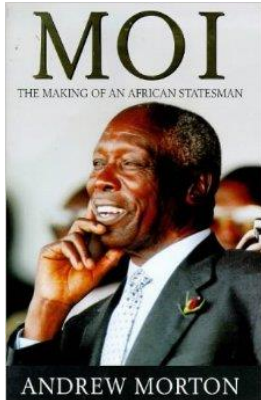
'(Facing Mount Kenya) is a really competent and instructive contribution to African ethnography by a scholar of pure African parentage...As a first-hand account of a representative African culture, as an invaluable document in the principles underlying culture-contact and change; last, but not least, as a personal statement of the new outlook of a progressive African, this book will rank as a pioneering achievement of outstanding merit'. - Professor Malinowski, on Amazon.com

- Duncan Ndegwa, a former Central Bank of Kenya Governor and Secretary to the Cabinet (Jomo Kenyatta administration), has written a book that sheds some light on Mzee Kenyatta – the man. Entitled *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, the book is actually a memoir of Ndegwa, who 'was among the breed of young Kenyans who laid the foundation of this country' as the sun of independence dawned on Kenya.

- The evergreen phrase 'not yet *uhuru* (independence)' is derived from the title of a famous book by Raila Odinga's father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Jaramogi, a prominent politician and

one of Kenya's patriarchs, was a supporter of Jomo Kenyatta before independence from Britain. They would later become fierce political rivals. History repeated itself in 2012/2013, when Jaramogi's son Odinga Odinga competed with Jomo Kenyatta's son, Uhuru Kenyatta, in the race to State House. Odinga contested the outcome of the poll, but the Supreme Court upheld Uhuru's victory.

- Ace biographer Andrew Morton has written a book about Kenya's former president Daniel Arap Moi, entitled *Moi: The Making of an African Statesman*. The book (an 'authorised' biography) traces the life and career of one of Africa's longest serving and most controversial leaders, Daniel arap Moi, who succeeded Jomo Kenyatta in 1978. It seemingly seeks to counteract Moi's international reputation as a 'dictator'. According to a *New York Times* article by Ian Fisher<sup>5</sup>, the book was an immediate bestseller on arrival in Nairobi: 'In the first few days it sold some 7,000 copies here (Nairobi), faster than any book before'. This was mainly fuelled by curiosity about the leader whose private life was a jealously guarded secret. And of course it was controversial. *The Times of London* said: 'One cannot help hoping that Morton was well paid for this book since it will do his reputation nothing but harm.'



Andrew Morton is a British journalist who has appeared in the Guinness Book of Records for his super-selling books. He has also penned sensational biographies of such personalities as the late Princess Diana (*Diana: Her True Story in Her Own Words*) and Monica Lewinsky (*Monica's Story*). He started working on the world-famous Bill Clinton sex scandal back in 1999 and his book is just one of many that detail former President Clinton's sexual escapades. Monica Lewinsky became a veritable superstar following the scandal and apart from talking to Morton, she also aired her dirty laundry on the Internet, in statements she made while testifying and on tapes that her friend, Linda Tripp, secretly recorded.

- *Beyond Expectations* is the title of the autobiography of towering businessman and politician Njenga Karume. The tome traces Karume's life from abject poverty (made no easier by his 'minimal education') to the highest financial circles in the land. He interacted with the country's first three presidents but is best remembered for his close association with Mwai Kibaki in whose administration he served as a Cabinet Minister. *Beyond Expectations* is highly recommended reading for the many Kenyan youths who wish to try their hand in entrepreneurship.

- As one might expect, there are many books that have been written about Kenya's struggle for freedom from British colonialism which was spearheaded by the Mau Mau fighters. The most stinging literary indictment of British atrocities is perhaps *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, written by Caroline Elkins.

Caroline Elkins began digging into the 'reforms and rehabilitation process' of Mau Mau detainees (dubbed 'The Pipeline') in 1995, as part of a dissertation she was writing at Harvard University. When she travelled to Kenya and spoke to former detainees, however, the complexion of the freedom struggle appeared very different from what was reported. The

<sup>5</sup> 'Lewinsky Author Catches Heat for Book on Kenya's President'

former detainees recounted tales of torture that would leave horror writer Dean R. Koontz standing. So shocking were the revelations that, in Kenya to launch the resultant book, Caroline Elkins claims to have had restless nights and 'nightmares' after talking to survivors. In a review for *The Standard*, journalist Kwamchetsi Makhoka, wrote: 'Anyone who travels 5,000 miles to find out how one race succeeded in civilising another deserves every bit of the shock that Caroline Elkins got.'

According to *Britain's Gulag*, the colonial British gov't used barbarous torture methods to suppress the Mau Mau uprising (Africans agitating to get their land and freedom back) after a State of Emergency was declared in 1952. Thousands of Mau Maus and their sympathisers died during the armed struggle, while many others were held in detention camps. It is estimated that 1.5 million people, mainly from the populous Kikuyu community, were placed in camps where thousands died<sup>6</sup>. Others not in the camps were herded into villages which were then ringed with barbed wire and women were forced to dig deep trenches around them and populate them with sharp sticks, to deter Mau Maus from getting over. The figures in Elkins' book have been contested by some critics. Official British records claim that only about 11,000 rebels were killed but 'new research' such as Elkins' indicates that they may have numbered well over 100,000, especially taking into account those who died in camps, prisons, villages and other parts (as opposed to combatants). In his review of the book, writer Kwamchetsi Makhoka suggested that Kenya's entire Black population stood at around 5.3 million at the time and it is therefore unlikely that the Kikuyu community alone could have exceeded 1 million in number. He however conceded that Elkins' book is a powerful account that shows that Britain owes the victims an apology. The title of Elkins' book was also deemed controversial, with critics complaining that the title gave the impression that the British clampdown was the equivalent of Nazi and Stalinist concentration camps. 'Gulags' were infamous Soviet concentration camps (in Siberia) where millions of people were bundled by the Communist regimes of the 1920s-30s.

*Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* was launched in Kenya in 2005, at the historically important Norfolk Hotel<sup>7</sup>. Speaking at the event, then Vice President Moody Awori said:

'The colonial masters were brutal, cruel and pitiless. They treated Kenyans as savages. All they wanted was the rich and fertile land of Kenya. They saw the Kikuyu community as the greatest hindrance to their success in seizing Kenya.'

In 2006, Caroline Elkins (now a Professor) won the the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction in America for *Britain's Gulag*.

Another book that details atrocities, on both the British and Mau Mau sides, is *Histories of the Hanged* by David Anderson<sup>8</sup>. *Histories...* relies more heavily on actual records, including court documents, and some might therefore consider it more scholarly. It is, however, also a powerful indictment of British atrocities in the 1950's. Closer home, StoryMoja has published a book by Samuel Waruhiu entitled *Corridors of British Colonial Injustice*. It covers the 1952

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<sup>6</sup> *The Standard*, 04/03/2014

<sup>7</sup> Now part of the Fairmont chain of hotels

<sup>8</sup> Widenfield & Nicholson, 2005

assassination of Kenya's Senior Chief Waruhiu and the two men who were hanged for his murder.

*'I would go so far as to advocate the annexation of this African territory (Kenya) to the Indian Empire, with provincial government under the viceroy, and let it be opened to us, and in a very few years, it will be a second India.'* –From Elspeth Huxley's *White Man's Country*



**Dedan Kimathi**

According to veteran thespian/filmmaker Lee Kanyare of A.C.T Theatre Group, famed Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi Wa Wachiuri was a dramatist and a poet before taking up arms! He ran a community theatre group in Nyeri Town (est. 1902) called Gichamu.

The idealistic Kimathi was an official of the Kenya African Union party (the predecessor of the future KANU ruling party) and a member of a militant resistance group called *Aanake a Forty* (The 40 Group). The 40 Group, which mainly consisted of young men who had fought in WWII had organized a secret strategy meeting in the Arbedare Forest on 19th

October, 1952 and decided to launch an armed struggle immediately having got wind that mass arrests were eminent.

Sure enough, on the night of 20th October, 1952, the colonial governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, declared a State of Emergency and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed.

The 40 Group formed a War Council that included Dedan Kimathi, Kago Mboko, Mbaria Kaniu, Gitau Matenjagwo, Mathenge Mirugi, Muthoni Kirima, Ndungu Giceru and Waruhiu Itote. It was renamed The Land or Freedom Army but became better known as the Mau Mau. The Mau Mau then put up a spirited armed freedom struggle against the British Empire. A conference in 1953 at Kinyona, Eastern Aberdares, confirmed Kimathi as Supreme Commander of the Mau Mau and gave him the rank of Field Marshal. Mbaria Kaniu was appointed his 1st Deputy, with the rank of General.

According to an [article on NyeriOnline.com](http://www.NyeriOnline.com) by Amos Kiboi, the colonial masters responded with formidable power:

'The colonial reaction was swift. Fortified villages sprung up, complete with spiked moats and watchtowers. A 6 to 6 curfew was enforced and 2,500 men drawn from the Lancashire Fusiliers and the Devonshire regiment were deployed together with elements from the Kings' African Rifles and the Kenya Homeguards<sup>9</sup>, bringing the whole colonial force in Nyeri District alone to about 7,000.

These were supported with aerial firepower by the Royal Airforce Lincoln Bombers, flying at least 900 sorties and dropping 600,000 pieces of ordinance between November 1953 and June 1955. It was six of these planes that Ndungu Gicheru would bring down with his trusty Bren LMG.'

<sup>9</sup> Homeguards – Africans who sided with the Whites; some were killed by the Mau Mau



Hordes of perceived independence agitators and suspected Mau Mau affiliates were arrested across the country, mostly from the GEMA (Gikuyu, Embu, Meru) community. Arrested 'terrorists' and sympathisers were arraigned before courts and detained in such places as Mwea, Manyani, Kapenguria, Yatta and Hola, often succumbing to hunger, mistreatment and disease. The colonialists tried, often in vain, to make Mau Mau prisoners renounce their oaths. Among those arrested were the politically important 'Kapenguria Six' –Jomo Kenyatta, Paul Ngei, Fred Kubai, Achieng' Oneko, Kungu Karumba and Bildad Kaggia. The Kapenguria Six were put through a Kangaroo court and sent to prison (Rawson Macharia, one of the witnesses who 'fixed' them later confessed to having being bribed to commit perjury).

In *Barrel of a Gun*, Ruth First tells of how the Mau Mau were eventually crushed:

'The revolt lasted for three years and was defeated by a combination of overkill and terror against the Land and Freedom Army and the civilian population at large.'

[NyeriOnline.com](http://NyeriOnline.com) describes the dying days of Mau Mau:

'Then came the capture of General China Itote in 1954, the death in action of General Kago Mboko. By 1955, thousands of freedom fighters had surrendered in the amnesty offered by the settler government and these gave a lot of intelligence to the colonial forces.

In the Aberdares, the war was increasingly becoming a man hunt for one man: Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi Waciuri.'

In October, 1956, while coming from a village foray to get food and intelligence<sup>10</sup>, Kimathi was shot in the leg by a homeguard called Ndirangu, and captured. He was taken to Nyeri General Hospital and kept under heavy guard. While he was there, chained, a death sentence was passed on him. He was later transferred to Kamiti Prison and at dawn on 18th February, 1957, he was hanged. Where his body was buried remains a mystery.

Kimathi is Kenya's most revered Mau Mau fighter (Jomo Kenyatta is revered as country's founding father/first president). Kimathi University of Technology in Nyeri is named after Dedan and there's also a Dedan Kimathi statue in uptown Nairobi City, near the Hilton Hotel.

*'It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.'* - Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi

In December 1963, Kenya became an independent state and Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, who one colonial governor had dubbed 'a leader unto darkness and death', became the new republic's first president. It is noteworthy that after many years of pursuing legal redress from the British gov't, over atrocities committed during the Mau Mau war, a large number of former freedom fighters recently won a multi-million-shilling settlement.

**'First, they ignore you; then they laugh at you; and then they fight you; and then you win.'** – Mahatma Gandhi

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<sup>10</sup> Some accounts say that Kimathi was actually on his way to surrender when he was shot

It is important to note that not all colonial-era Europeans were native-shooting, whip-cracking Empire builders. Many of them were settlers and sojourners who helped modernize the country. They mainly engaged in agriculture and are responsible for introducing cash-crop farming (tea, coffee, pyrethrum etc), dairy farming and various industries. Pioneers like Lord Delamere, Karen Blixen and Grogan did all the necessary experimentation at their own costs and some lost (or nearly lost) fortunes in the process. Today, tea, coffee and cut flowers are some of Kenya's top foreign exchange earners. History records that the settlers and the colonial government were often at cross-purposes. In *Struggle for Africa*, Vernon Bartlet wrote:

‘The White settlers of Kenya deserve kinder things than are generally said of them. These genuine settlers are outnumbered and outvoted by town dwellers and artisans...’

Africa was a convenient place for wealthy aristocrats to send their more troublesome relatives so that they wouldn't embarrass them at home. It was also attractive to adventurers or those looking to start life afresh. And so a whole motley crew of foreigners arrived at the Colonies and created their own little world. It is from among these interactions that the infamous 'Happy Valley' set sprung up – a group of socialites who made a name through heavy drinking, debauchery and wrecklessness<sup>11</sup>. A blurb on the jacket of *White Mischief* by James Fox described the expatriate social scene as 'a hornet's nest of upper-class decadence and misbehaviour.' An excerpt from Elspeth Huxley's *White Man's Country*:

‘It was nothing to have an Italian Count or Australian Baron thrown through the window (of your hotel room) on to your bed in the middle of the night.’

- [Muthoni Likimani](#) is living history. Apart from being an author, she is a pioneering female broadcaster and women's rights activist. The daughter of one of Africa's first Black missionaries, she was probably the first woman from Murang'a to fly to the UK, which she did in the 1950's under the auspices of a government programme to improve education. While in college in London, she was approached by a worker from the BBC who was looking for someone who could speak fluent Swahili. Ms. Likimani got the job and, as they recorded and broadcast her sessions, she developed a taste for broadcasting (In Murang'a she was working as a teacher). When she returned to Kenya, pre-Independence, she secured a radio job at the Voice of Kenya (now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation). She met author Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (*Coming to Birth*) in the 1950's and the two have been friends ever since. After broadcasting, she ventured into business, starting with a PR/marketing firm, writing, and championing women's rights. She also served in the Nairobi city council. She once made a thrust for parliament but did not clinch the seat. (Incidentally, I and a fellow writer giggled like kids when Muthoni Likimani showed as her old campaign poster depicting her as a young, beautiful woman. We have only known her as grandmother.)

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<sup>11</sup> Or, as they were called, the three 'As' – Alcohol, Altitude and Adultery





**LISTEN HERE, YOUNG MAN: Muthoni Likimani talks to Alexander Nderitu during a writers' retreat in Rift Valley**

Now in her late 80's, Ms. Likimani continues to write books and champion causes that are dear to her, including the promotion of peace through literature. Speaking at Daystar University recently, Ms. Likimani told the students: **'Your pen is your gun, use it to fight social evils instead of throwing stones and rioting.'**

In late 2012, the board of International PEN's Kenya Centre unanimously appointed her Patron of their chapter. A great-grandmother, she is affectionately referred to as 'Cucu' ('Grandma') by those fortunate enough to know or live near her. Her titles include *They Shall Be Chastised*, *Passbook F.47927*, *What Does a Man Want?* and *Fighting Without Ceasing*. The short story collection, *Passbook F.47927*, contains fictionalized short stories set during the State of Emergency, at the height of Mau Mau insurgency. At the launch of Muthoni Likimani's latest book at Paa Ya Paa art gallery (in 2013), Chief Justice Willy Mutunga remarked: **'In our next frontier of struggles, artistes will be the leaders.'**

*'Let France have good mothers and she will have good sons.'* – Napoleon

- Ms. Zarina Patel is a Kenyan-Indian writer, artist, human rights activist and campaigner for social justice. She is well known for being the publisher of [Awaaz magazine](#), which focuses on South Asian history as it relates to East Africa, and is considered an expert on the subject. She has also authored some pivotal books, including: *Challenge to Colonialism* (which details the struggle of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee for equal rights in Kenya), *Manilal Ambalal Desai* and *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*<sup>12</sup>. Zarina is also an environmentalist who has so far been successful in her fight to save Jeevanjee Gardens (recreation park) in uptown Nairobi from being erased.

- Grace Ogot (b 1930<sup>13</sup>) was a Kenyan author, nurse, broadcaster, politician and diplomat. She authored novels and short stories in both English and Luo. In the mid-1980's, she became a Member of Parliament and was made an assistant minister (of culture) by President Moi. This was at a time when there were very few prominent female politicians in

<sup>12</sup> Believed to be the founder of Kenya's trade union movement

<sup>13</sup> Some accounts say 1934

the country. In 1988, she returned to Parliament as the representative of Gem (the home turf of her distinguished husband, Prof. Bethwell Ogot) and was reappointed to her ministerial position. Her books, which elucidate Luo (Western Kenya) culture, include *Land Without Thunder* and *The Promised Land*.

- Wangari Maathai (b 1940), the first African woman to win the Nobel Prize for Peace, left behind a memoir entitled *Unbowed*. Although, Wangari is best known to the rest of the world as a Nobel Prize laureate, in Kenya she was best known as an environmental conservationist. She was also a politician: an MP for Tetu and an Assistant Minister during the Kibaki administration. Her environmental activism put her on a collision course with the Moi government, especially her fight to prevent the grabbing and commercialisation of Uhuru Park. Moi once publicly criticised, calling for her fellow womenfolk to keep her in check! In *Unbowed*, Maathai tells the story of her journey from rural Kenya, entry into politics, founding of her conservation group (the Green Belt Movement). She also narrates her trials and tribulations, including government repression, discrimination at work, a bitter public divorce, losing her job because of power politics, struggling with a bare existence and fighting to give her children a decent living, despite the odds. Former US president Bill Clinton had this to say about the memoir:

‘Wangari Maathai's memoir is direct, honest, and beautifully written - a gripping account of modern Africa's trials and triumphs, a universal story of courage, persistence, and success against great odds in a noble cause.’

- Veteran Kenyan novelist David Maillu (*Broken Drum*) has for many years been rumoured, in the press, to be interested in the presidency but he has so far never made a creditable effort towards this end. He is still best known for his numerous titles (making him arguably Kenya's most prolific novelist). Incidentally, when Ngugi wa Thiong'o returned to Kenya after two decades of self-exile, and kissed the ground, many people expected him to seek public office in the then upcoming General Elections. While he himself never committed himself, there were rumours that he would run for MP or even the presidency. His stated mission was to launch the first part of his voluminous memoirs, *The Wizard of the Crow*. As fate would have it, armed thugs brutally attacked the ageing novelist and his wife in their posh apartment near KBC TV station one night and scandalised the entire country. The motive for the horrendous attack remains unclear but it is widely believed that it was orchestrated by a politician who was jealous of the returnee's much-hyped return and feared that if Ngugi ran for a position, he (Ngugi) would be likely to clinch it.

Ngugi fled to the US during the Moi era. His writings, especially the stage plays, had rubbed the government the wrong way and he had previously been arrested and otherwise harassed for his writings. His works included *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Choose)*, *Matigari ma Njirungi (The Remnants of Njirungi<sup>14</sup>)* and *Shaitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)*. Ngugi says that one time while he was in the UK, he received word from a gov't operative that there was a 'red carpet' waiting for him when he returned (He was perceived by some to be bad-mouthing the Moi gov't abroad). He interpreted 'red' to mean blood/danger and fled to the US. A fellow writer, the soft-spoken

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<sup>14</sup> About Mau Mau freedom fighters

Prof. Micere Mugo (with whom Ngugi had co-written a play), also sought asylum in the US<sup>15</sup>. Being abroad didn't suppress the dissident in Ngugi – if anything he became more acerbic and has since written many pivotal political works (non-fiction as well as fiction) which include: *Penpoints and Gunpoints*, *De-Colonising the Mind*, *Moving the Centre* and *Writers in Politics*.



NGUGI WA THIONG'O: Looking back in anger?

Another famous political refugee who wrote books was Koigi wa Wamwere (*A Woman Reborn*), who fled to Norway fearing victimisation at home. (At one point, he and Ngugi were in detention together). He had a trademark dreadlocked<sup>16</sup> look and was considered a firebrand. He wrote his first book, *Conscience on Trial*, while in Kamiti Prison, between 1975 and 1978 (Mzee Kenyatta administration). In 1979, after his release, he joined parliament. From 1982 to 1985, he was again detained, this time during the Moi era. After release, and fearing for his life, he fled to Norway. In Columbia, USA, as a visiting scholar, he penned the book, *Towards Genocide in Kenya: The Curse of Negative Ethnicity*. He is best-known book is probably the memoir, *I Refuse to Die*. He returned to Kenya after the introduction of multi-party politics and the reduction of political persecutions. He formed a political party of his own, was elected into parliament and made a lukewarm stab at the presidency. He previously worked as a teacher and a journalist. Below is an excellent quote from Koigi from the *Daily Nation* (July 27, 2013):

'That many people cheered Moi for removing (powerful Attorney General) Njonjo from government got me wondering whether Moi had read *The Prince* by Machiavelli, who would have recommended him to make Njonjo unpopular before sacking him.

Much later, I discovered why Moi had laughed so hard...Wanguhu Ng'ang'a had given Moi a copy of *The Prince*, which he most likely read, giving him a tactic by which to bring down Njonjo and maybe harm Wanguhu himself. **The books we give or recommend to leaders can come back to haunt us.'**

<sup>15</sup> She also took up a Zimbabwean citizenship after her Kenyan one was revoked by the gov't

<sup>16</sup> Dreadlocks were associated with Mau Mau guerrillas and are still seen by many as revolutionary statements

Further afield, Nigeria's Wole Soyinka (*The Man Died*, written in prison) and Chinua Achebe (*There Was a Country*) were both thought to harbour presidential ambitions. The two world-renowned scribes had never shied away from politics, either in literature or in life. Soyinka has especially been posited as a presidential candidate on several occasions. Chinua Achebe spent many years in the diaspora and had been crippled in a 1989 accident, two points that dimmed his chances of making a serious run for high office back home.

- On August 1, 1982, a section of Kenya's armed forces (especially the Air Force) attempted a military takeover of President Moi's government. Their brief moment of glory came when they managed to take over the national broadcasting corporation, Voice of Kenya<sup>17</sup>, and announce that they had seized power from the Moi regime. Within hours, the coup attempt had been crushed and the government was still firmly in control, but that singular event would lead to one of the darkest episodes in Kenyan history, probably matched only by colonial suppression and the recent 2007/2008 post-election chaos. In the years immediately after the attempted coup, the KANU government went after the suspected plotters and possible instigators. Apart from army personnel, hundreds of civilians (including politicians like Raila Odinga and university student leaders who had opposed one-party rule) were rounded up and confronted with an assortment of charges, including sedition and treason.

The clampdown was like something out of a horror novel and for years there were whispered tales of secret torture chambers in the basement of a government-owned building called Nyayo House, in uptown Nairobi City, where suspected dissidents would undergo barbarous torture before being arraigned in kangaroo courts. It wasn't until Moi left government after 24 years in power that some survivors led the media to the former torture chambers and described how the indignities were performed. Some of the survivors, like Shem Ogola, wept openly as the memories came flooding back. Many survivors have since sued the government and some, like politician Koigi wa Wamwere, have won their cases. Other famous victims of torture include politician/businessman Kenneth Matiba, humour writer Wahome Mutahi (*Three Days on the Cross*) and lawyer Miguna Miguna (*Kidneys for the King*).

A book that compiles the harrowing tales of the torture victims was published by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), with the support of Citizens for Justice. The book is entitled, *We Lived To Tell: The Nyayo House Story*<sup>18</sup>, and contains such chapter heading as 'The Air Force coup attempt', 'Mwakenya', 'We lived to tell', 'In the dungeons - Nyayo House', 'Life in prison', 'Exile', 'The role of women' and 'Picking up the pieces'. In the Foreword, the former Chairman of Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, Maina Kiai, has this to say:

'Once again, I salute the people whose testimonies should enrich every Kenyans' life as they read this book. I salute those who could not contribute to the book because they paid the ultimate price with their lives. Through you Kenya is a better place for the moment, and we will not forget your work. We owe you.'

An excerpt from the Prologue (Pg. X):

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<sup>17</sup> Later 'Kenya Broadcasting Corporation'

<sup>18</sup> ISBN 9966-957-03-0

'Historically, the only parallels that can be drawn to the torture chambers are British colonial concentration camps during the Mau Mau war. The British developed and perfected the best known torture machinery in the world. This machinery included concentration camps where many Kenyans perished from various forms of torture including mass starvation, neglect, disease and gruesome violence.

Nyayo torture chambers were meticulously planned and built, using public funds of course, specifically for purposes of torturing and killing Kenyans who were deemed to be enemies of the Kanu regime. The ultimate objective was to crush the culture and spirit of resistance to the Moi dictatorship that was behaving as if Kenya and its people, as well as resources, were private property of the ruling elite.'

The book gives lurid details of what the victims went through. An example from the Prologue (Pg. X):

'Water would be poured into the cell and cold and then hot dusty air would be pumped alternately into the cells through the ventilation ducts. The victims would be denied food and for days they would be brutally beaten. Others were shot dead as they underwent interrogation. Those who survived this stage ended up in prison or detention after kangaroo trials of sedition or treason. Yet others, after giving names of their friends or relatives, would be allowed to go home.'

- In 1996, Kenya's Mathew Karauri – a former Assistant Minister for Education – self-published a political thriller entitled, *The Devil You Know*. He followed it up the next year with *The Last of the Ameru*.

- In 2003, Kenya's former anti-graft czar, John Githongo, caused a nationwide stir when he blew the whistle on a grand corruption scheme that would be later dubbed the [Anglo-Leasing Scandal](#). President Kibaki had just taken office and Githongo claimed that a clique of powerful men around the president were out to make an illegal fortune at the expense of the taxpayer. For his safety, Githongo (then the Governance and Ethics Permanent Secretary) fled to the UK from where he released an audio clip (secretly recorded) of MP and then Energy Minister Kiraitu Murungi allegedly asking Githongo to 'go slow' on the investigation of a particular graft case. Githongo collaborated with British scribe Michela Wrong (*In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*) on a book on the saga, entitled *It's Our Turn to Eat*.

*'There is no art which one government sooner learns from another than draining money from the pockets of the people.'* – Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*

In an interview with BBC's HardTalk television programme, [John Githongo estimated that Kshs 50 billion was lost](#) through 'hugely inflated' contracts with non-existent companies. Such was the stench created by the Anglo-Leasing Scandal that Kibaki eventually sent home several of his top men, including Kiraitu Murungi (*An Odyssey of Kenyan Politics*), former Finance Minister Francis Mwiraria and Internal Security Minister Chris Murungaru. Dr Murungaru has since sued Githongo for defamation, saying that the damning allegations ruined his political and private life, leading to his being dropped from the Cabinet and losing the Kieni parliamentary seat.

Interestingly, Kiraitu Murungi (a lawyer by profession) wrote a poetry book after being sacked. It is entitled *Song of My Beloved* and has received some acclaim. The themes explored are varied and include love, family and corruption. Some contain humour.

*'Corruption is in the eye of the beholder – but some beholders need stronger glasses than others.'* – Pro. Ali Mazrui, celebrated African scholar

- Of course, grand corruption is not limited to African states. In his alarming and highly researched book, *Lords of Poverty*<sup>19</sup> (1989), author [Graham Hancock alleged corruption and betrayal of public trust](#) in the most unlikely of places – the international aid business ('the aristocracy of mercy').

According to Hancock, whether it is donations to international charities, development loans from mega-banks, inter-government payments, or money earmarked for the needy (victims of famine, drought, earthquakes etc) in developing nations, a large portion of the money never reaches its proper destination. The book's summary on Amazon frames the situation thus:

'The magnitude of generosity from the world's wealthy nations suggests the possibility of easing, if not eliminating, hunger, misery, and poverty; in truth, however, only a small portion of this sixty billion dollars is ever translated into direct assistance. Thanks to bureaucratic inefficiency, misguided policies, large executive salaries, political corruption, and the self-perpetuating "overhead" of the administrative agencies, much of this tremendous wealth is frittered away...'

Below is an excerpt from the beginning of this 'case study in betrayals of a public trust':

*'...In Sheraton Hotels in scattered nations  
We damn multi-national corporations;  
injustice seems easy to protest  
In such seething hotbeds of social rest.*

*We discuss malnutrition over steaks  
And plan hunger talks during coffee breaks.  
Whether Asian floods or African drought,  
We face each issue with open mouth...'*

- Ross Coggins

**'Poverty is the worst form of violence.'** – Mahatma Gandhi

- Kinyanjui Kombani (*Den of Inequities*) is a Kenyan creative writer and banker. His novel *The Last Villains of Molo*, inspired by the ethnic-based clashes in Kenya's Rift Valley in the 1990's, has been used as a study text at universities in Kenya and Germany, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. His two children's tales, *Wangari Maathai: Mother of Trees* and *We*

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<sup>19</sup> *The Lords of Poverty: The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business*. Publisher: Atlantic Monthly Press; Reprint edition (January 10, 1994). ISBN-13: 978-0871134691



*Can Be Friends*, were approved by the Kenya Institute of Education<sup>20</sup> for use in Kenyan schools. Below is an extract from *The Last Villains of Molo*:

‘The axe-man dropped his hand and walked out. At the door, they looked behind to see the cold form of the young girl. She was bent on her knees, one hand trying to stem the flow of blood from her father’s body. As their eyes met, the hatred in hers hit the two attackers like a cold blade of steel.’

- Richard Crompton’s novel *The Honey Guide* centres on a fictional murder mystery set in the aftermath of the Kenya post-election violence. The post-election violence (PEV) that erupted between 2007 and 2008, after a disputed presidential election pitting Mwai Kibaki against Raila Odinga (who maintains that he won but his ‘victory was stolen’). The ensuing violence resulted in the loss of over 1000 lives and the displacement of about 500,000 others.

- Former MP [Joe Khamisi](#) has authored a thought-provoking book entitled, *The Politics of Betrayal in Kenya*, aimed at ‘exposing the rot in the Kenya political system’. The book illustrates how the electorate has been betrayed their political ‘leaders’. It mainly centres on the politically shaky period between 2001 and 2008 and particularly on president Kibaki’s first term in office (when the author was himself a member of parliament). It also delves into historical happenings like President Moi’s rule (1978-2002) mentions instances of gov’t repression and grand corruption.

It also sheds light on the disagreements between Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka (the leading lights of the Orange Democratic Movement) which led to a split in the party.

Mr. Hamisi is a journalist and has worked for newspapers in Kenya and Tanzania and been a broadcaster at the Voice of America. He was the Managing Director of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation for two years. He joined politics in 2002 and was elected the Member of Parliament for Bahari Constituency at the Coast. He is now a full time writer, political analyst, blogger and author. He is currently working on a memoir, tentatively entitled *Dash Before Dusk*.

While *The Politics of Betrayal* shows the betrayals of the people by their leaders, politicians themselves often complain about betrayal within their ranks. A few famous instances:

- During a national KANU delegates’ conference, Vice President George Saitoti<sup>21</sup>, President Moi’s long-serving ‘No. 2’, accepted that he was not chosen to be the outgoing president’s successor. He gave a famous ‘There comes a time’ speech in which he conceded that ‘the country is more important than an individual’ as he shelved his presidential aspiration.
- Raila Odinga, who comes from a political dynasty and was tortured by the Moi gov’t for alleged subversive activity, made a surprise move when he agreed to join Moi’s party, KANU. Raila had formed his own party by then and the merged entity was dubbed ‘New KANU’. When the moment came to nominate a flagbearer, Moi picked Uhuru Kenyatta

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<sup>20</sup> Now Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development

<sup>21</sup> Died in a helicopter crash ahead of the 2013 elections

(then considered by some to be a political greenhorn) as his 'preferred successor'. A disgruntled Raila Odinga left the party.

– Raila teamed with opposition candidate Mwai Kibaki and several other presidential hopefuls to form a 'super alliance' that would finally kick KANU out of power. Shelving individual presidential dreams, the political heavyweights (who included female candidates Martha Karua and Charity Ngilu) formed the NARC party aka 'Rainbow Coalition', with Kibaki as the frontman. NARC won the 2002 election in a landslide victory. Mere months after Kibaki's ascension, he and Raila became bitter rivals, the latter vehemently insisting that Kibaki failed to honour a pre-election Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U.)

– About to retire after 24 years as Kenya's Head of State, Daniel Arap Moi publicly stated: **'The people I have helped the most are the ones who have hurt me the most.'**

– In the 2007 elections, Raila and Kibaki went head-to-head in a race that opinion polls said was too close to call. Raila ran on an ODM ticket while Kibaki ran on a PNU (Party of National Unity) ticket. Controversy raged after the ballots were cast as there seemed to be an inordinate delay in the release of the final tally. When Kibaki was eventually declared the winner, violence broke out in many parts of the country, pitting ODM and PNU supporters against each other. Raila claimed that he had won the ballot and the declaration of Kibaki as winner was tantamount to a *coup de etat*.

*'May God protect me from my friends, I can protect myself from my enemies.'* – Voltaire

- Former Kibwezi MP Kalembe Ndile has written a book on his life (with the help of journalist Peter Thatiah). The book is entitled *Kalembe Ndile: My Squatters, My Struggles, My Dream*. The memoir chronicles his life from a poverty-stricken childhood to the corridors of power. In one anecdote, he gets kicked out of a meeting that includes ODM-Kenya Presidential candidate Kalonzo Musyoka.

- Ms. Kingwa Kamencu, a writer and former Deputy Secretary-General of PEN Kenya Centre, brought some excitement to the 2013 presidential race when she announced that she would



also be gunning for State House. The Nairobi University alumna had just returned from Oxford University with a Masters in African Studies and was under 30 years of age. One newspaper article dubbed her 'The Beautiful President', although that's not saying much since a presidential race is rarely akin to a beauty contest. In fact, the other females in the running were over 50 years old and at least one of them was a grandmother. Kingwa initially got a lot of ink from journalists but as the campaign took shape, turning into a two-horse race between Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta, all other candidates faded into the background.

Kingwa tried to stay relevant by making some highly controversial observations/recommendations on social media that had many people's eyebrows rising like hot-air balloons.



**'They say that politics is show business for ugly people.'**

– Gerald Celente, author and trends forecaster, in *Fall of the Republic* (documentary film)

- If the Kenyan government were asked to give a title to a book about Okiya Omtatah, they would probably suggest, *A Thorn in the Flesh*. After the surprise terrorist attack on Westgate shopping mall, a press article urged the national intelligence service (NSIS) to focus on serious matters, not 'a gadfly like Omtatah.'

Okiya is a political activist who appears to thrive on irritating the government. He has lodged *dozens* of lawsuits against perceived corrupt and unconstitutional practices in the corridors of power, eg. flawed tenders, and with some success. He is best known for chaining himself to the head office of the National Police Service – with a comically large steel chain – to protest police brutality in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 polls. As the 2013 General Elections approached, the Commission charged with overseeing the voting process announced that it would be acquiring Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) kits in order to curb rigging. Omtatah challenged the award of the multi-billion BVR tender and the resulting public discourse threatened to turn the Kenya-Canada government-to-government acquisition into a national scandal. One evening, Omtatah alighted from a bus at the General Post Office stage and began to walk into town, unaware that two mysterious men in suits alighted after him. After trailing him for a while, one of them called out to him and asked him whether he was going to drop the BVR issue or not. He defiantly returned in the negative. The still-unidentified men fished out hidden metal pipes, flailed him around the head and left him for dead. He claims he never lost consciousness. He just lay in a pool of his own blood, eight teeth missing, until someone called an ambulance. He was rushed to hospital and urgently operated on. The surgeon later told him that by the time he was brought in, he had on 'only thirty more minutes to live' (due to blood loss). He recovered well enough to continue fighting. He ran for the position of Nairobi Senator in 2013 (to which the 2012 elections were pushed) but lost out to Gideon 'Sonko' Mbuvi.

Okiya Omtatah is the author of the stage plays *Voice of the People* and *Lwanda Magere*.

**BIAFRA: Darkness at Sunrise**

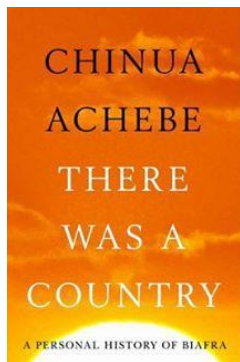
The Biafra War (also known as The Nigerian Civil War) took place from 6th July 1967 to 15th January 1970. It was a blood-soaked ethnic and political conflict caused by the attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed [Republic of Biafra](#). The conflict was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions mainly between the Hausas of north and the Igbo of the southeast of Nigeria. Over the two and half years of the war, an estimated 1 million civilians died from famine and fighting. The war became notorious for the starvation of some of the besieged regions during the war, and consequent claims of genocide by the largely Igbo people of the region.

According to a timeline on the educational website [lml.jou.ufl.edu](http://lml.jou.ufl.edu), one of the triggers of the war was a series of riots by northerners (in May 1966) that led to the killing, by axes and machine guns, of about 30,000 Igbos. This led to a mass immigration of Igbos back to the east. In July of that same year, northerners staged a counter-coup, killing the Igbo military president Ironsi. General Yakubu Gowon, a non-Hausa northerner, took over.

On 30 May, 1967, the military governor of the east, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared the secession of the south-east region from Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra, an independent nation. He cited the northern massacres of the Igbos as a reason for succession. Nigeria rejected the secession of the oil-rich region. Peace talks held in neighbouring Ghana collapsed, leading to armed conflict. So dark was the war period, in which Biafra systematically lost territory to the militarily superior Nigerian forces, that at one point an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 people were dying daily from starvation.

Writers Chinua Achebe and Christopher Ikigbo supported the Biafran successionists. Ikigbo was one of the young men who took arms against the advancing Nigerian forces – and he paid the ultimate price. The flag that the short-lived 'Republic of Biafra' had come up with depicted a rising sun (hence the title of Chimamanda Adichie's book – *Half of a Yellow Sun*), ostensibly symbolising independence/the dawn of a new era. But the sun of independence never rose in Biafra: on January 15, 1970, Biafra surrendered when its military commander, General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, fled to Cote d'Ivoire.

Sources: Wikipedia, 'Encyclopedia of African History' by Kevin Shillington, 'The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafra War' by A. A. Madiebo, [Blackpast.org](http://Blackpast.org), [Iml.jou.ufl.edu](http://Iml.jou.ufl.edu)



- Forty years after the Biafra War, Nigeria's Chinua Achebe finally published a book on the conflict. The book is entitled *There Was a Country*<sup>22</sup>. It is a memoir that details his involvement in the conflict and was released shortly before his death. Other major Nigerian writers who have written about Biafra include Wole Soyinka (*The Man Died*), Cyprian Ekwemesi (*Survive the Peace*), Eddie Iroh (*Forty-Eight Guns for the General*), Flora Nwapa (*Never Again*), Chukwuemeka Ike (*Sunset at Dawn*) and, more recently, Chimamanda Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*).

Achebe (b 1930) was a Nigerian novelist, poet, professor at Brown University (US), and critic. Achebe submitted the hand-written manuscript for *Things Fall Apart* to Heinemann Publishers of London in the 1950s. The editor could have thrown the un-typed bundle of papers into the trash can, but he decided to give it a chance. It turned out to be 'the best first novel I have ever read.' *Things Fall Apart* went on to become, arguably, the most widely read book in African literature. It is said to have sold 12 million copies so far, in several dozen languages. Achebe's early works zeroed in on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of Western and traditional African values during and after the colonial era. Following the international success of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe authored *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People* (a political satire) and *Anthills of the Savannah*.

'(Achebe) is one who has brought Africa to the world.' – Nelson Mandela

'Achebe never hesitates to lay the blame for the African continent squarely where it belongs.' – Wole Soyinka

<sup>22</sup> Penguin Press, 2012. [ISBN 978-1-59420-482-1](https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/9781594204821)

- Wole Soyinka (b 1934), is a Nigerian writer, notable particularly as a playwright and poet. He was conferred the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first Black African to be so honoured. He is also a social critic and political activist, known for his strong criticisms against military rule in Nigeria, notably against the late General Sani Abacha regime, as well as other totalitarian regimes in Africa. His works include the plays *The Lion and The Jewel* (which I highly recommend), *The Trials of Brother Jero* and novels *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomie*. A Swahili translation of *The Trials of Brother Jero* (*Masaibu Ya Ndungu Jero*) was widely read in Kenyan secondary schools in the 1990's. He is also a memoirist and has penned such personal titles as *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* and *Ake: The Years of Childhood*.

*'No man lives without jostling and being jostled; in all ways he has to elbow himself through the world, giving and taking offence.'* – Thomas Carlyle, *On Bowsell's Life of Johnson*

- Youthful novelist Chimamanda Adichie did not experience the Biafra War first-hand but has relatives who either died, were injured or lost possessions in the conflict. Her bestselling novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is saga 'about love and war' that uses Biafra as a backdrop. A major Hollywood film based on *Half of a Yellow Sun*, starring Thandie Newton, was released in 2013 to wide acclaim. The book has reportedly sold 800,000 copies in English and been translated into 35 other languages.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria. Her titles include *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *The Thing Around Your Neck* (a short story collection, 2009) and, most recently, *Americanah*<sup>23</sup> (2013). Chimamanda studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. At the age of 19, Chimamanda left Nigeria and moved to the United States for higher learning. After studying communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, she transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University. She graduated *summa cum laude* in 2001, with a bachelor's degree. She has since received numerous awards and distinctions for her penmanship (or 'penwomanship?'), including the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction (2007) and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2008).

*'Your chances of winning are looking slimmer than a stick man.  
Looks like I'll take the entire galaxy  
Before you get Half of a Yellow Sun.'*

- Alexander Nderitu, *To Be The Man* (poem),  
*Where the Kremlin Live*

- In his youth, British-born novelist Frederick Forsyth worked as a print journalist. During this time, he was sent to northern Africa to cover the Biafra War. When he turned to fiction writing, he wrote a book about the war, entitled *The Biafra Story*.

Mr. Forsyth became a full-time writer in 1971 and has since written more than 10 bestsellers and received worldwide acclaim. He wrote from abundance, meticulously researching each novel. His masterpiece is *The Day of the Jackal*, a thriller about a plot to assassinate French President Charles De Gaulle. The *Sunday Times* said: 'As a political thriller it is virtually in a class by itself; subtle, fast-moving, superbly written, unputdownable, easily beating Ian

<sup>23</sup> 'Americanah is a powerful political and literary statement.' - Binyavanga Wainaina, author

Fleming on his own ground. The French background is beautifully atmospheric – down to the last whiff of Gauloise.’

Forsyth returned to the subject of Africa in *Dogs of War* (about mercenaries) which takes place in an imaginary country called Zangaro. It sold over 2 million copies. He is also the of *The Devil's Alternative*, *The Deceiver* and the *Fist of God*<sup>24</sup> (about Saddam Hussein/Gulf War I). He now lives in the UK where he joined the Conservative Party in 1998.

- A Briton living in post-Independence Uganda, Denis Hills initially had no intention of knocking his host country's president – the infamous Idi Amin – in a book he was working on. In his memoir, *Tyrants and Mountains: A Reckless Life*, he claims that he was provoked to do so by the horrendous acts being perpetrated at the time, such as the murder of one of his Makerere University students. He writes:

‘The dismembered body of Kay Adroa, a small jolly girl who had left my English class to get married to Amin as his third wife and had borne him children was found in a gunny bag in August 1974. Not long beforehand, Amin had peremptorily discarded her, and thrown her cousin, the former prime minister, to the Nile fishes.’

Incensed, Denis Hills wrote that Amin was ‘a black Nero’ running the country ‘like a village tyrant, by fear’. He was swiftly arrested and a diplomatic spat erupted between the UK and its former colony. It took the Queen's intervention to save Denis Hills from certain death.

Denis Hills had quite a time in Africa. He happened to be in Uganda when a fully-fledged coup took place, armoured vehicles and all:

‘When I left, I heard distant firing and there was a smell of smoke as though the security forces were firing at *kondos* (thieves). Explosions followed. Dawn was breaking but it wasn't until I saw armoured troop carriers grinding through Wendegeya and Asian shopkeepers peeping through barred windows that I knew there had been a coup.’

- Giles Foden's novel, *The Last King of Scotland*, tells the story of Uganda's Idi Amin from the point of view of a Scottish doctor, Nicholas Garrigan. Nicholas finds himself unwittingly drawn into the dictator's crazy, murderous world. Amin uses the hapless doctor as, by turns, a physician, confidant, foreign advisor, guinea pig and court-jester. It is set during a turbulent time in Ugandan history – a period that included the expulsion of Asians, deterioration of relations with Kenya and Tanzania, and the horrendous large-scale slaughter of civilians. *The Last King of Scotland* was turned into a successful Hollywood movie and garnered an Academy Award for lead actor Forrest Whitaker (TV's *Twilight*).

- There are many books about the recently deceased Nelson Mandela – the first President of a united South Africa. One of them is *Mandela: The Authorised Biography* by Anthony Sampson. The book traces Mandela's life, from his early childhood in Transkei to his entry into the African National Congress (ANC), which he joined in 1943 after meeting ANC legend Walter Sisulu at a party. Anthony Sampson was a personal friend of Mandela's and his 600-plus-page

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Forsyth's works are avidly read by the CIA, KGB and British SIS.’ - *Today*

book doesn't delve deep into the latter's private life. According to a review in Kenya's *Saturday* magazine, 'Anthony Sampson is no Andrew Morton...he also uses witness reports from Mandela's close associates and friends to piece his life together...tries to make the book as objective as possible.' Another book that gives us an insight into the life of *the man* who gained a 'saintly' reputation worldwide is *Young Mandela* by David James Smith, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson of London.

Mandela's own book is a voluminous affair entitled, *Long Walk to Freedom*. *The Softback Preview* calls it, 'The epic story of South Africa's first Black President.' In it, Mandela tells his inspirational story and reveals just how difficult it was to defeat the apartheid regime. A couple of excerpts:

'There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires.'

and

'I shall fight the government side by side with you, inch by inch and mile by mile until victory is won...The struggle is my life.'

By 1998, *Long Walk to Freedom* had raked in approximately USD\$ 2 million, received worldwide acclaim and made the bestseller lists in several countries, including Britain. It would become an even bigger bestseller in 2013, as the former anti-apartheid fighter gave up the ghost, aged 95. In the final year of his life, his home was the most spied on residence in the world, mainly by journos hoping to get a scoop. More than 100 heads of state attended his memorial service, sealing Mandela's status as the most beloved leader of his time. He belonged to the Xhosa tribe and is survived by his third wife, Graca Machel. Incidentally, Graca is the only African woman to become the First Lady of two countries. (She was previously married to the late President Samora Machel.)

- Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* is one of those towering works of literature that even non-readers know or talk about. Here is a well-known passage from the opening paragraphs of the book:

'The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. The lightning flashes over them, clouds pour down upon them, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth. Down in the valleys, women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly grows beyond the height of a man.'

Alan Paton (b 1903) was at one time the head of South Africa's now-defunct Liberal Party. He was born in Pietermaritzburg in Natal Province, to Scottish ancestry. In 1924, he became a school teacher. In 1981, he published *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, the first part of a projected trilogy dealing with the years from 1952 to the Black township riots of 1972. He began writing *Cry, The Beloved Country* in a hotel in Norway and completed the first chapter in one evening. He finished it in San Francisco three months later after working on it in hotels, trains and boats. The book, published in 1984, explored the theme of race in apartheid South Africa as evidenced by the snippet below:

'I have one great fear in my heart: that one day when they (the Whites) turn to loving, they will find that we (the Blacks) have turned to hating.'

The book was a spectacular success and Paton was hailed as a visionary. Waterstone's, a British book chain, rates *Cry, The Beloved Country* as one of their top 100 bestsellers, along with Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*. Paton also wrote *Too Late the Phalarope*, a number of religious and religious works, a collection of short stories entitled *Debbie Go Home*. He described himself as 'a mere Natalian' and wrote sentimental stories and passionate poems before his death in 1988, from throat cancer.

*'As a rounded human being in his own right, the Black man in Afrikaner literature is as absent as the English working man from a tea party of Miss Austen's young ladies.'*

- Lawrence van der Post, *The Dark Eye in Africa*

- There are so many works that have been written in jail that literary critics are now treating 'prison literature' as a subgenre all its own. Mandela wrote while doing time in the now-famous Robben Island, off Cape Town, but he wasn't the only one. Among the other inmates who wrote books were poet Dennis Brutus. Many of the poems in his collection, *Letters to Martha*, were penned from experiences in Robben Island, where he was held as a political prisoner. *The Guardian* said, '...in the deft simplicity of the first part of this book, he (Dennis Brutus) has grace and penetration unmatched even by Alexander Solzhenitsyn...'

*'I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill one only finds that they are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment for with freedom come responsibilities and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.'* - Nelson Mandela

ANC supporter Mongane Wally Serote (*Yakhal'Inkomo*) won the Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize, the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa and is a Fulbright Scholar. His poems explore themes of political activism, the development of Black identity (or 'Black consciousness'), violent revolt and resistance. He is one of the scribes that are very familiar with the inside of a cell, having spent 9 months in solitary confinement in SA as he and others like Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela fought for the abolition of apartheid. Learn more about the remarkable life of this Pan-Africanist and Black Consciousness promoter in the section headlined ***Militant Poet - A Life in the Day of Wally Serote: Notes*** towards the end of this document.

During a public lecture at Nairobi University (UoN), Wally Serote surprised many when he said that he has 'utmost respect for (Zimbabwean President) Robert Mugabe'. One of the university dons later retorted that he (the don) had 'utmost distaste for Mugabe'. These kinds of conflicts/differences of opinion between intellectuals are rather common. According to [AfricanWriting.com](http://AfricanWriting.com), renowned Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui once stirred controversy at a conference meant to celebrate the 'Life and Poetry of Christopher Okigbo'<sup>25</sup> (a Nigerian writer who died during the Biafra War) that was held at the University of Massachusetts,

<sup>25</sup> 1932 – 1967, R.I.P



USA. Professor Mazrui spoke on 'The Muse and the Martyr: Christopher Okigbo in Comparative Perspective,' and appeared to question Okigbo's decision to take up arms, leading to his death. This perspective reportedly enraged some attendees as Okigbo is generally hailed as a hero by Naija scribes. Mazrui's speech was also viewed as insensitive, the website reports, as members of Okigbo's family were present, including his daughter. Others in attendance included Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Dennis Brutus and Chimamanda Adichie. AfricanWriting.com notes that, 'Ali Mazrui is one of the more controversial figures in African cultural studies, having previously been involved in well publicised personal and ideological disputes with such notable others as Wole Soyinka, Abiola Irele, Biodun Jeyifo and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'

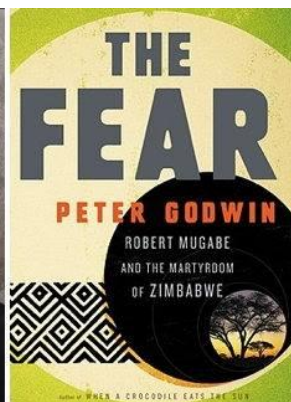
I have no qualms about reporting such incidents because I am an entertainer, not an academic. In fact, I would make a very good moderator (or referee, as the case may be) wherever intellectuals might be squabbling. I have no horse in that race.

Moving on, Ghanaian poet and diplomat Kofi Awoonor was arrested in the 1970s, for assisting a soldier accused of trying to overthrow the government, and was imprisoned without trial. He wrote a book entitled *The House by the Sea*, about his time in jail. Kofi Awoonor died while visiting Kenya in 2013 when heavily armed terrorists stormed a popular shopping mall in Nairobi.

Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o also did time as a political prisoner, at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison, during the Kenyatta administration. His detention without trial caused an international outcry. While in prison, Ngugi penned the book *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, reflecting on his writing, the nature of his imprisonment, the future of the country and his fellow prisoners. Upon release, Ngugi would go in self-exile where he would stay, holding teaching jobs and giving talks, until the present day. He has made many visits to Kenya since the exit of President Moi in 2003. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a former Nairobi University lecturer, clashed many times with Moi's government. In 1986, Ngugi's political novel *Matigari*, published by Heinemann, was banned by the Moi/KANU government. Some of his stage plays were also banned.

*'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend until death your right to say it.'* - Voltaire

- Peter Godwin was born and bred in Zimbabwe but now resides in the US where he is the current president of International PEN's USA Centre and a member of the Council on Foreign



Relations. He visited Kenya during the 2013 StoryMoja Hay Festival and was interviewed by PEN Kenya president, Khainga O'Okwemba, who runs a column called Literary Postcard in *The Star* newspaper. Godwin's book *The Fear* is a scathing indictment of President Robert Mugabe's reign. The book contains many harrowing tales from victims of Mugabe's government a thing Godwin has done so often, he is referred to as 'a chronicler of other peoples' courage.'

Godwin is also the author of *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*, a memoir about growing up in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the 1960s and 1970s during the Rhodesian Bush War. *The Boston Globe* called it 'devastatingly brilliant' and 'one of the best memoirs to come out of Africa'.

- Though English, Doris Lessing was born in Persia (Iran), in 1919, and grew up in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Some of her writings exhibit Marxist beliefs, radical views on racial segregation, gender, politics and social injustice. Her works include *Children of Violence*, *The Golden Notebook*, *The Grass is Singing*, *In Pursuit of the English* (a memoir) and *Mara and Dann*. Doris Lessing is one of Britain's foremost writers and had a soft spot for Africa as exemplified by such works as *African Stories*. In 2007, she won of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

- US-Sudanese writer Kola Boof is a controversial poet, novelist and human rights activist. She is the author of *Flesh and the Devil*, *Nile River Woman*, *Diary of a Lost Girl* (autobiography) and *Virgins in the Beehive* (a 'hip-hop pop novel').

- *When Bullets Begin to Flower* is a work of 'resistance poetry' published by East African Educational Publishers and containing works from Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, originally written in Portuguese and translated by Margaret Dickinson. Contributors include Agostinho Neto, Viriato da Cruz and Jose Craveirinha.

Agostinho Neto (1922 – 1979) was the first President of Angola (from 1975 to 1979). He led the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the war for independence (1961 - 1974). He left Angola for Portugal, and studied medicine at the universities of Coimbra and Lisbon. He combined his academic life with covert political activity of a revolutionary sort; and PIDE, the security police force of the Estado Novo regime headed by Portuguese Prime Minister Salazar, arrested him in 1951 for his separatist activism. The public university of Luanda, the Agostinho Neto University, is named after him. Chinua Achebe wrote a poem entitled *Agostinho Neto* in his honour.

- *King Leopold's Ghost* and *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz* are two of the most-read books about the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and its shocking political-economic history. The long history of war, exploitation and misrule has made Congo one of the poorest countries above the ground, even though it is one of the richest underground. This vast nation's crust is believed to hold mineral wealth that is worth more than all the oil in Saudi Arabia. But the minerals have so far been both a blessing and a curse.

*King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hochschild describes the DRC in the period just prior to the American Museum Expedition. In 1885, King Leopold II of Belgium took control of the vast Congo Basin and began a process of pacification and exploitation. As a colony, the Congo was unique in that the entire vast region was basically the 'private property' of one man! To illustrate how a blessing becomes a curse, during Leopold's reign, motor vehicle manufacture was growing into a roaring trade and there was great demand for rubber (for the wheels). Thousands of Congolese natives in rubber-growing areas were forced to harvest the sap under inhumane conditions. According to *King Leopold's Ghost*, by the time King Leopold ceded the Congo to Belgium in 1908, he had amassed a huge personal fortune at the cost of millions of Congolese lives.



One of the more recent books on the subject of the DRC is *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa* by Jason Stearns. Writing for *New York Times Book Review*, Adam Hochschild called it, 'The best account (of the conflict in the Congo) so far....The task facing anyone who tries to tell this whole story is formidable, but Stearns by and large rises to it.'

In *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, Michela Wrong - a correspondent who witnessed Mobutu's last days - traces the rise and fall of the idealistic young journalist who became the stereotypical African dictator. It analyzes the acts of the villains and the heroes of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Known as 'the Leopard,' Mobutu Sese Seko (who ruled Zaire for 32 years) showed all the cunning of his namesake - seducing Western powers, buying up the opposition, and dominating his people with a devastating combination of brutality and charm. While most of the population was churchmouse-poor, he plundered the country's copper and diamond resources, downing pink champagne in his lavish palace like some modern-day reincarnation of the crazed station manager depicted by Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*). By the time of his decline and death, conventional wisdom was that Mobutu was Africa's wealthiest man.

Legendary author Norman Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*) had this to say after visiting Zaire to cover the historic Mohammed Ali vs. George Foreman boxing match in Kinshasa<sup>26</sup>:

'Mobutu was everywhere. He was the equivalent in Africa of Joseph Stalin. You saw his picture everywhere. And of course, part of the vanity of dictators, they almost always - with the possible exception of Mussolini, he was half ugly and half attractive - most dictators are unbelievably ugly or plain: Franco, Hitler...Mobutu looks the archetype; he's the epitome of a closet sadist. Sort of guy if you meet him in a bar, you think, "Oh, my God - who are the poor women who are associated with this feller?"'



Image: *When We Were Kings* documentary

*'I do not have to forgive my enemies. I have had them all shot.'* – General Ramon Naváez

- Whoever said 'well-behaved women rarely make history' was probably thinking of people like Egyptian feminist writer Nawal el Saddawi (*The Hidden Face of Eve*). Not one to mince

<sup>26</sup> *When We Were Kings* (1996), documentary film

her words, she famously said: 'A writer should write about injustices, oppression and discrimination. There is nothing like a neutral writer. Even in love there are politics. You cannot separate writing and fighting.'

Nawal el Saddawi attended the Medical College of the University of Cairo, graduating in 1955. She worked as a doctor but was lost her job in 1972 after publishing the book *Woman and Sex* – a bold move in an Islamic country. In 1982, she formed the Women's Solidarity Association, a group that was outlawed in Egypt in 1991. After publicly criticizing then President Awar Sadat, she was arrested and only released after his assassination. She authored more controversial books, including *Woman at Point Zero* (1973), *God Dies by the Nile* (1976) and *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977). Her name appeared on a fundamentalist death list in 1988 and in 2008, she nearly lost her Egyptian citizenship because of her stage play, *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting*.

*'The personal lives of people and their requirements are the directing and motivating force which are translated in the final analysis into a political will and into the politics of a country.'* – Nawal el Saddawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*

- In 1970, legendary Ghananian president Kwame Nkrumah (now deceased) authored a book entitled, *Class Struggle in Africa*. He has been described as a 'Marxist, thinker, author and fighter'<sup>27</sup>.

- Somalia, situated along north-eastern flank of Africa, was once known as 'the Land of Poets'. The calibre of poets that this horn-shaped country has produced is probably unmatched in the Third World (if not the entire known world). Political, social and economic strife (especially in the years after 1994, when it ceased to have a functioning government) have buried Somalia's treasure trove of literature (and other arts) under a pile of rubble.

The currently top-rated poet is Mahamed Ibrahim Warsame aka 'Hadraawi'. He was born in Burco and worked for Radio Mogadiscio and the state-controlled Department of Information. He attended Lafoole University and would later teach there. He also wrote a lot of protest works. In 1973, Hadraawi wrote the poem *Siinley* and the stage play *Tawaac* (English: *Lament*) and was subsequently imprisoned for 5 years. After his release, he became the Director of the Arts Division of the Academy of Science, Arts and Literature in Somalia. He joined the Somali National Movement based in Ethiopia and later relocated to Great Britain. Hadraawi drew large audiences when he graced the Kwani Litfest in Kenya in late 2012, composed of both Nairobi-based Somalis and Kenyan literati. In January 2013, Hadraawi was awarded the Prince Claus Award for his contribution to peace through poetry.

Poetic rapper K'naan (originally from Somalia but now residing in the US) is one of the artistes who name Hadraawi as an inspiration. K'naan (English: 'trabador'/'traveller') gained worldwide fame when he was tapped to compose an anthem for the FIFA World Cup Soccer tournament which took place in South Africa. He came up with the song *Wavin' Flag* which he performed during the opening ceremony, while waving a sky-blue Somali flag. K'naan's melodic rap songs often contain political statements and reflections on his war-torn motherland. His hits include *Fatima*, *Somalia* and *ABCs*. *Fatima* is especially sad, mainly

<sup>27</sup> *The Sunday Standard* (Kenya), June 24, 2007

because he claims that it is the true story of a childhood friend he left in Somalia when he fled the country, initially coming to Kenya and then heading to Canada. He later learnt that she was killed in the civil war that would rock the country for years, destroying the fledgling cosmopolitanism of Mogadishu and nationalism of Somalia. A sample of the lyrics:

*'Damn you shooter, damn you the building  
Whose walls hid the blood she was spilling  
Damn you Country so good at killing  
Damn you feeling, for persevering...*

*Fatima,  
What did the Gunman say  
before he took you away on that fateful day?  
Fatima,  
Did he know your name, or the plans we made  
To go to New York City?'  
- K'naan, Fatima (rap song)*

The new poetic voices coming out of Somalia include Sayadin Hersi (*Verloren Vader*) and Warsan Shire (*Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*<sup>28</sup>). Sayadin Hersi resides in Netherlands where he has been seeking asylum since 1992. Though a Somali, Warsan<sup>29</sup> was born in Kenya and currently resides in the UK.

- In an editorial in *African Business* magazine back in 1998<sup>30</sup>, journalist Anver Versi took issue with foreign journalists who delight in misreporting and making fun of African leaders. He wrote:

*'I do object to this blanket vilification of African leaders. Leaders, good, bad or indifferent, do represent their people and when you use crude terms to describe them, you are also dismissing their people as of no consequence...*

*'...African leaders have mirrored the preoccupations in their own countries. Moi typifies the thrusting get-rich-quick mentality in Kenya; Mobutu's chaotic rule reflected the chaos of trying to govern a country the size of Europe; Sani Abacha's iron fist embodies the deep schism in the body politic of Nigeria and so on...*

*'What is not helping is the oversimplification of African leaders as laughing stocks. People, some in very high places, believe what they read in the paper...'*

*'What is Western becomes universal and what is Third World becomes local. Locally becomes measured by the degree of its distance from the metropolis of the Western World.'*

*- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Moving the Centre*

<sup>28</sup> Winner of the Brunel University African Poetry Prize

<sup>29</sup> 'Warsan is the hottest poet in the world today' – Muthoni Garland, author of *Tracking the Scent of My Mother*

<sup>30</sup> 'On Knocking African Leaders', *African Business*, February 1998

- Canadian Lieutenant-General Roméo Antonius Dallaire, who headed the hapless UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda during the 1994 holocaust, has written a book about his experiences. The book is entitled *Shake Hands With The Devil* and a documentary companion has also been issued. Another poignant book about the horrific Rwandan genocide include *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families* by Philip Gourevitch<sup>31</sup>. One of the outstanding aspects of the Rwandan genocide is that the entire reign of terror, in which an estimated 800,000 to 1 million people lost their lives, took only 100 days. Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You...* offers some insights into how easily the killing was done, as in this passage:

"Rwandan culture is a culture of fear," Nkongoli went on. "I remember what people said." He adopted a pipey voice, and his face took on a look of disgust: " 'Just let us pray, then kill us,' or 'I don't want to die in the street, I want to die at home.' " He resumed his normal voice. "When you're that resigned and oppressed you're already dead. It shows the genocide was prepared for too long. I detest this fear. These victims of genocide had been psychologically prepared to expect death just for being Tutsi. They were being killed for so long that they were already dead."

The title of Gourevitch's book came from a physical letter sent to a cleric by a villager who had received word that the *interahamwe* killers were approaching. The letter begins very politely and undramatically, salutations and everything, and then goes on to drop the bomb that there are rumours of approaching death ('Tomorrow we will be killed...') and can the good cleric offer any help to the desperate villagers? Instead of offering succour, the priest fled to the US where his daughter lived and left his 'flock' to be massacred. Churches, in fact, turned out to be the worst places to seek refuge. They made perfect targets for the genocidaires: they were easily surrounded and torched, or made it easy for grenades and bullets to be utilised. Some of the biggest massacres took place inside churches. A salient aspect of the holocaust was that no creditable help was forthcoming from the international community. It was a military unit (including former guerrilla fighters) led by current Rwandan president Paul Kagame that penetrated Rwanda via Uganda and impressively overpowered the killer regime, bringing the madness to a halt.

'Genocide is a cheese sandwich. What does anyone care about a cheese sandwich? ...Who gives a shit? Crimes against humanity. Where's humanity? Who's humanity? You? Me? Did you see a crime committed against you? Hey, just a million Rwandans.'  
- From Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families*.

'Words can be the most powerful weapon in a person's arsenal.' – Paul Rusesabaginya, Rwandan genocide survivor and inspiration for the film *Hotel Rwanda*  
(For more about what happened in Rwanda in 1994, see the article entitled ***Harvest of Blood: An Example of 'Faction' Writing*** towards the end of this document).

As we examine some of the books about the horrors that human beings have inflicted on each other, especially over the last two centuries, why don't we also take a glimpse into some of the books on the possible causes of such conflicts?

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<sup>31</sup> ISBN: 0-374-28697-3

*'We will fight the war as if there were no White Paper, and we will fight the White Paper as if there were no war.'* - David Ben-Gurion, Jewish politician

- In his famous book, *The Lucifer Effect*, renowned social psychologist Philip Zimbardo argues that it is very easy for good people do bad things and moral people to act immorally. In short, the line between good and evil is thinner than most people realize. Based on his own experiments with his students, Zimbardo theorizes that certain situations and **group dynamics** can 'make monsters out of decent men and women'. The results of his studies on human behavior are shocking, illuminating, engrossing – and no doubt controversial.

*'Now the wrong and the right  
And the right and the wrong  
Why can't we all just get along?'*  
- Carbon/Silicon, *Why Do Men Fight?* (song)

- In her book, *Triggers of Violence*, Anzette Were links conflict-related trauma to the sense of disempowerment often experienced by men in hopeless situations. She postulates that boys and men are most driven to acts of violence when they are the unable to provide food, shelter, education and security to their families and the community at large.

*'Either war is obsolete, or men are.'* – R. Buckminster Fuller, American engineer

- Famed Cuban revolutionary and global icon of rebellion, Che Guevara, authored a book entitled *Handbook of Guerrilla Warfare*. In the passage below, he seeks to give some perspective to militant revolutionary activity vis-à-vis terrorism:

*'It is necessary to distinguish very clearly between sabotage, a revolutionary and highly effective form of warfare, and terrorism, a measure that is generally ineffective in its effects. Since it often makes victims of innocent people and destroys a large number of lives...its use, by provoking police oppression, hinders all more or less, legal and clandestine contact with the masses.'*

*'In the last three thousand years, we have fought five thousand wars.'* – Osho, Indian spiritual leader

In his hard-hitting book, *Invisible Armies*, Stephen Seguller makes no bones about the power of terrorism:

**'No government can protect everything and everyone, everywhere and constantly. The terrorist can strike at anyone, anywhere, at any time. Nothing will eliminate terrorism; defeating it is a pipe-dream.'**



**Security agents rescue civilians during the Westgate Mall terror attack (left) and Kenya Defence Force footage shows aerial view of final damage to the popular shopping mall (right)**

In *World Policy Journal*, Zachary Karabell writes:

‘Ask American college students, in the elite universities or elsewhere, what they think when the world “Muslim” is mentioned. The response is invariably the same: gun-toting, bearded, fanatic terrorists hellbent on destroying the great enemy, the United States.’

The year before he died, aged 84, tough-talking Pulitzer-prize winning American author Norman Mailer participated in a lengthy televised debate in which he trashed the notion that we should give up essential liberties, or live in a permanent state of fear, due to terrorism. He argued that according to ‘the numbers’, the odds of the average person becoming the victim of a terrorist attack are extremely slim. He said that people who live in terrorism-prone areas, like Israel, should treat the sporadic attacks the way a house owner with a pest problem learns to live with the same. The remarks were made while promoting a disquieting book he had co-authored with his youngest son, John Buffalo Mailer, entitled *The Big Empty*. Below are some snatches of the conversation (Norman speaking):

- ‘I’ll give you a metaphor. If I’m living in a house and there are vermin in the house, I may have to accept those vermin. I can run around stomping on them all day long or I can get various kinds of chemicals to spray. If I can’t stop the vermin, do I burn the house down? Do I move to another house I can’t afford? Or do I just live with the vermin? The answer is: You live with it.’
- ‘We can’t give everything we have achieved in a couple of hundred years away in order to stop terrorists...We have to live with a certain amount of anxiety and uncertainty.’
- ‘There is no living with terrorism if all you say is, “Oh, we can all be destroyed tomorrow crossing the street”. The odds are enormous you won’t be destroyed tomorrow crossing the street.’

- 'There is a certain toughness of fibre that the Israelis (have) of necessity, given their history and their origins. They live with terrorism. They hate it. Of course they hate it. I hate it. I hate terrorism.'
- 'You're not going to get rid of terrorism by saying, we're going to bring democracy to a country. The number of terrorists may well increase in Iraq if they ever do get true democracy, which I doubt.'

Norman Mailer was one of America's most beloved and outspoken writers. His books include *Ancient Evenings* (set in ancient Egypt), *The Naked and the Dead*, *Barbary Shore* (about Socialism and Communism), *The Presidential Papers*, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, *The Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song*. He won the coveted Pulitzer Prize twice, for *The Armies of the Night* (1968), which also bagged the National Book Award, and for *The Executioner's Song* (1979). For 6 decades, he was a public figure and participated in varied fields of life, including making movies and running for Mayor of New York City. He was married 6 times and fathered 9 children, all of whom survived him.

*'Have all our revolutions, all our changes of creed, all the bloodshed and the burning, made men happier?'* – Andrew Lang, *St. Andrews*

- Whistleblower John Perkins is best known for his book on institutionalized (and, he claims, militarized) economic bullying by Western nations, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. Allegedly a former insider in US government takeovers of Third World economies, John Perkins - who has been interviewed countless times since his revelations – has lived several lives: as an economic hit man (EHM), as the CEO of a successful alternative energy company (who was rewarded for not disclosing his EHM past) and as a best-selling author. His books include: *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, *The Secret History of the American Empire* and *Hoodwinked: An Economic Hit Man Reveals Why the Global Economy IMPLoded -- and How to Fix It*. Perkins' Twitter handle is **@economic\_hitman** and his website is [www.johnperkins.org](http://www.johnperkins.org).

**'Do one thing every day to make the world better.'**

–John Perkins, author of *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*

- Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*<sup>32</sup>, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*) unwittingly found himself in the middle of a politico-religious storm after publishing *The Satanic Verses* which offended many Muslims. Iranian revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, issued a *fatwa* (death edict) on Mr. Rushdie on February 14, 1989. The Booker Prize Winner, who was then living in the UK, had no choice but to live in hiding, moving often (sometimes he'd sleep in two or three beds in one night!) Meanwhile, British Muslim protesters marched on the streets with banners that read 'RUSH TO DIE'. This controversy alone soured diplomatic relations between the UK (which was protecting him) and Iran. Things cooled off after some years. The *fatwa* was eventually lifted and Rushdie re-emerged from life on the run. He famously made a cameo in the comedy hit movie *Bridget Jones Diary*

<sup>32</sup> 'A new kind of fiction of the highest order: magical, artistic, urgently political.' – *New Statesman*



(based on the bestseller of the same title<sup>33</sup>) and sparred with literary rival John le Carré (*A Perfect Spy*). Interestingly, Rushdie maintains that he has no regrets about writing the book:

'I am content with the book I wrote and I hope it can now take its proper place on the bookshelf and can simply be read and studied so that people can make up their own minds.'

He has so far managed to keep body and soul together.

*'It is no secret that my childhood was in Bombay...But you fall in love with particular cities at a particular point in time. Mumbai is not Bombay. It just happens to be the same place.'* - Salman Rushdie

- In December 2013, more than 500 of the world's leading authors, including five Nobel Prize winners, signed a petition condemning the massive state surveillance practices revealed by NSA whistleblower, Edward Snowden. They warned that spy agencies are undermining democracy and must be curbed by a new international charter. The scribes urged the United Nations to create an international bill of digital rights that would enshrine the protection of civil rights in the Internet age. The internationally-renowned writers, who came from 81 different countries, included Margaret Atwood (Canada), Günter Grass (Germany), Arundhati Roy (India), JM Coetzee (South Africa), Mikhail Shishkin (Russia) and Julian Barnes, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Irvine Welsh, Hari Kunzru, Jeanette Winterson and Kazuo Ishiguro (all from Great Britain).



#### **A FEELING FOR SNOW: Snowden temporarily sought refuge in Russia**

*'Rulers see through spies, as cows through smell, Brahmins through scriptures and the rest of the world through their normal eyes.'* – Kautilya, Indian philosopher

- Nelson DeMille served in Vietnam in Army Intelligence and in the infantry as a Lieutenant before embarking on a writing career. He is the author of over a dozen novels including *By the Rivers of Babylon*, *Word of Honor*, *The Charm School* and *Plum Island*. *By the Rivers of Babylon*<sup>34</sup> addresses the incessant Arab-Jew Middle East conflict. In it, a booby-trapped Israeli Concorde<sup>35</sup> crash-lands in a desert but the passengers survive. The plane wreck becomes a microcosm of the State of Israel as the marooned passengers fight to keep a gang of Arab militants at bay. Nelson DeMille undertook extensive research for the novel – including placing a small bomb in the tail of a model Concorde.

*'After two thousand years of masses, we have progressed to poison gasses.'*

<sup>33</sup> The book sold about 1 million copies in the UK alone

<sup>34</sup> 'Not since *Exodus* has there been such a raw powerful story of the Middle East.' – Harold Robbins, author

<sup>35</sup> Concorde – French-made supersonic passenger jet, now out of production



– From Nelson DeMille's *The Charm School* (a novel)

- During the historic 1968 US presidential race, Joe McGinnis, a newspaper reporter, worked on Richard Nixon's advertising and media staff for several months without getting noticed. In his resultant book, *The Selling of the President*, McGinnis showed how Nixon's advisors used TV to create a 'new Nixon'. The book postulated that televised images had supplanted serious issues in American political campaigns. Here's a snippet:

'What the camera showed was Nixon's hunger. He lost, and bitter, confused, he blamed it on his beard. He made another, lesser thrust in 1962, and that failed, too. He showed the world a little piece of his heart the morning after and then went East to brood.'

The *Sunday Telegraph* described *The Selling of the President* as 'Probably the most irreverent book ever written about a President while he is still occupying White House. It will enrage Mr. Nixon, bring cackles of delight from his opposition and set serious minds fretting about the way an American politician now needs to be packaged and glamourized if he is to have any hope of reaching high office.' The Nixon presidency would eventually be cut short by the infamous Watergate Scandal which could have resulted in the president going to jail<sup>36</sup>. Through a piece of admirable political horse-trading, Nixon resigned the presidency in 1974 and his vice president took over office. The new president then gave Nixon a presidential pardon for his crimes, allowing the ageing politician to escape a possible jail term. On his last day in White House, Nixon said thank you and goodbye to his staff in a televised speech which contained the words:

'Always remember: others may hate you but those who hate you do not win unless you hate them (back). And then you destroy yourself.'<sup>37</sup>

Joe McGinnis went on to write other *New York Times* bestselling non-fiction books, including *The Last Brother*, which revolves around the life of former Senator Teddy Kennedy, JFK's youngest brother. 'Controversy rages around this book,' said *Cosmopolitan*, '...the sad story of Teddy Kennedy, neglected by his parents, overshadowed by his brothers, who grew up to drive too fast, drink too much, and through carelessness and arrogance, destroy his own bright promise.'

'The feeling that pervaded America in the early months of 1964 was that, like Jesus, he (J. F. Kennedy) had died for our sins. We wanted to consume him symbolically – his body and his blood...His brothers (Robert and Teddy Kennedy) were as close to him as we could get. They were the resurrection and the life.' - From *The Last Brother*

Joe McGinnis famously locked horns with Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin when she became John McCain's presidential running mate on a Republican ticket. Joe McGinnis wanted to write a book<sup>38</sup> about her and went as far as renting the patio of her neighbour, so that he could observe her comings and goings. Ms. Palin – a former beauty queen who had

<sup>36</sup> 'Some of the best writing was done in prison,' Nixon joked, anticipating his future.

<sup>37</sup> *Days That Shook The World*, BBC Documentary

<sup>38</sup> The working title of the book was *Sarah Palin's Year of Living Dangerously*

invigorated the ageing McCain's race against Obama – took exception to McGinnis' scrutiny and made no secret of her ire. This being the digital age, she took pictures of the author spying on her from her neighbours' veranda and posted them on social media sites castigating the scribe for invading her privacy and questioning what the former journalist could possibly glean from watching her family like a Peeping Tom.

- In *Barack H. Obama: The Unauthorized Biography*, controversial historian/author Webster Griffin Tarpley alleges that, far from being his own man, Barack Obama is, in fact, a 'puppet' and 'Manchurian Candidate'<sup>39</sup>. He argues that the real power behind the throne is a clique of money-men and power brokers. In the book, Webster Griffin Tarpley covers the personal history Obama: from a dysfunctional childhood in a bi-racial home to getting an Ivy League education and finally a story-book adventure to the White House as the first-ever African-American president of the United States. Concerning young Barack Obama's father figures, and the allegation that Barack is a Muslim not a Christian, Webster Griffin Tarpley has this to say:

**'The two Third-World men Ann Dunham (ie. Barack Obama's mother) had chosen to marry had a few things in common: both were nominal Moslems whose devotion to Johnny Walker Black Label scotch whiskey was greater than their devotion to the Koran.'**<sup>40</sup>

The hard drinking and other unbecoming habits of Barack Obama's Kenyan father are well-documented and by no means a secret. How did Barack Junior counteract the effect of his uninspiring father and end up becoming a much-admired dad to daughters Sasha and Malia and husband to Michelle? In his commencement address to Morehouse College graduands (class of 2013) Barack Obama explained:

'My whole life, I've tried to be for Michelle and my girls what my father was not for my mother and me. I want to break that cycle where a father's not at home, where a father's not helping to raise that son or daughter. I've tried to be a better father, a better husband, a better man.'

Incidentally, Barack's most recent literary effort, a book entitled *Of Thee I Sing*, is dedicated to his two daughters, Sasha and Malia. Written in the form of a letter, it profiles 13 legendary Americans and the ideals that helped shape the United States. It is noteworthy that the book was initially released in e-book format and was already well-known and reviewed by the time it hit print. His previous bestsellers were *Dreams From my Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*.

<sup>39</sup> Page 4, *Barack H. Obama: The Unauthorized Biography*, ISBN-13: 978-0-930852-91-7

<sup>40</sup> Page 30, *Barack H. Obama: The Unauthorized Biography*, ISBN-13: 978-0-930852-91-7



Photo: The Washington Post

**Obama with daughters Sasha and Malia in a 'Politics and Prose' bookstore. The man facing away from them appears to be a Secret Service agent.**

Webster Griffin Tarpley is also the author of the controversial non-fiction books *George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography* (1992), *9/11 Synthetic Terror: Made in the USA* (2005) and *Obama the Postmodern Coup: The Making of a Manchurian Candidate*.

Tarpley uses the phrase 'Manchurian Candidate'. This is derived from Richard Condon's second novel, *The Manchurian Candidate*, which tells the Cold War story of a US Army man whose brain is covertly programmed by the Chinese (after he is nabbed in Korea), making him the perfect assassin. The book was a massive bestseller and contains some of the best thriller writing this side of Ian Fleming. It was turned into an iconic film of the same title, featuring Frank Sinatra, and a re-make was recently made, starring Denzel Washington. Below is an excerpt from the original book version:

'Big John was generating noise out of every orifice, switching syntax, darting his eyes about, and flashing that meaty look in his unshaven face, he was the commonest kind of common man forty ways to the ace.'

- In his book, *Empire of Illusions*, author Chris Hedges lends his voice to the growing number of critics and conspiracy theorists who claim that Obama's occupancy of White House is little more than a triumph of sleek marketing and PR. 'President Obama does one thing and Brand Obama gets you to believe another,' he writes. 'This is the essence of successful advertising. You buy or do what the advertiser wants because of how they make you feel.'

'(Republican presidential candidate) John McCain is on to something. There was a time in my life when I started palling around with a pretty ugly crowd, I've got to be honest. These guys were serious deadbeats, they were low-lives, they were unrepentant, no-good punks. That's right - I've been a member of the United States Senate.' – Senator Barack Obama being hilarious at the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner, as he campaigned for presidency for the first time

- By the time he became president, Barack Obama had two non-fiction books to his name. *Dreams From My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*. He had previously authored many articles and been elected Editor of the *Harvard Law Review* at the end of his first year at Harvard University. Writing for *The Wall Street Journal*, journalist Jonathan Raban said that Obama writes so well, 'he could as easily be a novelist as a politician.'

Talking of novelists, the quotable Benjamin Disraeli (author of *Sybil*) was a novelist of some note before becoming British Prime Minister (twice).

After his controversial presidency, George Bush Jr released a book entitled *Decision Points*. It was aggressively marketed and reportedly sold 220,000 copies on its day of release (including 50,000 in e-book format). Other books written by American presidents include *My Life* by Bill Clinton (400,000 copies sold on first day of sales); *RN* by Richard Nixon (autobiography), *Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy; *Why Not the Best?* (campaign autobiography) and *An Hour Before Daylight* by Jimmy Carter; *Hunting the Grisly* and *The Rough Riders* by Theodore Roosevelt and *Personal Memoirs* by Ulysses Grant.

*'History will remember me kindly for I intend to write it.'* — Winston Churchill

- The Brothers Čapek – Josef and Karel – were the best-known literary figures of liberated Czechoslovakia after 1918. Josef was a painter but collaborated with his brother in composing sketches, and short stories. He also penned critical essays in which he defended the art of the unconscious. Karel wrote novels, visionary romances, travel books and essays, but is best known for his stage plays, the last of which were written just before Hitler's entry into Czechoslovakia and dealt with the rise of dictatorship and the terrible consequences of war. The Brothers Čapek's most famous work is the tragi-comic theatre piece, *The Insect Play* (or *And so Ad Infinitum*).

Karel died in 1938, on Christmas Day. Following Hitler's invasion of 1939, Josef Čapek was sent to a German concentration camp. He died at Belsen in April 1945.

- It is estimated that about 700 books have been written about Adolf Hitler alone. According to online social-political commentator, Guy Evans, Hitler was influenced by a 1928 book called *Propaganda*, written by Sigmund Freud's American nephew, Edward L. Bernays<sup>41</sup>. The following is the most-quoted passage from the book:

'The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.'

In his own book, written while he was in prison, Hitler demonstrated his mastery of propaganda:

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<sup>41</sup> Believed to be the father of 'Public Relations'

'The unremitting use of propaganda can convince people that the most miserable existence is paradise and that Heaven is Hell.' – From *Mein Kampf* (English: *My Struggle*)

Hitler clearly saw propaganda as a key tool in governance. His writings, speeches, et al, don't indicate that he believed the public could be trusted to think/act as he desired:

'The masses are feminine and stupid. Only emotion and hatred can keep them under control.' - Adolf Hitler

According to the documentary film, *Apocalypse: The Rise and Fall of Adolf Hitler*, the man who would later go on to become the world's greatest villain was a failed artist in his youth. He loved both fine art and the theatre. He was particularly fascinated with operas (like Wagner's *Parsifal*) and their tales of great heroes. He fought in World War I and was badly injured, requiring prolonged hospitalization. For his service, he received an Iron Cross medal that he proudly wore (sometimes under his work clothes). He would later meet up with influential politicians and businessmen and the now infamous Nazi Party was formed. Initially, the newly-fangled Nazi party won a very tiny number of parliamentary seats, and therefore had difficulty moving policy, but it came across as a group to watch. The Nazis were considered radical and even revolutionary and Hitler was temporarily arrested. His sentence was rather like a home arrest and he was able to receive guests into his well-appointed cell and work on his forthcoming book, *Mein Kampf*. He had been rising up the ranks of the Nazi party and his book would be part of his power play. His grandiose ambitions for his book, and therefore himself, indicate that he was a man of limitless ambition. He wanted the book to be a kind of modern-day Bible, of which he was the Jesus, Mary and Moses combined. When he got out of prison and published the memoir, he got lukewarm sales despite an impressive marketing campaign.

He re-entered the political arena and quickly demonstrated a knack for rallying the masses. He used his military background to gain political sympathy. He gave impassioned speeches. Some say he got his impressive hand gestures and public speaking skills from his days in theatre. Germany had been humiliated in World War I and forced to accept numerous concessions after the fact. The Versailles Treaty was a bitter pill for Germans to swallow but they had no choice. It appeared that the other European powers, Britain and France in particular, wanted to make Germany pay financially and politically for 'the Great War.' According to *Apocalypse: The Rise and Fall of Adolf Hitler*, Germany was being treated almost like a Third World country. The Nazis promised a return to glory. They gave hope that Germany would be great once more. The Nazi Party went from strength to strength and eventually took power in Germany. Shortly afterwards, Hitler invaded Poland and World War II began.

Contrary to popular belief, most Germans did not jump into the Nazi bandwagon because they felt superior to other people or were power hungry, anti-Semitic or murderous. Many of them harboured the feeling that Germany had lost too much in the forced post-World War I pacts (the Treaty of Versailles, in particular) and they rallied behind the Nazi party because the said political party promised to get back what had been forcefully taken away.

## THINGS WE LOST IN THE WAR

*'May the hand wither that signs this treaty.'* - Frederick Scheidemann,  
the German Chancellor (June 1919), before he resigned rather than agree to the Treaty

*'Those who sign this treaty, will sign the death sentence of many millions of German men,  
women and children.'* - Count Brockdorff-Rantzau,  
leader of the German delegation to Versailles (15 May 1919)

The **Treaty of Versailles** was one of the [peace treaties](#) at the end of World War I. It ended the state of war between Germany and [the Allied Powers](#). It was signed on 28 June 1919, exactly five years after the [assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand](#).

Of the many provisions in the treaty, one of the most important and controversial required 'Germany [to] accept the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage' during the war (the other members of the Central Powers signed treaties containing similar articles). This article, [Article 231](#), later became known as the War Guilt clause. **The treaty forced Germany to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions, and pay reparations to certain countries that had formed the Entente powers.** In 1921 the total cost of these reparations was assessed at 132 billion Marks (then \$31.4 billion or £6.6 billion, roughly equivalent to US \$442 billion or UK £284 billion in 2014).

The Treaty of Versailles, whose 440 Articles demobilised and reduced the military forces of Germany, reduced its lands by 14%, and left 12.5% of the German people living outside German borders. With this treaty, **Germany also was stripped of its colonial empire in East Africa.** Article 27 stripped Germany of much boundary land, which was distributed to Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Austria, Czech-Slovakia, Poland and France (which claimed coal mines in the Saar Basin as reparation for the mines destroyed in France). In addition, Germany was forbidden to build any fortification on the Rhine. Territories ceded in the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871 were returned to France, as well.

In the treaties concerning African protectorates, France and Britain divided German Kamerun (Cameroons); Belgium gained small parts of northwestern German East Africa; the United Kingdom by far the greater landmass, notably Tanganyika (later Tanzania). Togoland was divided between France and Britain; German South West Africa was annexed to the Union of South Africa. In the Pacific, Japan gained Germany's islands north of the equator (the Carolines and Marianas) and Kiaochow (Jiaozhou) Bay in China. German Samoa and German New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago were assigned to New Zealand and Australia<sup>42</sup>.

*'You must carve in your heart  
These words, as in stone -  
What we have lost*

<sup>42</sup> Further reading: *The German Offensives of 1918* by Martin Kitchen (Tempus Publishing, 2001), *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff and the First World War* by Robert B Asprey (Time Warner Paperbacks, 1994), *Peacemakers* by Margaret MacMillan (John Murray, 2001), *Land and Power: British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-19* by H Nelson (David and Charles, 1971), *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* by P Bell (Longman, 1986)



*Will be regained!*

- 'Lost but not forgotten land'

(A poem found on the back of a German postcard, produced about the time of the Treaty of Versailles, showing the land where Germans lived)

Sources: Wikipedia.org, [johnclare.net](http://johnclare.net), et al

At the heyday of the Nazi regime, *Mein Kampf* became something akin to a holy book in Germany. According to some reports, not having a copy of the book in your home was considered unpatriotic and in even suspicious. As you might expect, the sales it achieved are every publisher's wet dream. In recent times (especially after 2009), the e-book version of *Mein Kampf* has been a bestseller on Amazon and iTunes.



Images: *Apocalypse: The Rise and Fall of Adolf Hitler* (documentary)

## **BESTSELLER: Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* being read all over Germany**

*'We will continue our struggle, fanatically and without pity, until death!'* - Adolf Hitler

According to the BBC documentary series, *Days that Shook the World*, Hitler spent his last days in a bunker under Berlin, as the city made a last stand against Stalin's forces. With him underground were some trusted lieutenants and his mistress, Eva Braun. One of Hitler's henchmen was so devoted to the Führer that his four daughters all had names that began with the letter 'H'. Hitler and Eva got married in the bunker in a small, sombre, ceremony. As Berlin fell to the advancing Russians, it is said that both Hitler and Eva committed suicide<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Some people hold the view that Hitler actually escaped and the tale of his suicide and the burning of his body by his henchmen is actually a cover-up story.

*'Churhill understood that in 1945. He wanted to advance beyond Berlin to free all the nations that bordered Russia. But the West had had a bellyful of war by then and left Stalin to take advantage of that apathy.'*

- Jeffery Archer, *The Hungarian Professor* (short story), *A Quiver Full of Arrows*

- Günter Grass, author of *The Tin Drum*, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999. Grass is Germany's best-known post-World War II writer and a legend in annals of literature. He served in the air force during the war, was captured by the Americans and held as a prisoner of war. After WWII, he remained active in politics.

His literary reputation was made with *The Tin Drum*, *Cat and Mouse* and *Dog Years*, published between 1959 and 1963. *The Tin Drum* tells the story of character Oskar Matzerath, who refuses to grow up under the Nazi regime and instead remains a dwarf who beats a tin drum as a warning. Oskar's stunted growth is believed to be a metaphor for lack of social/political/cultural development. The book became a hit and sold 300,000 copies in Germany alone (1 million in the US). 'It was as if German literature had been granted a new beginning after decades of linguistic and moral destruction,' said the Stockholm-based Nobel Academy.

Politically, Grass supported the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In 1965, 1969 and 1972, he actively supported the SDP in national parliamentary elections, making campaign trips of his own. In a speech at Princeton, US, in 1966, Grass 'separated literature from politics, the poet from the election campaigner'<sup>44</sup>. His book *Diary of a Snail* (1972), however, shows a link between the writer and the social democrat. In 1966, Grass play *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising* was staged. The next year, he released a poetry anthology entitled *Interrogated* which contains a long 'protest poem'. Inspired by the anti-Vietnam protests in the US, Grass released the novel *Local Anaesthetic* in 1969, to wide acclaim. *Time* magazine called him, 'a man whose words reach the youth.' The quick re-unification of Germany in 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, alarmed Grass who feared that the country might stray again:

*'It can't be that my children and grand-children will have to suffer under the stigma of being German. These late-born children also have a share of the responsibility for ensuring that such things – even their stirrings – never happen in Germany again.'*

- It is no exaggeration to say that World War II changed the course of all mankind. Apart from the political, economic and social upheavals that derived directly from it, many technologies that we use today were either invented or perfected during, or just after, the war. These include rockets, submarines, helicopters and, of course, the atomic bomb.

*'The time of scientific innocence, together with its implied reassurance, has passed, having definitely ended on the morning of July 16, 1945, at Alamogordo, New Mexico, when the atomic theory established its own conclusive proof that it was no longer a theory.'*

- Charles Berlitz, *The Bermuda Triangle*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Gunter Grass: About Drawing and Writing*, published by the Goethe-Institut

<sup>45</sup> 5-million-copy bestseller

Many works of literature (and other arts like film) also reflect, or are based upon, this dark chapter in human history. The individual books set during WWII are too numerous to mention (some individual novelists have several books *each* on the subject) so I will just pick two, as examples:

*The English Patient* by Sri Lankan-born Michael Ondaatje is a love story set amongst the ruins of a villa in Tuscany, at the end of WWII. In it, a Canadian nurse tends to a badly injured pilot - the 'English' patient (who is in fact a Hungarian aristocrat shot down by the Germans). *The English Patient* won the 1992 Booker Prize and was turned in a multiple-Oscar-award-winning film, starring Ralph Fiennes and Kristin Scott Thomas.

*Catch-22* by America's Joseph Heller (*God Knows*) is a big, psychologically complex, but very funny novel about an American airforce base off the Italian coast where the soldiers are stranded in more ways than one. It contains such odd characters as Milo Minderbender who bombs his own airfield in exchange for a promise from the Germans of the cost of the mission plus 6% and Yossarian who is continually trying to avoid combat duty<sup>46</sup>. The book sold more than a million copies and added the word 'Catch-22' to the English dictionary.

'I won't try to define *Catch-22*. I believe the book remains relevant in so many ways. It deals not so much with the war situation but our societal situation in which people are at the mercy of other people.' – Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*

*'Do not mourn for me: I shall have influenced history more than any other German.'* – Dietrich Eckhart

- Former Mexican diplomat Carlos Fuentes is now a prolific, acerbic columnist as well as a novelist, essayist and short story writer. A major figure in the Mexican literary landscape, Mr. Fuentes burst into the spotlight with his 1958 novel, *Where the Air is Clear*, and has since won 'just about every literary accolade except the Nobel Prize.' In 1999, he was conferred the Belisario Dominguez Prize which is awarded annually to distinguished Mexicans. He used the award buzz to slam economic globalisation for impoverishing millions of people:

'We live in a globalised world. It is not a fair world but it can be a better one.'

- Dario Fo (b 1926) is an Italian actor, playwright, comedian, singer, theatre director, stage designer, songwriter and political campaigner, and recipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize in Literature. Internationally, his best-known works are *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and *Can't Pay Won't Pay*. He has been described as 'Arguably the most widely performed contemporary playwright in world theatre' and his plays have been translated into 30 languages and performed across the world.

His work of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is peppered with criticisms of assassinations, corruption, organised crime, racism, Roman Catholic theology and war. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, he criticized [Forza Italia](#) and its leader, Silvio Berlusconi. Following the European sovereign-debt crisis, his biting satire now targets 'banks mostly, and the big

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<sup>46</sup> 'No one has ever written a book like this.' – *Financial Times*

entrepreneurs...those who – through the media, television and in other ways – make every effort to ensure that the people accept the conditions they find themselves in.'

As controversial as they come, Fo's solo piece *Mistero Buffo*, which was performed across Europe, Canada and Latin America over a 30-year period, is recognised as one of the most controversial and popular spectacles in postwar European theatre and has been denounced by the Vatican as 'the most blasphemous show in the history of television'. Fo is also the author of *The Pope and the Witch*. In 1980, United States authorities blocked Fo and literary collaborator Rame from performing at the country's Festival of Italian Theatre, with their banishment from the country compared to the country's similar treatment of Bertolt Brecht, Charlie Chaplin and Gabriel García Márquez. Americans Arthur Miller, Bernard Malamud, Richard Foreman and Martin Scorsese were among the intellectuals who opposed the 1980 banning of Fo by U.S. authorities.

Fo's receipt of the 1997 Nobel Prize in Literature marked the 'international acknowledgment of Fo as a major figure in twentieth-century world theatre'. The Swedish Academy praised Fo as a writer 'who emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden'.

In 2005, Fo revealed plans to run for Mayor of Milan, the most economically important city in Italy, the following year. He said it was part of his ongoing fight to rid Milan of Berlusconi's political colleague Gabriele Albertini, who was the incumbent mayor.

Fo's work certainly positions him as a champion for the downtrodden. In the *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, for example, a dissident suspiciously dies while in police custody and his death is vaguely dismissed by authorities as 'an accident'. This is a situation that finds echoes around the globe. The issue of police harassment and extra-judicial killings is one of the top social justice topics of our time.

- 'Playwright who became a president' was once a crossword clue in the *New York Times*<sup>47</sup>. The correct answer is: VACLAV HAVEL

Václav Havel (5 October 1936 – 18 December 2011) was a Czech playwright, essayist, poet, dissident and politician. As a youth, he was an avid reader who found a way to borrow university books before going to college. He began co-writing plays during his military service in the 1950s and staged first solo play, *The Garden Party*, in 1963. He was pro-democracy and very anti-communism and anti-soviet. He is said to have referred to the Communist USSR as 'Absurdistan'. His works were banned after a 1968 uprising (the 'Prague Spring') was crushed by a Soviet invasion involving war tanks. This made Havel even more politically active. His revolutionary motto was: 'Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred.'

His political activities resulted in multiple prison terms, and constant government surveillance as well as questioning by the secret police (Státní bezpečnost). His longest prison stretch, from May 1979 to February 1983, is documented in letters to his wife that were later published as *Letters to Olga*. He also became known for his essays, most

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<sup>47</sup> New York Times - Oct. 14, 2011

particularly *The Power of the Powerless*, in which he described a societal paradigm in which citizens were forced to 'live within a lie' under the communist regime.

On 29 December 1989, while he was leader of the Civic Forum, Havel became President of Czechoslovakia by a unanimous vote of the Federal Assembly. Havel was the 9th and last president of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and the first president of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

He wrote more than 20 plays and numerous non-fiction works, translated internationally. In 2005, Havel was voted 4th in *Prospect* magazine's global poll of the world's top 100 intellectuals.

- When it comes to penning political books, few people have been as prolific or influential as America's [Noam Chomsky](#) ('The Elvis of Academia'). For over four decades, he has been at the forefront of government-critiquing, thought-provoking, literature and his stature is now larger than life: he is a kind of intellectual rock star.

[Chomsky](#) is a linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, logician, political commentator and activist. Internationally revered as the 'father of modern linguistics', Chomsky is also a major figure in analytic philosophy. He has spent most of his career at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he is currently Professor Emeritus, and has authored over 100 books. He has been described as a prominent cultural figure, and was voted the 'world's top public intellectual' in a 2005 poll.

His numerous titles include *American Power and the New Mandarins*, a ferocious indictment of the Vietnam War. The description on the book jacket reads:

'American power is not wielded by napalm-crazy reactionaries who wish to bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age, but by the New Mandarins. This elite of liberal experts profess to analyze problems in a scientific, value-free language. Any human reaction to the war it condemns as "sentimental"; or, more accurately, the categories in which protests are formulated (honesty, indignation) simply do not exist for the tough-minded social scientist...Chomsky shows that unconscious bias distorts their view of the world, from Vietnam to historical events such as the Spanish Civil War. The New Mandarins have rejected the traditional role of the intellectual as conscience of the community. Their sophisticated techniques rest on dogmas about America's rectitude which are naive, crude – and frightening.'

Chomsky's more recent titles include: *On Western Terrorism: From Hiroshima to Drone Warfare* (with Andre Vltchek), *Power Systems: Conversations on Global Democratic Uprisings and the New Challenges to U.S. Empire*; *Power and Terror: Conflict, Hegemony, and the Rule of Force*; *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians*; *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*; *Perilous Power: The Middle East and US Foreign Policy*; *Government in the Future*, *Chomsky on Anarchism*; *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs* and *Secrets, Lies and Democracy*.

*'Gradually but unmistakably, America is showing signs of that arrogance of power which has afflicted, weakened and in some cases destroyed nations in the past.'* – J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*

- Nathan McCall's autobiography, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, has been described as 'perhaps the best analysis of race relationships in America today'. It tells the story of a young Black man, born of a working class family, and his sojourn through a racism-infested world.

For my money, the best book on race relations is *Black Like Me*, which was first published about 50 years ago. *Black Like Me* is the chilling true story of John Howard Griffin, a 39-year-old White journalist, who decided to 'cross the color line' and find out how life really was for the dark-skinned people in America's Deep South. Using medication, he darkened his skin colour and lived among the Black population for seven weeks. The year was 1959 (prior to the Million Man March and the passing of the major civil rights bill in 1964). As a black man, Griffin trudged southern streets searching for a place where he could eat or rest, looking vainly for a job other than menial labour and feeling the 'hate stare'.

When it was published in 1961, Griffin's book caused a major controversy and he was persecuted by fellow Whites for 'betraying' his real race. Despite that, the book became a runaway success and has sold ten million copies in addition to becoming a highly acclaimed classic! According to Bruce Watson of the *Smithsonian* magazine: 'A half century after its publication, *Black Like Me* retains its raw power...it's a well-written literary text that predates the "nonfiction novel" of Mailer, Capote, Tom Wolfe and others.'

Dr. Neal Hall, an African-American eye surgeon, has won over 10 prizes for his first poetry collection, *Nigger for Life*, in book festivals around the world. The title is derived from Dr. Neal's feeling that no matter what he does, he is always judged by his skin colour first. In Kenya to attend the 2013 StoryMoja Hay Festival, Dr. Neal told an interviewer on KTN TV that there were times when he would be going into or coming out of a surgical theatre and everyone thought he was the janitor, not the surgeon. When he tried to set up his own practice, he sensed the 'attitude' that lessors didn't trust a Black man to be a reliable tenant. When asked, in a KTN interview, whether Barack Obama's occupancy had improved the lot of African-Americans, Dr. Neal Hall replied in the negative, saying that the only true emancipation for Blacks will come when they are economically empowered. That's where the discrimination hides.




**BLACK LIKE ME: Dr. Neal Hall is interviewed on KTN's book review show**



- Stokely Carmichael, whose marriage to South Africa's Mariam Makeba seriously damaged the latter's singing career, was an African-American Civil Rights activist and writer. He authored the book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*<sup>48</sup> which was critically acclaimed. *The Tribune* said, 'Carmichael's book reveals the author – usually represented in the media as little more than a bundle of hate and fury – as an intelligent advocate of a palpably just cause.' He died of cancer on 15th November, 1998.

*'Death solves all problems – no man, no problem.'* – Russian dictator Joseph Stalin

- Malcolm X (aka El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) was an African-American Muslim minister and human rights activist. To his admirers he was a courageous advocate for the rights of Blacks, a man who indicted White America in the harshest terms for its crimes against Black Americans. Detractors accused him of preaching racism and violence. Still, he is recognised worldwide as one of the greatest and most influential African-Americans in history.

<b>'X' Marks the Spot</b>	
 <p><b>Malcolm X and poet Maya Angelou in Ghana in 1964</b></p>	<p>Name: Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little)  D.O.B: May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.  Died: February 21, 1965 (aged 39) in New York City, New York, U.S.  Cause of death : Assassination (multiple gunshots)  Other names El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz  Occupation: Minister, activist  Organizations: Nation of Islam, Muslim Mosque, Inc., Organization of Afro-American Unity  Political movements: Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism  Religion: Sunni Islam (converted from Nation of Islam)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Source: Wikipedia</i></p>

The highly influential book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, was published in 1965, and came about as a result of a collaboration between Malcolm X and journalist Alex Haley. Haley co-authored the autobiography based on a series of in-depth interviews he conducted between 1963 and Malcolm X's 1965 assassination. *The Autobiography* is a spiritual conversion narrative that outlined Malcolm X's philosophy of Black Pride, Black Nationalism, and pan-Africanism. It was also the basis of the 1992 film *Malcom X*, which was shot by legendary director 'Spike' Lee and starred Denzel Washington (written by [James Baldwin](#)

<sup>48</sup> 'No mere rabble-rousing broadsheet. Stokely Carmichael's answers may be wrong but he asks a lot of good questions.' – *Daily Telegraph*

and [Arnold Perl](#)). In 1998, *Time* named *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* one of ten 'required reading' non-fiction books.

**'We declare our right on this earth...to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.' – Malcom X**

- Reggae (or 'dub') poet [Mutabaruka](#) (Allan Hope) was born on 26 December 1952 in Kingston, Jamaica. Mutabaruka has written poems on every issue known to man. He is known for his expression and lively performances as much as for the poems themselves. Some of his themes include sexism, politics, discrimination, poverty, race, and religion. In his youth, he was influenced by such books as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. He converted to Rastafarianism and has defended 'livity' with such poems/songs as *Dispel the Lie*.

In July 1971, *Swing Magazine* published for the first time a poem by Allan Mutabaruka. Their readers were 'ecstatic' and the magazine continued publishing the 'brother'. Mutabaruka's first book, *The First Poems*, was launched in the 1980s and took off well. A sequel entitled *The Next Poems* was launched on 10 March 2005. In the spring of 2007, Mutabaruka had the chance to teach African American studies at Merritt College. Below is an excerpt of Mutabaruka's best known poem, entitled *Dis Poem*:

*'...dis poem is vexed about apartheid rascism fascism  
the klu klux klan riots in brixton atlanta  
jim jones  
dis poem is revoltin against 1st world 2nd world  
3rd world division man made decision  
dis poem is like all the rest  
dis poem will not be amongst great literary works  
will not be recited by poetry enthusiasts  
will not be quoted by politicians nor men of religion  
dis poem is knives bombs guns blood fire  
blazin for freedom  
yes dis poem is a drum  
ashanti mau mau ibo yoruba nyahbingi warriors  
uhuru uhuru  
uhuru namibia  
uhuru soweto  
uhuru afrika...'*

- An admirer of India's founding father, Mahatma<sup>49</sup> Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr was a charismatic Black preacher who pushed for Civil Rights in America during the volatile 1960s. Adopting Mahatma's famous non-violence stance, he organised marches and rallies in aid of racial equality in the United States (notably the 'Million Man March' in Washington DC). His 'non-violent' efforts of course sometimes turned violent (like Gandhi's) as police clashed with

<sup>49</sup> His first name was actually a title given to him by his followers; it means 'Great Soul'

marchers. Martin Luther King Jr was himself assassinated, at the age of 35, when he stepped out onto the balcony of a motel in Washington DC.

Conspiracy theories about his death continue to echo around the globe to this day. The assassin was a White man who had just been released from prison and had a military background. He booked a room in a hotel opposite Dr. King's motel, set up his sniper rifle and waited as patiently a vulture for the opportune time. Meanwhile, Martin Luther remained closeted in his room, resting, preparing a speech he would deliver at a function that evening and receiving guests. Across the street, the hit man waited. Towards evening, Dr. King, who was now preparing for his evening engagement, stepped out onto the balcony and began chatting with Reverend Jesse Jackson, who had just driven up. The assassin saw his chance – and with a single bullet, he made his mark on history. As soon as Dr. King went down, his associates raised the alarm. Across the street, the hit man quickly packed up his weapon and fled from the hotel. Realizing that the nearby streets were too dangerous, he dropped the murder weapon and run away. As the news of Dr. King's death spread, violent riots (fires, looting, clashes with riot police) broke out in dozens of American towns. As for the assassin himself, there are more questions than answers:

- Why did a man just 'sprung' from prison immediately go after a Black leader instead of partying, re-uniting with old friends etc? (Even if he was a Racist)
- The receptionist at his hotel, and other shopkeepers nearby, testified that he paid for everything in cash, peeling off brand new 20-dollar notes from a fat wad. Where did he get this stash from? (As in who was his paymaster?)
- Does the fact that he was a former soldier point to a larger conspiracy involving the military?

Interestingly, Martin Luther King Jr's idol, Mahatma Gandhi, was also assassinated (at a time when conflicts between Hindus and Muslims were at an all-time high<sup>50</sup>). Gandhi was shot at point-blank range on 30 January 1948, by a man called Nathuram Godse who was armed with a pistol. The motive is debatable but according to conventional wisdom, there were those who felt that Gandhi (ever the pacifist) was ceding too much to the Muslims during the birth of Pakistan. So much for 'non-violence'!

There are numerous books about Martin Luther King Jr, including quite a number by King himself, mostly compilations of his sermons, speeches and thoughts. These include: *Why We Can't Wait*, *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, *Strength to Love*, *The Measure of a Man*, *All Labor Has Dignity* and *A Time to Break Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King Jr for Students*. Clayborne Carson (a historian, documentarian, and director of the King Papers Project) has used both published and unpublished material to come up with an 'autobiography' of King. The book, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr*, gives a first-person account of the famed leader's life, from his birth in Atlanta in 1929 to his awakening social consciousness and discovery of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

**'Love is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed.'** -

Mahatma Gandhi, Indian nationalist leader

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<sup>50</sup> It was the division between the Hindus and the Muslims that lead to the creation of two separate states after the ouster of the British Colonial Empire: Muslim-dominated 'Pakistan' and Hindu-dominated 'India'

**A WORD TO THE WISE: Great Political Quotes**

*'Ethics is a branch of politics. It is therefore the duty of the statesman to create for the citizen the best possible opportunity of living the good life.'* – Aristotle, *Ethics*

*'Leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them.'* - John C. Maxwell, motivational writer/speaker

*'You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.'* - Woodrow Wilson, US President

*'For when we have faced down impossible odds, when we've been told we're not ready or that we shouldn't try or that we can't, generations of Americans have responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can. Yes, we can. Yes, we can.'*  
- Barack Obama

*'For no government is better than the men who compose it, and I want the best, and we need the best, and we deserve the best.'* - Senator John F. Kennedy, speech at Wittenberg College, Oct. 17, 1960)

*'Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though chequered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the grey twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.'* - Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919

*'One can easily fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all the time but one cannot fool all the people all the time.'* – Abraham Lincoln

*'Men make history, not the other way round.'* –Harry Truman, former US President

*'An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.'*  
— Winston Churchill

*'In the absence of justice, what is sovereignty but organised robbery?'* - North African bishop Saint Augustine

*'Governments saw men only in mass; but our men, being irregulars, were not formations but individuals...Our Kingdoms lay in each man's heart.'* – T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

*'Both men are in the Navy, know martial arts, and use profanity the way politician use doublespeak.'* – From Michael Hauge's, *Writing Screenplays That Sell*

**'Whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow where only one grew before would deserve better of mankind and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together.'** – Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*

- In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold 305,000 copies in one year (the equivalent of over 4 million today). It is believed to have helped change racial attitudes in America and helped spark the American Civil War (it had sold about 7 million copies by then). Among those who read it were future President Abraham Lincoln who is famed for, among other things, abolishing the slave trade in the US.

*'Once, I thought to write a history of immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.'* – Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*<sup>51</sup>

- Henrik Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of the People* (1882), continues to influence political thought over 100 years after it was penned. It is studied in schools all over the world and is critically acclaimed. Its themes include government corruption and workplace incompetence.

- Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) helped raise the public's social awareness on a key issue of the day. It described the intolerable working and sanitation conditions in Chicago's meat-packing plants.

- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not only one of the bestselling novels of all time but also one of the most influential. Widely read in North America, this much-referenced book tells the disquieting story of a Black man who falsely accused of raping a White girl back in the days of slavery. A lengthy but poignant black-and-white movie of the same title was fashioned from it.

- Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, who is said to have 'practiced the ideals he cherished in his literature', was the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, some of the best-known books the world over. He wrote on many themes, including politics and war. Below is an excerpt from the voluminous *War and Peace*:

*'The terrible sight of the battlefield strewn with corpses and wounded men, the crushing responsibility that weighed upon him, the news that reached him every few minutes of so many generals being killed or severely wounded, together with the loss of prestige, all made an extraordinary impression on the Emperor Napoleon.'*

- The Broadway stage play *Fiorello!* brilliantly captures the antics of a politician on the campaign trail, from mud-slinging rivals to addressing different ethnic groups in different languages (a familiar practice in Kenya). Actor Tom Bosely played the lead role of 'colourful New York Mayor', Fiorello H. LaGuardia, in all 700-plus performances of this hit show. *Fiorello!* became the 3<sup>rd</sup> musical in history to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

*'He who throws mud only loses ground.'* – Fat Albert<sup>52</sup>

- Marlin Fitzwater, a former US Press Secretary has written a book that gives a behind-the-scenes look at the White House during the Reagan and Bush Snr administrations. Fitzwater served from 1982 to 1992 under both presidents. Entitled *Call the Briefing*, Fitzwater doles

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<sup>51</sup> Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

<sup>52</sup> Famous TV character created by US comedian Bill Cosby

out such anecdotes as politicians crying and two cabinet ministers tussling in the White House. In one Oval Office incident, Housing Secretary Jack Kemp lunged at Secretary of State James A. Baker and grabbed him by the neck. He also claims that Reagan quarrelled with First Lady Nancy Reagan. Fitzwater served under 7 chiefs of staff and wrote that three of them left their offices literally in tears. This is reminiscent of Kenya's former head of civil service, Dr. Sally Kosgei, crying inconsolably during President Moi's departure from active politics.

*'Politics is way more cut-throat, I think, than (professional) wrestling is.'* – Jesse 'The Body' Ventura, former wrestler who became a governor in the US

- In 1995, Pat Gray, a 41-year-old lecturer in politics, wrote a 23,000-word novel, entitled *The Political Map of the Heart*, in only 24 hours, making him the world's fastest novelist!

- Hunter S. Thompson's book, *Fears and Loathing*, was turned into a political comedy film, *Primary Colors* (1998), by Universal Studios.

- European writer Ian McEwan won the 1998 Booker Prize for his novel, *Amsterdam*, which revolves around an editor who is sacked after publishing a politician's steamy pictures.

- First, there was Niccolo Machiavelli who wrote *The Prince* – that 'manual' for dictators and other would-powerful rulers that asserted that 'it is better to be feared than loved' - and now there's Robert Greene, author of *The 48 Laws of Power*. *The Prince* was written in 1513 and published in 1532, five years after Machiavelli's death.

Robert Greene's unflinching political treatise, *The 48 Laws of Power*, has been a huge bestseller in Kenya, not just among the politically minded but business types as well. Drawing on numerous historical examples and using the symbol of an ancient court (with a king, henchmen, jesters, soldiers, subjects etc), Greene illustrates his points in order to instruct the modern 'prince' on how to grab (for power is taken, not given) and preserve power. The laws include, 'Never Outshine Your Master'. A drop of wisdom from the book:

*'In fact, you have more to fear from friends than from enemies. If you have no enemies, find a way to make them.'*

And here's a sample from Machiavelli's *The Prince*:

*'Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruins amongst the many who are not good. A prince who wants to keep his authority must, therefore, learn how not to be good.'*

*'The only means to gain one's ends with people are force and cunning. Love also, they say; but that is to wait for sunshine and life needs every minute.'* – Johann Von Goethe (1749 – 1832)

- Britain's Jeffery Archer (b 1940) was educated at Wellington School, Somerset and Bransnose College, Oxford. He became an MP in 1969 and wrote his first novel, *Not A Penny More, Not a Penny Less* in 1974. He went on to become Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party and was made a Life Peer in 1992. Archer is best known around the world for his



bestselling novels and short story collections which include *Kane & Abel*, *Honour Among Thieves*, *First Among Equals*<sup>53</sup>, *Shall We Tell the President?*<sup>54</sup>, *A Quiver Full of Arrows*<sup>55</sup> and *The Fourth Estate*.

Archer tried to become Mayor of London but claims that his plans were foiled by a 'Get Archer' smear campaign. The dirty laundry that was being aired included his missing A-level and university degree certificates, his resignation as a Member of Parliament in 1974 after some bad investments near ruined him financially and a payment to a prostitute in 1986.

In 1987, Archer successfully sued *Daily Star* for libel and was awarded £500,000 in damages. Thirteen years later, his private secretary revealed that Archer had forged supporting diaries and used a fake alibi which he had asked her to concoct for him. Friend and literary rival, Frederick Forsyth had this to say about Archer's conviction:

'The last time I saw him was during the trial...In my view, if you're going to concoct an alibi, you do it yourself at dead of night with the candles burning. You don't ask Mrs. Peppiatt to do it for you and keep the original. Still, I have no doubt he is busy writing his book.'<sup>56</sup>

Archer was sentenced to a 4-year jail term during which he wrote the books *Prison Diaries* and *Sons of Fortune*. He is now out of the cooler and back on the bestseller lists. An editor of *The Guardian* (UK) famously wrote:

'Lord Archer is a comeback kid who makes Bill Clinton and Peter Mandelson look like amateurs. He will only be finished when he is placed in a coffin. And even then, it might be wise to make sure he is cremated.'

- *New York Times* best-selling author, Kitty Kelly, must surely rank as the Queen of Exposés. The original '[gossip girl](#)', Ms. Kelly has published best-selling unauthorized biographies of



#### GOSSIP GIRL: Kitty Kelly

Ms. Kelly has published best-selling unauthorized biographies of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Sinatra, Nancy Reagan, the British Royal Family, the Bush family and talk show queen Oprah Winfrey. Ms. Kelly started out as a journalist, contributing to such publications as *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *People*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Los Angeles Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*. Her first celebrity biography was *Jackie Oh!* (1978), about former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. *Jackie Oh!* talks about J. F. Kennedy's womanizing ways as well as Jackie's love life, her depression and electric shock treatment. Kelly followed it up with an unauthorized biography of singer Frank Sinatra, entitled *His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra* (1986). The book discussed Sinatra's marriages, affairs and supposed links to the Mafia. Sinatra filed a \$2 million lawsuit to prevent it from being published but subsequently dropped the case. Kitty Kelly was paid \$3.5 million to write

<sup>53</sup> 'The finest novel about Parliament since Trollope.' – *The Scotsman*

<sup>54</sup> 'The only difference between this book and *The Day of the Jackal*, is Archer is a better writer.' – *Chicago Tribune*

<sup>55</sup> 'Somerset Maugham never penned anything so swift or so satiric as this.' – *Publishers Weekly*

<sup>56</sup> UK *Daily Express*, 30/07/2001, Pg. 42

the book *Nancy Reagan: The Unauthorized Biography*, an exposé of yet another former First Lady. The book claimed that Nancy had an affair with crooner Frank Sinatra, that she frequently relied on astrology, that she had lied about her age, and that she was physically abusive to her daughter. In response, former President Ronald Reagan issued a statement saying that the book 'has no basis in fact and serves no decent purpose.' Kitty Kelly took on the British monarchy in *The Royals*<sup>57</sup> (1997) in which she alleges that, among other things, the Windsors obscured their German ancestry, Queen Elizabeth II was the product of artificial insemination, and that her sister Margaret was anti-Semitic.

Kitty Kelley's detractors have branded her 'the consummate gossip monger'. Oprah's role model, talk show host Barbara Walters, said that books like Kelley's 'are all about finding dirt, not the truth.' In her defence, Kelley asserts that her writing is about 'moving an icon out of the moonlight and into the sunlight'. Says she: 'I am an unabashed admirer of transparency and believe in the freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment.'

Kelley won the 2005 PEN Oakland Censorship Award and is also the recipient of the Outstanding Author Award, from the American Society of Journalists and Authors, for her 'courageous writing on popular culture.'

*'It is not critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled. The credit belongs to the man in the arena, marred with dust, sweat and blood who errs and comes short again and again...one who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion and spends himself in a worthy cause.'* – Theodore Roosevelt, former US President

- The 1960's appear to have been a very volatile time for American politics (in much the same way that the 1980's were boom-time for American music). The book, *An American Melodrama*, seeks to capture the chaos of this exciting chapter in American political history, especially as it pertains to the 1968 presidential elections:

'(Former President) Lyndon Johnson was so unpopular, he couldn't run. Assassins struck down Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, and Negro riots brought war to the American cities. In Vietnam, the N.L.F. launched the Tet Offensive and hustled America along the road to losing its first foreign war. McCarthy and Wallace launched their highly individualistic campaigns, each determined to beat the American political system. Even before Mayor Daley's cops decided to turn to rest of Chicago into an abattoir at the Democratic Convention, the 1968 Presidential Campaign had proved the most traumatic in history.

- A co-editor of TV's *60 Minutes*, Dan Rather has co-authored a candid book with Mickey Herskowitz. In the book, entitled *The Camera Never Blinks*, Rather discusses numerous personalities, including JFK, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Rather's own famous colleagues.

- In a FOX TV interview, author Craig Shirley, said he was able to gain unprecedented access to 1980 campaign files and interviewed more than 150 insiders in order to write *Rendezvous with Destiny*, a book about former US President Ronald Reagan. *Rendezvous with Destiny*

<sup>57</sup> Warner Books, New York, ISBN 0-446-51712-7

analyzes the 1980 presidential campaign, showing the path of Reagan (a former movie actor) from a defeat at the 1976 Republican convention, through tough primaries in which he floored several Republican heavyweights, a general election campaign complicated by the presence of a third-party candidate and finally to the moment of glory - Reagan's victory on Election Night in 1980. The Reagan presidency was no walk in the park, though – he was publicly attacked at least twice. In one daylight assassination attempt, a Secret Service agent shielded Reagan with his own body, taking a bullet to the torso<sup>58</sup>, while the president was bundled into the back of his limo, which then roared off, Reagan buried under the bodies more Secret Service bodyguards. When they were safe and sound, Reagan (who was usually in good humour) told the bodyguards that, while he may not have been hit, *they* nearly crushed him to death with their bodies!<sup>59</sup>

- Even before the USSR fragmented into several independent states, H       Carr     d'Encausse had already published a book entitled, *Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt*. The book sought to show that far from being a homogenous block, the USSR was 'a diverse, widespread federation of over 100 formerly independent nations, many of which are becoming increasingly restless under Russian domination.' *Les   chos* called the book, 'Indispensable reading for anyone interested in the problems of our times.'

- In 1978, Soviet official Arkady Shevchenko sent shockwaves throughout the international diplomatic community when he voluntarily defected to the US. Then the United Nations Under Secretary General, Shevchenko was the most important Soviet official to defect to the West. He later wrote a book on his defection, published by Grafton Books, entitled *Breaking With Moscow*. In the memoir, Shevchenko discussed Soviet party leaders like Krushchev, Brezhnev and Chernenko. He was especially critical of his former boss, then Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko:

'To work with Gromyko is to visit hell...he can be rude and crude with subordinates, loudly and arrogantly promoting the idea of his own omniscience and others' stupidity.'

'Give me a child for the first five years of his life and he'll be mine forever.' – Vladimir Lenin,  
Russian dictator

- The now-ended Cold War inspired numerous fiction storytellers during and after the 40 years it lasted. Some of the best thrillers were penned during the Cold War. Examples include Martin Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*, a murder mystery set in Moscow city; David Morell's *The Brotherhood of the Rose*, about two orphan brothers who grow up in the CIA and belatedly find out that their mentor is an evil and corrupt manipulator; Irvin Wallace's famous *The Second Lady*, about a Russian plot to abduct America's First Lady and replace her with a double; Robert Ludlum's *The Parsifal Mosaic*, a powerful transatlantic thriller which stayed on the New York Times bestseller list for 30-plus weeks; John le Carr  's *Tinker Tailor*

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<sup>58</sup> He survived the hit

<sup>59</sup> *The Secret Service*, documentary

*Soldier Spy* and *The Russia House*<sup>60</sup>; Len Deighton's *Berlin Game* and Frederick Forsyth's *The Deceiver*.

'Glasnost is trying to escape over the (Berlin) Wall, and getting shot with a silenced machine gun.' – Len Deighton, *Spy Line*

- *Gorky Park* by Martin Cruz Smith, an international bestseller, centres of the investigation of the murder of three youths whose faceless corpses are discovered in a frozen Moscow park. *Gorky Park*, which has been described as 'equal to the best creations of le Carré', topped US bestseller charts and was adapted for film (starring William Hurt).

- Another great Cold War thriller was *The Death Freak* which is about two agents, one CIA, the other KGB, who join forces in order to outwit their spy agencies and retire from the espionage game. *The Death Freak* has been described as a 'superthriller that out-Bonds Bond.'

- John le Carré has been described by *Time* magazine as 'The premier spy novelist of his time...perhaps of all time.' His realistic spy narratives differ sharply from the bold, superhuman, exploits exemplified by Ian Fleming's James Bond series. 'With James Bond, you want to be him,' le Carré once said in a TV interview. 'With my characters you say, "God, I hope I'm not him!" ' His Cold War thrillers include *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, *Smiley's People* and *The Russia House* (which was filmed starring Sean Connery). Below is an excerpt from le Carré's *The Russia House*:

'You have before you a man committed to peace and brotherly love. By this I mean that my primary ambition is to knock so much shit out of the Pentagon fire-breathers that they will never again tell the President of the United States that twenty rabbits make a tiger , or that every f\*\*\*ing sardine fisherman three miles out of port is a Russian submarine in drag.'

Of *The Russia House*, the *San Francisco Chronicle & Examiner* said:

'What happens to (characters) Barley and Katya reveals better than a Kissinger brief what *glasnost* and *perestroika* are about in terms of human suffering, triumph, and loss and survival.'

Andrei Bitov, author of *Pushkin House*, had this to say:

'A spy need not be a writer, but a writer must surely be a spy. *The Russia House* once again proves le Carré's professionalism in the role of writer functioning as spy.'

'Writers need to give voice to the silenced of their nations - and that in itself is a political act.' -  
Elif Safak at a Hay Festival event

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<sup>60</sup> No.1 on the *New York Times* Bestseller List

In an Al-Jazeera TV interview that included Kenyan writer/academic Mukoma wa Ngugi (*Nairobi Heat*), bestselling Scottish crime writer Ian Rankin explained the appeal of the crime genre to novelists, especially in recent times:

'Young authors are attracted to crime fiction...You can talk about corruption in high and low places, politics, the economy - nothing is off limits to the crime novel... In the late 20th Century, writers began to write a more urbanised crime fiction that did deal with social issues, that did deal with politics.'

**'We are all political animals, whether we realise it or not. I certainly am!'**

- Farah Ghuznavi discussing the dangers of conforming to stereotype, the hidden riches of Bangla literature, and the five main reasons *not* to be a writer

- [Michael Moore](#) is best known around the world as a filmmaker, and in particular as the man behind the hugely successful anti-George Bush administration documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Less known is that he is also a bestselling author whose books include *Stupid White Men* and *Dude, Where's My Country?*

Michael Francis Moore (b 1954) is an American filmmaker, author, social critic, and political activist. He is the director and producer of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which remains the highest-grossing documentary of all time and winner of the Palme d'Or award. His films *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and *Sicko* (2007) also placed in the top ten highest-grossing documentaries, and the former won the Academy Award for Documentary Feature. In September 2008, he released his first free movie on the Internet, *Slacker Uprising*, which documented his personal quest to encourage more Americans to vote in presidential elections. He has also written and starred in the TV shows *TV Nation* and *The Awful Truth*.<sup>61</sup>

Moore's written and cinematic works criticize globalization, large corporations, assault weapon ownership, U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, the Iraq War, terrorism, the American health care system and capitalism. Some in the American Right Wing consider Moore a Leftist gadfly who is anti- the Conservative Party (and George Bush in particular).

Moore's other books include *Will They Ever Trust Us Again?*, *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*, *Downsize This!* and a memoir, *Here Comes Trouble*.

- In his 2004 memoir, entitled *My Life*, former US President Clinton describes his extra-marital affair with Monica Lewinsky as his biggest mistake, without going into much detail. The book is amazingly fat and one British reviewer remarked that it was interesting that Clinton could recall so many details from his childhood and yet during the Lewinsky trial, he claimed not to remember a lot things! US Comedian Dennis Miller holds this opinion: 'Asking (Bill) Clinton to write an honest book is like asking Ashley Simpson to sing accappella.' Bill Clinton was fodder for a lot of American comedians. In one of his super-popular acts, ventriloquist [Jeff Dunham](#) asks one of his puppets, 'What do you think of gay marriage?' Without skipping a beat, the puppet replies, 'Oh, I love the Clintons!'

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<sup>61</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Moore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Moore)

It's OK to laugh at Bill. Any US President who gets oral sex in the Oval Office when the world is turning topsy-turvy deserves to be made fun of.

- Former First Lady (and 2008 Presidential hopeful) Hilary Rodham Clinton has some literary merit of her own. There is of course the memoir, *Living History*, which was released around the time of her presidential bid. But before that, back in 1996, she had published a book entitled *It Takes a Village* which is said to have earned her \$261,898 in royalties in one year. The Clintons donated all the book's earnings to charities.

Mrs. Clinton also wrote a book about how she and Bill entertained guests at the White House. It was entitled *An Invitation to the White House* and described such dos as state dinners, annual receptions, private parties and Christmas gatherings. Her other White House book is *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy: Kids' Letters to the First Pets* (about the Clintons' cat and dog).

- To be fair, Clinton wasn't the biggest of the playboy presidents: J. F. Kennedy (the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States) had a much more impressive (and tantalising) record of sexual conquests, according to numerous accounts. Luckily J. F. Kennedy (assassinated in Dallas in 1963) lived in the pre-Internet age, a time when there were fewer eavesdropping devices and less aggressive news-gatherers (these days, *paparazzi* are accused of everything from bugging phones to chasing down cars with motorbikes to overflying private homes with helicopters and drones). It is alleged, in a plethora of books, that the FBI kept tabs on JFK's love life and has audio recordings of some of his trysts, the most alarming one being of JFK and a smouldering brunette named Judith Campbell (while he was President). What makes the Campbell affair so sensational was that she was, simultaneously, the girlfriend of a Mafia boss and speculation has been rife as to whether she was a conduit between the two men or, even more alarmingly, a spy for the Mob.

*'The American voter, insisting upon his belief in a higher order, clings to his religion which promises another, better life; and defends passionately the illusion that the men he chooses to lead him are of a finer nature than he.'* – Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President*

John Fitzgerald Kennedy apparently came from a family of 'players'. His controversial father, Joe Kennedy, was alleged to have been a philanderer of epic proportions and has been the subject of many books, including [The Sins of the Father by Ronald Kessler](#) and *The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy* by David Nasaw. The novel, *Fatherland*, one of the world's most celebrated thrillers, postulates a world in which Hitler won the Second World War and Joe Kennedy (rumoured to have been a Nazi sympathiser) became the US President.

Joe Kennedy is said to have bootlegged liquor during the Prohibition period, produced cheap but profitable Hollywood movies, supported the Nazis during World War II, made a fortune on the stock market and endeared himself to politicians, actively campaigning for his preferred candidates. Some biographers say that he wanted to run for president but realized that his reputation wouldn't hold up to scrutiny, so he did the next best thing – pushed his sons into politics. JFK's older brother was supposed to run for high office but he died piloting a bomber during World War II. Joe then sponsored JFK to run against Nixon (a Republican) on a Democratic Party ticket.



J. F. Kennedy's campaign had some elements of farce. Joe is alleged to have bought large volumes of a book by JFK in order to keep it on the bestseller list (a worker at their home is said to have discovered the books in the attic). JFK won a Pulitzer Prize for a book which to this day some researchers say he did not write himself. The book, entitled *Profiles in Courage*, may have been initially authored by JFK but it has been claimed that there were other contributors, including Ted Sorensen who would later become President Kennedy's official speech writer. (The famous line, 'Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country' was also allegedly written by Ted Sorensen, not Kennedy). JFK authored another book entitled *While England Slept*, designed to depict the US in heroic light. His wife Jackie was a life-long arts enthusiast and dabbled in painting as a pastime. In her youth, one of her ambitions was to be an author, but this was apparently overtaken by events. According to an article in Kenya's *Sunday Nation* newspaper, Jackie 'hoped to write The Great American Novel, but wound up living it.' She did, however, become an Editor for Doubleday (a prestigious publisher) in her sunset years.<sup>62</sup>

Back to politics, selling JFK to the public was harder than Joe had anticipated. JFK was young and good-looking but too new to politics – and a legendary philanderer. In *The Last Brother*, Joe McGiniss writes that Joe once remarked that with the money he was spending on the campaign, he could have gotten his own chauffeur elected! In the end, Joe admitted to having made a lot of regrettable deals in order to get his son into the White House. And the drama didn't end there – the US soon embarrassed itself with the botched Bay of Pigs invasion of Communist Cuba; JFK mishandled the aftermath of Russian missiles being spotted near American shores; Joe Kennedy got a stroke from which he never recovered; Robert Kennedy<sup>63</sup> disastrously tussled with organised crime bosses; and JFK was himself shot dead as his motorcade drove through Dallas on a day that will live in infamy.

*'Hemingway, Eichmann, Stranger in a Strange Land  
Dylan, Berlin, Bay of Pigs invasion  
Lawrence of Arabia, British Beatlemania  
Ole Miss, John Glenn, Liston beats Patterson  
Pope Paul, Malcolm X, British Politician sex  
JFK blown away, what else do I have to say?'  
- Billy Joel, We Didn't Start The Fire (song)*

Joe Kennedy had nine children with his devout Catholic wife but is said to have had numerous liaisons that strained his marriage<sup>64</sup>. These liaisons included trysts with actresses when he was a film producer. It is also said that the Kennedy men 'passed on' girlfriends to each other, like hand-me-down clothes. For example, movie star and sex symbol Marilyn Monroe (*Some Like it Hot, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*) had supposedly an affair with JFK (and infamously sang 'Happy Birthday' to him when he was President<sup>65</sup>). According to several biographies and biopics, after JFK broke off his tryst with Marilyn, Robert 'Bobby' Kennedy took her up. After that relationship ended, Marilyn was so depressed that her former lover, crooner Frank Sinatra, flew her out to his private residence to recuperate. She would

<sup>62</sup> Her biggest coup at Doubleday was getting the reclusive King of Pop, Michael Jackson, to ink a book deal with them. Unfortunately, the (ghost-written) memoir, entitled *Moonwalk*, shed little light on the life of the musician.

<sup>63</sup> JFK's brother; then the US Attorney General

<sup>64</sup> McGiniss, et al

<sup>65</sup> She was fired by the movie studio after this incident

eventually die from a possible drug overdose. Robert Kennedy, who as AG had opposed organized crime syndicates, would be assassinated some time after his brother. Frank Sinatra had campaigned for JFK and sang his campaign song *High Hopes* at the inauguration. According to the book *The Last Brother*, JFK had continued his philandering ways even after he married Jackie.

*'Politics is like a prostitute; it sometimes prefers dacoits to ascetics.'*

– Nemisharan Mital, *World-famous Glamorous Women*

Before you start to pity Jackie Kennedy and 'tweet' your admiration for this iconic and world-famous lady, let us examine the books that have been written about her...

In *A Woman Named Jackie*, author C. David Heyman claims that 1960's icon Jackie Kennedy Onassis was no saint. Of course she knew about JFK's way with women but since childhood, she had had a fiery desire to be a 'queen', and being associated with Kennedy, who was a rising star at the time they met, was good strategy. During a party when they were President and First Lady, she once drew a picture of JFK with his pants (trousers) at his ankles, saying, 'I demand my conjugal rights!' But the book says that, while Jackie was handy with a wisecrack, she couldn't take a joke at *her* expense. As you might expect, the marriage was troubled from the word go. For a long time, she couldn't bear children due to stress-induced miscarriages. Allegedly, JFK would sometimes have women brought over to him at the White House, the Secret Service shielding the affairs from Jackie.

Overall, *A Woman Named Jackie* paints Mrs Kennedy as an unbelievably selfish, mean, self-absorbed and status-obsessed woman whose lifestyle could only be maintained by fabulously rich men. One of the people in the book describes her thus:

'(Jackie O.) was hard, tough, self-serving, with no great ambitions towards personal achievement but a great love for the limelight, publicity and applause. Her mouth betrays her. It is like that of a shark.'

There is evidence for her selfishness in the clip of the JFK assassination that is now easily available on YouTube and other video-sharing websites. In the footage, JFK is seen happily waving to fans while sitting in the back of a blue convertible next to Jackie. He suddenly jerks as the first bullet hits him in the chest cavity. Before anyone can react, another bullet hits him in the skull – and this time we see a blood-cloud blossom from the point of impact. Jackie immediately twists around and starts to climb onto the boot of the moving vehicle. By this time, a Secret Service agent has jumped from the trailing escort vehicle onto the presidential boot. He pushes The First Lady back into her vehicle. JFK's bleeding head falls onto her lap as the entire motorcade increases speed in order to flee the danger zone...During the inquiry that followed, Jackie said she had no memory of trying to leave the moving vehicle. Be that as it may, don't you think it is interesting that her muscle-memory was towards self-preservation only? Most people have a basic instinct to help others. If the person walking next to you on the pavement stumbles, don't you instinctively lurch sideways to catch them? If you heard a child scream in the next room, wouldn't you rush to its aid without a second thought?



**A DAY THAT SHOOK THE WORLD: JFK and Jackie just before the assassination**

As First Lady, Jackie of course received many gift from well-wishers, especially when she travelled abroad. The book alleges that Jackie wrote a memo to embassy staff on how to handle her gifts – the precious ones (eg. antiques, artworks) were to be forwarded to her and the rest secretly destroyed. This is shocking for a First Lady: why not donate all un-precious gifts to your favourite charity or, better still, give them to your staff?

After JFK's demise, Jackie was in limbo for a while and but did a stand-up job raising her children. She would then shock America by marrying Greek shipping & air transport billionaire Aristotle Onassis. The way most pundits saw it, Aristotle – who owned a private yacht and his own island – had 'bought' himself a celebrity wife. Jackie once described an incident whereby she was lunching *alfresco* in Europe and an American woman spotted her. The tourist came forward, spat at Jackie and called her a 'tramp'. Although she would later earn some respect in the US, become a permanent feature in the political landscape and a style icon to millions of women, there are many who still feel that, as in the Frank Sinatra song title, 'the lady was was tramp.'

According to *As We Remember Her* by Carl Anthony ('an oral history of Jackie'), the famous widow continued to promote the arts and historic restoration (her pet projects as First Lady) until her death from cancer at the age of 64. According to *As We Remember Her*, Jackie dreamt of writing the Great American Novel but wound up living it instead.

*'Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall.'* – William Shakespeare

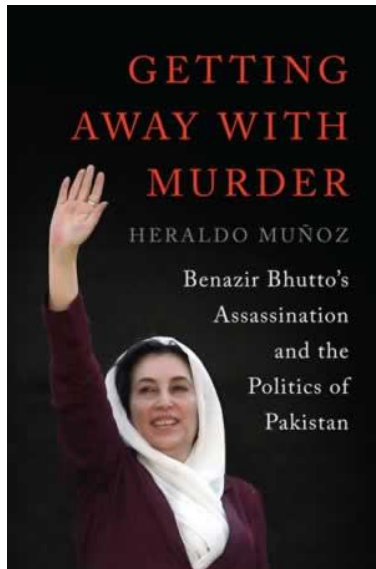
## Of Men and Lions

*'Until lions can tell their own stories, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the (human) hunter.'* – Swahili Proverb

*'The institutions that were created to ensure that people were enlightened have been allowed to disappear into oblivion. It is as if we want to go back to the (Biblical) Egypt of do-nothingism. That is a tragedy that we must not allow to happen.'*

- Former Anti-Corruption Commission head, PLO Lumumba, on TV's *Jeff Koinange Live*

I once worked as an Editor and Head Writer for a magazine called *Matatu Today* (Actually, I preferred to write as opposed to editing). One of the most intriguing aspects of *matatus*<sup>66</sup> to me was the stickers. I even created a section for them in the magazine. The messages carried by the stickers ranged from the thoughtful to the ludicrous and made for good entertainment. There was one that initially amused me but later made me re-think it. It read:



'IF A MAN STEALS YOUR WIFE, THE BEST REVENGE IS TO LET HIM KEEP HER'. The more I thought about that message the less funny and the more propagandist it seemed. It appeared to be promoting complacency, the do-nothing philosophy.

On 27<sup>th</sup> December 2007, Benazir Bhutto, the world-famous former prime minister of Pakistan, was killed in a bomb-and-gun attack, shortly after she returned home from exile to challenge incumbent, Pervez Musharraf<sup>67</sup>, in a democratic election. A formidable woman, Benazir was the head of a political family as key to Pakistani history as the Gandhi-Nehru clan to India or the Kenyattas to Kenya. In December 2013, the lead commissioner of a UN investigation into the *kamikaze* assassination, Herald Muñoz, published a book entitled, *Getting Away with Murder: Benazir Bhutto's Assassination and the Politics of Pakistan*.

Benazir Bhutto, parse her how you would, was a global icon. There have been very few female national leaders in world history – let alone in conservative Muslim nations like Pakistan. But Benazir did it. I would argue that for every one hundred Musharrafs, there is only one Benazir Bhutto. Where are the books about her rise to the top? As we have seen, there are plenty of books about famous women – Princess Diana, Jackie Kennedy etc. Benazir's assassination was Pakistan's equivalent of JFK's assassination. There have been numerous books, films, TV shows, documentaries and even songs about that. What has Pakistan told the world about its most famous assassination – an event that sent shockwaves around the world? How is it that the most acclaimed book on the issue was written by an outsider? Doesn't the populous nation of Pakistan have scribes? When Nixon became embroiled in the Watergate Scandal, journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein famously wrote all about it in a bestseller entitled *All the President's Men*. Doesn't Pakistan

<sup>66</sup> Public transport vehicles

<sup>67</sup> Musharraf's memoir: *In the Line of Fire*

have journalists who can convert research information into book form and enlighten the world? (A couple of newspaper articles would hardly suffice in a matter of such gravitas).

Remember, always and forever, that if you don't tell your stories, somebody else will do it for you (and probably mess them up in the process). Africa is rising. The Africans are increasingly telling their own stories (in film<sup>68</sup>, [novels](#) etc). Perhaps, other developing regions can learn from this. Letting other people tell your stories for you is the artistic equivalent of letting another man 'steal' your wife. Shall we do nothing or shall we take her back?

*'Success comes to those who dare and act. It seldom goes to the timid.'* – Indian President Jawaharlal Nehru

**Pigs would fly if I were a politician**

**ALEXANDER NDERITU**

**5 min interview**  
By Catherine Mukel

**I'm good at** .....writing.

**I'm bad at** .....mental arithmetic to the point of being hopeless.

**The last book I enjoyed was** ..... *Bring on the Empty Horses* by David Niven.

**The most surprising thing that happened to me was** .....being contacted by a publisher to translate my stories into Japanese.

**A common misconception of me is that** .....I am snobbish. Like most writers, I am an introvert.

**One of my worst childhood fears**

**was** .....drowning. My swimming teacher drowned in the school swimming pool.

**My ideal night out is** .....a quiet evening in a classy restaurant with an interesting, attractive woman.

**In another life I would be** .....a rock star.

**If I were a politician** .....pigs would fly and the moon would be made of green cheese. I hate politics.

**The best age to be is** ..... 20s. This is when one decides what

**you'll be for the rest of your life.**

**The best part of my job is** .....the hours are flexible.

**My greatest regret is** .....experimenting with too many business ideas in my 20s.

**Historical figure I most identify with is** .....William Shakespeare. We share the birthday (April 23).

**Living person I most admire is** .....Sir Richard Branson. People who achieve great things from humble beginnings.

**My greatest achievement**

**is** .....pioneering e-books in Kenya.

**My favourite writer is** ..... Spy writer John le Carre.

**My greatest possession is** .....my intellect.

**If I was going to die in five minutes my last words would be** ..... Er tu, Brute?

*Alexander Nderitu is the author of When the Whirlwind Passes, a poet and the e-book pioneer in Kenya. His books can be purchased via his website [www.AlexanderNderitu.com](http://www.AlexanderNderitu.com)*

Suggest an interviewee by sending their name, address, cellphone number and profession to [5minute@nairobiatar.com](mailto:5minute@nairobiatar.com)

### An Alexander Nderitu interview in *The Star* newspaper

Believe it or not, this is the first time I am writing about politics and politicians, even though I have been a writer for over 10 years. I am not a political animal. I'm the kind of guy who believes that 80% of all songs should be about beautiful women and absolutely none should be in praise of politicians.

I was hoping to avoid politics completely but it that's virtually impossible for a novelist. As Nawal el Saddawi observed, 'Even in love there are politics.' It's just as well that I am no longer a journalist because I prefer to write positive stories rather than cover depressing news. If I were sent to Tanzania to cover a Rwandan Genocide hearing at the Arusha Tribunal, I would probably spend more time at the Arusha Poetry Club, with people like me.

*'The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars'* - Jack Kerouac, *On The Road*

<sup>68</sup> Think Nollywood – probably the world's most prolific film industry



### **A Brief Look at Swahili Literature**

*'The inhabitants are Moors (Arabs ) who, although formerly rich, now live in utter poverty – their most usual occupation is that of making mats, baskets and straw hats so perfectly finished that the Portuguese bring them out to wear on feast days.'*

- A Franciscan monk writing about Mombasa centuries ago

*'Swahili is an African language, but one which has incorporated many words from around the world, like a linguistic melting pot. The word "Swahili" itself actually comes from the Arabic word for "Coast", and there are traces of Indian and even Portuguese, too.'*

- From the BBC Documentary, *Kingdoms of Africa – Great Zimbabwe*<sup>69</sup>



**A Swahili woman dressed in printed 'khangas' (Zanzibar, 1890)**

Kiswahili is a phonetic language that is widely spoken in Eastern Africa. The people from whom the language originated are themselves called The Swahili. Literature does not exist in a vacuum (in fact you can learn a lot about about past societies from their oral/written literature), so before we discuss the arts, let's get a feel of the Swahili people – their culture and heritage.

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<sup>69</sup> Narrated by Dr. Gus Casely-Hayford, directed by Ishbael Hall, produced by BBC Four

## A TASTE OF CULTURE

*'I will not write about a meal in a restaurant unless I have eaten that meal in that restaurant.'* – Sidney Sheldon, author of *The Other Side of Midnight* (novel)

Some of the most popular Swahili foods are *pilau* and *biryani* (or *biriani*). Both are rice-based, contain meat and may be enriched with any number of spices. The difference is that with *pilau* the meat is cooked with the rice (everything – spices, veggies, tomatoes, onions, potatoes etc – is stuck together in a single super-meal) whereas with *biryani*, the meat (fish, chicken, beef etc) is prepared separately from the rice and then served together, usually with a drink like the super-sweet *ukwaju* juice.

In his voluminous novel, *Poor No More*, Robert Ruark describes a tumultuous sea voyage from Mombasa (the main character is an impressionable young man working on the ship). As the ship finally nears its destination, the cook uses the remaining ingredients to prepare a feast for the seafarers – a dish of *pilau* (also called *pilaf* or *jambalaya* in the West). Ruark (who had been to Kenya and is also the author of *Uhuru* and *Something of Value*), writes:

'What he (the cook) was making was one big dish and he made in an iron cauldron big enough to boil a hog in. It was *jamabalaya* but its main ingredient was rice and peppers. Into this rice had been mixed shrimps, oysters, clams, clayfish, pork sausage, white slabs of fish, a chicken of the stock, and the whole business cooked together until it was one great beautiful adventure. Dan had coloured the rice with saffron, and the juices from the chicken had got married in a tremendous soupy ceremony so that the rice while dry by grain, was damp by volume...'

In his non-fiction book, *The Lunatic Express*, Charles Miller talks of visiting a seedy restaurant in Mombasa that served the most delicious omelettes he had ever tasted. This is common in that part of the world (and a parallel can be drawn with Somali-predominated Eastleigh in Nairobi). You may enter an eatery that doesn't look very sanitary (the walls, the tables, the waiters etc); you order something like fish *biryani* or beef *shawarma* (pronounced: *shah-wah-r-mah*) and, after a wait, comes this delightful adventure of a meal served on a metallic plate in generous proportions. *Shawarma* is sort of a supersized burger with all the trimmings, although comparing a fast-food burger with *shawarma* is like comparing a visit to the local zoo with a wildlife safari through the Serengeti. Visitors are often advised not to leave Mombasa until they have tasted *shawarma*. The local traditional alcoholic drink is a foul-smelling/tasting whitish liquor drawn from palm trees, called *mnazi*. The locals say that the highly intoxicating *mnazi*<sup>70</sup> is good because it is all-natural (no additives or preservatives) hence it's a gift from God. Tourists might beg to differ, as *mnazi* is an acquired taste. It is usually drunk by men, young and old, in open-air *shebeens* and has evidently been around for centuries. Other foods that are common at the Coast but not inland include *pepe* (jack fruit) and coconuts or coconut-based dishes and drinks.

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<sup>70</sup> *Mnazi* is the name for 'palm tree'





**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Alexander Nderitu samples the local cuisine during a PEN Kenya workshop in Mombasa**

*The Lunatic Express* has a hilarious section concerning the food that was served on the British-sponsored trans-Kenya railway in colonial times. The following passage takes place on the train, in Voi, not far from the coastline:

'Critiques ranged from "the chef is a true artist" to "excepting of course the food served on German liners, never have I tasted such filth". The latter assessment was probably more accurate. At Voi, the main course invariably consisted of iron boiled beef, rubber mashed potatoes and something that the menu called cabbage. All entrees were garnished with insects; diners ate with one hand while the other fanned away mosquitoes.'

Let's discuss the weather in the land where Swahili began. Being located squarely in the tropics, the E. A. coast is usually warm/hot, as you might expect. It is often warm even during the night and visitors quickly notice the large number of fans and forever-opened windows in hotels and villas. The default state of weather is: Hot and Humid.

In the book *Isle of Cloves* (believed to be about Zanzibar) author F. D. Ommanney beautifully describes the weather at the Swahili Coast.

'It is very hot and damp from about November to May. The humidity...is very high so that one lives in a state of unbecoming dampness and nothing seems to dry.

In about May, a welcome change takes place; it begins to rain. Heavy black clouds build over the island and spill their contents in crushing downpours which advance through the coconut plantations with the noise of an express train. At first, these refreshing cloud-bursts come in intervals and everyone is thankful for them; but they become more and more frequent until they form into a steady downpour...

Long before it has ceased...everyone is praying for it to stop. Roads become impassable. The narrow streets are racing rivers of muddy water. Water spouts solidly with ceaseless chatter from every pipe and gutter. Broad lakes poked by pitiless falling pencils of rain cover every square yard of flat ground. The people paddle about under umbrellas, holding their white robes about their knees. The mosquitoes and every other insect imaginable rejoice and arise in clouds, singing.

The monsoon comes like a fierce hot breath, covering the surface of the straits between the island and the mainland with white horses and dark squalls. Every day,

the wind blows hard but falls away about sunset to give place to those serene and silver nights that are one of the glories of this part of the world.'

Music forms a large and critical part of coastal culture. While modern forms of music and dance, like rap and ragga, are gaining ground – especially amongst youths – more traditional forms like Taarab and Bango remain highly popular. Contemporary Tanzanian music in Swahili – popularly referred to as 'Bongo Flavour' – is also a staple at the Kenyan coast and many Tanzanian musicians continue to be invited to perform there. Even the urban Coast-based musicians – practicing Hip Hop, R&B and other contemporary styles - often use Kiswahili language as opposed to English. Taarab music is slow-tempo, easily listening music that is highly influenced by Arabian styles. It is probably the most 'Swahili' of music styles and is often played during social occasions such as weddings. 'Bango' is also easy listening music that draws a lot of parallels with Calypso<sup>71</sup> (Afro-Caribbean music). One parallel is that Calypso music covers all aspects of society like a flood, as does Bango. In a song dubbed *Choi La Mnyonge* ("The Victim's Tear"), for example, Bango maestro Mzee Joseph Ngala re-tells the allegedly true story of a family that was torn apart by a rape case. The documentary, *Calypso Dreams*, mentions this socio-political aspect in the art form:

'Every song they make in America is about love. But we sing from politics to sport to science to whatever...it is recorded in Calypso.' - From *Calypso Dreams* (documentary)

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<sup>71</sup> Forerunner to Mento, Blue Beat, Rocksteady, Reggae and some other musical styles

## ORIGINS OF KISWAHILI LIT

*'Zanzibar...is as relaxing as a Turkish bath.'* – Alan Moorhead, *The White Nile*

The name 'Swahili' is believed to come from the Arab word 'Sawahel' which means 'Coasts'. Swahili, then, was used to refer to language of the coastal people of East Africa<sup>72</sup>. There is a popular joke in East Africa whose basic version is: 'Kiswahili was born in Zanzibar, grew up in Tanzania, fell sick in Kenya, died in Uganda and was buried in the Congo.' As amusing as that might be, some experts believe that Swahili more likely began in Kenya, in places like Lamu and Pate, before spreading to Tanzania. What we know for certain is that it was born at the East African Coast and came about as a result of interactions between visiting Arabs and the local Bantu people, mainly thanks to intermarriage.

According to the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#), the earliest preserved Swahili writing was in Arabic script, and subsequent writings were primarily in three main dialects ie. *ki-Unjuga*, *ki-Mvita*, and *ki-Amu*. In the 1930s, British colonial authorities, with some assistance from local African scholars and writers, formally began to standardize the language, choosing the dialect spoken in Zanzibar Town (*ki-Unjuga*) as the basis for the Swahili to be used in publishing and education throughout East Africa.

Swahili literature is classified into three genres: *riwaya* (the novel), *tamthilia* (drama/play) and *ushairi* (poetry).

The first literary works date back to the beginning of the 18th century (when all Swahili literature was written in the Arabic script). A scholar named Jan Knappert considered the translation of the Arabic poem *Hamziya* from the year 1652 to be the earliest Swahili written text. Starting in the 19th century, missionaries and orientalist introduced the Latin script for writing the Swahili language<sup>73</sup>.

Some of the oldest existing Swahili texts are: *Takhmisa* by Sayyid Abdallah bin Ali bin Nasir (who lived circa 1720–1820), *Utendi wa Katirifu* by Jan Knappert (written either in the last quarter of the 18th century or early 19th century), *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* (1858) and *Utendi wa al-Akida* (late 1870s). Of course, as with all African literature, the true origin of Swahili lit was in 'oral' form – stories (*hadithi*), poems (*mashairi*), proverbs (*methali*) and so on existed as oral literature long before they were captured in written/print form. For example, Swahili oral literature utilises 'opening/closing formulas', common in ancient African and European lit. To this day, Swahili speakers sometimes say '*Hadithi, hadithi - hadithi njo*' ('Story, story – story come') before they tell a tale the old-fashioned way. They also say '*Nipe mji*' ('Give me the name of a town') before they give you the correct answer to riddle/*kitendawili* that you have been unable to unravel. Poems are also often vocalised in a formulaic sing-song fashion that dies on the page (until resurrected through singing).

<sup>72</sup> The East African coast, incorporating several populated islands, is sometimes referred to as the 'Swahili Coast'

<sup>73</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swahili\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swahili_literature)

A poetic text called *Mashairi ya Liongo*, published by E. Steere, has become something of a Holy Grail of Swahili lit. Its manuscript might be the oldest existing Swahili manuscript<sup>74</sup>. Jan Knappert said of it:

'This song of Liongo's is one of the oldest specimens of Swahili literature, much older than the epic and probably eighteenth-century in the form in which we have it. Its language is archaic.'

Traditional poetry can be classified into different groups according to its form and content. It can be epic, lyrical or didactic, as well as religious or secular. Examples of narrative poetry, known as *utenzi*, include the *Utendi wa Tambuka* by Bwana Mwengo (written circa 1728) and *Utenzi wa Shufaka*.

Classic Swahili texts include *Alfu Lela U Lela* (Arabic: *ألف ليلة وليلة*). This is a translated version of the classic anthology of Middle Eastern stories otherwise known as *One Thousand and One Nights*.

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<sup>74</sup> There are a number of ancient texts in UK archives, museums etc

### THE FATHER OF POETS?

*'Among all men on the earth, bards (poets) have a share of honour and reverence, because the muse has taught them songs and loves the race of bards.'* - Homer, *The Odyssey*

The blind Homer, cited by many as the 'father of poets', may have lived circa 800 B.C. Not much is known about the actual man. However, ancient Greeks told of an old, blind, wandering poet who composed the two great Greek epics, the *Illiad* (believed to be the world's longest poem) and the *Odyssey*<sup>75</sup>, and who went about from place to place reciting these narrative poems. The stories became so popular that at least 7 cities of ancient Greece claimed to be the birthplace of Homer!

Homer's tales have now been translated into many other languages, including several English versions. The exceedingly long poems take readers/listeners on a journey into an ancient/surreal world of action-adventure, fraught with gallant heroes, horrible giants (Cyclops), exotic locations, treacherous seas, dangerous women (Sirens) and fierce battles. They have familiarized the world with Greek mythology and acted as the basis for other Greek myths/legends/literatures/songs.

Even in modern times, Homer continues to be honoured through study, music, literature and film eg. James Joyce's *Ulysses*<sup>76</sup> (voted the best book of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and the hit rock song *Tales of Brave Ulysses* by CREAM<sup>77</sup>.

*I'll have no talk of pacts with you,  
Forever unforgiven as you are,  
As between men and lions there are none,  
No concord<sup>78</sup> between sheep and wolves,  
But all hold one another hateful through and through  
So there can be no courtesy between us.'*  
From Homer's *Illiad*

The [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) notes that early Swahili fiction consisted mainly of stories inspired by indigenous oral narrative traditions, Arabic tales, and translations of works by European writers. An important exception was James Mbotela's 1934 historical novel *Uhuru wa Watumwa*, but it was the writing of Shaaban Robert (1909–62) that really gave impetus to a literature in the new Standard Swahili. The works of this Tanzanian poet, novelist, and essayist gained wide circulation in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s and are held in high esteem in East Africa to this day. Two other important writers from this period were the Zanzibaris Muhammed Saleh Farsy, whose novel *Kurwa na Doto* (1960) is a minor classic, and Muhammed Said Abdulla, whose first story of a series of detective adventures, *Mzimu wa*

<sup>75</sup> 'The Odyssey' ie. the journey of Odysseus (the hero)

<sup>76</sup> Ulysses – Another name for Odysseus, hero of the *Illiad*

<sup>77</sup> CREAM – A rock music supergroup that included guitarist Eric Clapton

<sup>78</sup> Agreement

*Watu wa Kale* (1960), marked the beginning of a transition toward a Swahili fiction that reflected the East African experience of industrialization, Westernization, and the struggle for self-government and development of the post-independence society. The success of Tanzanian Faraji Katalambulla's crime thriller *Simu ya Kifo* (1965) set the pace for future Swahili novels. After the mid-1960s, Swahili publishing grew by leaps and bounds.

### Looking for Ludwig Krapf

Dr. Ludwig Krapf, a German cleric attached to the church society of England, is believed to be the first Christian missionary on Kenyan soil. He arrived at the Coast in 1844, along with a colleague named Johann Rebmann. Before coming to Kenya, he had initially travelled south from Europe and spent time in Abyssinnia (now Ethiopia) where other missionaries were establishing Orthodox Christianity. He noticed that Arabic was the *de facto* lingua franca of Northern Africa. He travelled back northwards into Egypt where he set about learning Arabic so that he would be able to fit in with the Arabs at the Arab-ruled East African coastal strip (then controlled by Omani Arabs as part of the Sultanate of Zanzibar's Seyyid Said).

It is important – or at least interesting – to note that the Arabs had been visiting the Eastern Africa coastline for centuries before 'the White Man' arrived (Portuguese traders first came to the East African coast in 1498). Arabian sea-goers navigated the seas using small boats called dhows which had large triangular sails. Since they were small and made of light materials, the dhows could actually move quite fast (when the winds were true) and the sailors voyaged back and forth, trading in everything from spices to gold to human slaves. Given the smallness of the dhows, we believe that the sailors travelled from the Middle East to East African coasts by hugging the shoreline, either in the Red Sea (coasts of Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti) or the Indian Ocean (coasts of Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania etc). A Franciscan monk described the Mombasa Arabs<sup>79</sup> as 'Moors'<sup>80</sup> – a term that generally refers to Northern African Arabs. This lends credence to the belief that the dhow-travellers covered great distances by staying relatively close to *terra firma* (so that they could occasionally stop to rest, replenish food/water supplies, repair boat damage etc). The Arabs expertly utilised monsoon winds - which change direction twice a year - in order to be wind-powered southwards and then northwards. The Europeans, on the other hand, were more sophisticated sea-goers and had large ships that could voyage for months on end (even if they sometimes travelled the wrong way, like Christopher Columbus!) The Europeans also utilized compasses, telescopes, maps and other navigational aids. You can imagine how different the European vessels looked when they were juxtaposed with their equivalents from other parts of the world. In *The Lunatic Express*, Charles Miller paints a picture:

'Shielding his face from the sun, Whitehouse took particular notice of the great fleet of Afro-Oriental sailing vessels which were crammed into the claustrophobic Old Harbour and which now seemed huddled about his own ship like a plague of waterborne locusts.'

But let's get back to Dr. Ludwig Krapf and his contribution to Kenyan literature. Dr. Krapf arrived at the Kenyan Coast, from Egypt, and was welcomed by the Kaya elders (a kind of

<sup>79</sup> There is still a sizeable population of Arabs in Mombasa today – Kenyans by nationality

<sup>80</sup> As I explained in *Alexander Nderitu Introduces Africa*, Africa is not entirely Black (Negroid) – it has always been a mixture of races, including Caucasians

traditional religious council) of the Mijikenda<sup>81</sup> coastal community. The Kaya elders later gave him 92 acres of land at a place called Rabai where the local Kaya leader was called Jindwa. Rabai (where, incidentally, my suspense novel *After Midnight* is set) is situated about 25 km from Mombasa island.



**Dr. Ludwig Krapf**

Photo: Wikipedia

Dr. Krapf learnt Swahili from the Swahili people and some Mijikenda languages from the Kaya elders, with whom he spent a lot of time. Dr. Krapf, who gets no credit for his diplomatic skills, realised that building a Christian church in the middle of a Muslim ruler's territory might cause hostilities. He travelled all the way to the island of Zanzibar where he met Sultan Seyyid Said and was granted limited permission to do his missionary work. Returning to Rabai, Dr. Krapf began building St. Paul's Church in 1846. Between 1844 and 1866, Dr. Krapf translated the first four books of The Holy Bible into Swahili. In 1849, he founded the Church Mission School (now Isaac Nyundo School). This makes Rabai the place where both Christianity and formal education in Kenya began.

Also in 1849, Dr. Krapf met an Akamba<sup>82</sup> leader called Chief Kivoi and they became fast friends. From Kivoi, Dr. Krapf – who clearly had a flair for languages – learnt some Kamba. In December of 1849, Dr. Krapf visited his friend Chief Kivoi in Ukambani (or 'Kambaland'). During this visit, the missionary spotted something spectacular in the distance – a mountain so great that its three peaks were in the clouds. Could his sentiments on that day have been similar to these poetic lines that were written by a tourist (called Upton) in 1986 as he luxuriated at Mt. Kenya Safari Club in Nanyuki?

*'Here where Kenya's mountain shows  
Her crown at dawn  
A secret mountain, wreathed in cloud  
Above the wooded hills...  
She shows her height then coyly hides  
Her beauty once again...'*

Dr. Krapf named the mountain 'Mt. Kenya' and many decades later the entire country would named after it. History books record that Dr. Krapf 'discovered' Mt. Kenya (inasmuch as Christopher Columbus 'discovered' America). This is a dubious claim because the area all around the mountain was already populated by indigenous tribes, notably the Agikuyu, the Ameru and the Embu. The Agikuyu were (and still are) a very large community (even larger than the Akamba) that lived mainly by farming. The Agikuyu referred to Mt. Kenya as 'Mt. Kirinyaga' and prayed facing it, holding it to be sacred<sup>83</sup>. The mountainous Central Kenyan regions where they lived were superb for agriculture<sup>84</sup> and the Agikuyu not only had enough

<sup>81</sup> Mijikenda – means 'Nine tribes'

<sup>82</sup> A large tribe mostly found in Eastern Kenya

<sup>83</sup> Hence the title of Jomo Kenyatta's book: *Facing Mt. Kenya*

<sup>84</sup> In later decades, the Agikuyu would give the colonial government hell in a this-is-our-land armed struggle



produce to sustain their vast population but to trade with non-farming communities like the Maasai.

In 1850, Dr. Krapf wrote a collection of English-to-Swahili 'grammar books'. He also translated parts of the Bible into the Kamba language.

Tropical diseases were a major challenge to the arriving Europeans. Dr. Krapf lost his wife and newborn daughter to malaria and was himself wracked by ill health. Johan Rebmann went blind in 1871. In 1856, Dr. Krapf travelled back home to Germany (via Britain) and while he was there, he married a woman named Charlette.

Returning to Rabai, Dr. Krapf continued his mission of trying to convert Christians in a land dominated by tribal religion and Islam. One very sickly man agreed to be baptised but died soon afterwards. After some time, a man named Nyundo and his son accepted Christianity. Dr. Krapf baptised them 'Abraham' and 'Isaac' Nyundo. Isaac Nyundo married a girl named Polly and the iconic couple would later take over Dr. Krapf's work. In 1869, Dr. Krapf was recalled to Germany over the low number of converts. Around this time, slavery was being abolished all over the world, giving rise to 'freetowns' (communities of freed slaves). When the freed slaves in Mombasa's Free Town (or 'Frere town', both are correct) heard about the church in Rabai, they turned up in droves. Many of them were literate or familiar with Christianity. In 1883, more funds and building materials were sent from Europe to make a bigger church. The church they built is still there, along with the school and cottages that Dr. Krapf and Johann Rebmann built. When a PEN-Kenya delegation recently visited the historically significant region of Rabai (in the footsteps of Ludwig Krapf), they were surprised to see so many ancient things still in use in the church that pioneering missionaries built – the seats, the windows, the pulpit. When I touched the keys of Kenya's first grand piano, I was surprised that it still plays music.

Circa 1878, Dr. Krapf wrote the first-ever English-to-Swahili dictionary (Published post-houmously in 1882 by Oxford). He also authored an autobiography, a copy of which can be found at Rabai. He died a natural death (on his knees in prayer) in Germany in 1881. Over 3,000 mourners attended his funeral.

### **The Mazrui Clan**

The surname 'Mazrui' often pops up when one studies coastal history or academia. The Mazruis were an Omani-Arab clan that ruled parts of the East African coast from the 18th to the 20th century. In the 18th century they governed Mombasa and opposed the Al Bu Sa'id Omani dynasty that reigned over Zanzibar. On at least one occasion they attacked Stone Town in league with the Portuguese.

When the British East Africa Protectorate was established in the late 19th century, the Mazruis were among the forces that actively resisted British rule, along with the Agikuyu and Akamba people from further inland.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of formidable relics of the Mazrui era (ruins, museums, cultural sites, artefacts etc). For such a famous (and important) family, one would expect more memorabilia, at least one well-stocked museum<sup>85</sup>.

Ali Mazrui (born 24 Feb 1933 in Mombasa) is an academic and political writer on African and Islamic studies and North-South relations. He is an Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities and the Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York.

Mazrui obtained his B.A. with Distinction from Manchester University in Great Britain in 1960, his M.A. from Columbia University in New York in 1961, and his doctorate (DPhil) from Oxford University (Nuffield College) in 1966.

In 2005, Ali Mazrui was selected as the 73rd top-most intellectual person in the world on the list of 'Top 100 Public Intellectuals' by [Prospect Magazine](#) (UK) and [Foreign Policy](#) (United States).

He has written or co-written more over 20 books and published hundreds of articles in major scholastic journals and for media houses. He has also served on the editorial boards of more than twenty international scholarly journals.

In addition to his written work, Dr. Mazrui was also the creator of the television series *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, which was broadcast by the BBC. A book by the same title was jointly published by BBC Publications and Little, Brown and Company.

Prof. Elizabeth Orchardson-Mazrui is an artist and writer of books (academic, children's, and poetry) and articles. She has a keen interest in history and culture, especially that of the coast-based Mijikenda community. Her published books include *Adventures of Mekatilili*, a children's novel based on the legendary Mekatilili Wa Menza and Mijikenda historical and oral traditions. (Mekatili was a historical Mijikenda woman who resisted British colonisation and is hailed as a hero to this day.)

### **The 'Sultan' of Swahili Lit**

As sure as the Kilimanjaro is Africa's tallest mountain, Tanzania's Shaaban Bin Robert is the biggest name in Swahili Literature. Sheikh Shaaban Bin Robert (often abbreviated as 'Shaaban Robert') had humble beginnings – he was an unasumming primary school dropout with a gift for storytelling. He wrote prose, poetry and essays and employed a very wide range of literary devices, including allegory and personification. He wasn't merely a storyteller – he was more of a teacher and socio-political commentator, using literature as a tool. He tackled such themes as justice, law, love, peace, brotherhood and the human condition. His many and varied works made a big contribution to Swahili literature and culture. Tanzania's first president, Mwalimu Nyerere, was so big a fan that he personally promoted the books! According to a *Daily Nation* article, by Julius Sigei and Hugholin Kimaro, Shaaban Robert's literature may have influenced Mwalimu Nyerere's decision to introduce

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<sup>85</sup> The Mazruis are also not properly acknowledged for their role in colonial resistance. Almost all credit goes to the Mau Mau fighters and although they (Mau Maus) were the tip of the spear, there were documented pockets of resistance all over the country.

African Socialism (*Ujamaa*) to Tanzania, which he did with the Arusha Declaration of 1967. The Socialism experiment didn't go to well and among those who have written about Tanzania's strygggle with it are Euphrase Kezilahabi, author of *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* and *Gamba la Nyoka*.



**A selection of books by Shaaban Robert**

Two of Shaaban Robert's contemporaries were Muhammed Saleh Farsy (*Kurwa na Doto*, 1960) and Muhammed Said Abdulla (*Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale*, 1960), both of whom came from Zanzibar.

Shaaban Robert left us on June 22, 1962, but Death, be not proud – his works will be studied and enjoyed for generations, if not forever.

*'A writer will always have a place of immortality on this Earth as long as his/her work is still read and appreciated.'* - La Belle Rouge, *Poetess Of The Heart*

Other iconic Swahili scribes include:

- Tanzanian Faraji Katalambulla (Tanzania)
- Euphrase Kezilahabi (Tanzania)
- Mohammed S. Mohammed (Tanzania)
- Ebrahim Hussein (Tanzania)
- Penina O. Mlama (Tanzania)
- Alamin Mazrui (Kenya)
- Ali Jemaadar Amir (Kenya)
- Katama Mkangi (Kenya)
- P.M. Kareithi (Kenya)
- Wallah Bin Wallah (Kenya)
- Ken Walibora (Kenya)



**Ken Walibora, author of *Siku Njema* (left) with Alexander Nderitu**

## MODERN TIMES

Kiswahili is on the march, both as a language and a socio-political force. In Tanzania (which incorporates the island of Zanzibar), Kiswahili has been part and parcel of the society for millenia. Tanzania's first president, the beloved Mwalimu ('Teacher') Julius Nyerere gave many brilliant speeches in Swahili. The transcripts of those speeches are not just good for African political studies<sup>86</sup> but for Swahili studies as well. In Kenya, the growth of Kiswahili was boosted by its being made a mandatory examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. Kiswahili is a permanent feature at the Kenya Coast (or 'Pwani') but is less popular inland ('Bara') where there are many more indigenous languages like Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kalenjin, Kikamba, Kimeru and so on. Swahili and English are very popular in the capital city, Nairobi, because it is a melting pot and therefore the use of vernaculars is limiting and often considered anti-social.

- College students can major in Swahili at various universities across the country. Nairobi University teaches Swahili literature, a course that covers: Genres of Kiswahili literature (poetry, prose and drama), analysis of early works of literature in Kiswahili, modern Swahili literature, Kiswahili literature and Eastern African nationalism, Thematic and stylistic developments in Kiswahili literature, Literary movements in Kiswahili literature, Comparison with texts from other languages translated into Kiswahili and Analysis of selected texts.

- The Insitute of Swahili Studies (University of Dar es Salaam) has over 75 years in the teaching and research of Swahili Language, Literature and Culture. It aims to promote these elements with a vision of seeing Swahili become 'the lingua franca of the African continent'.

- Professor Mohamed Hassan Abdulaziz (b 1932) is a Senior Lecturer and Founder Chairman of the new Department of Linguistics and African Languages at University of Nairobi. He helped build the new Department from scratch and was its chairman from 1970 to 1985.

He was born in Mombasa where he also received his early education. He later obtained a B.A. degree in Classical and Modern Arabic from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University, and a M.A. degree in Swahili<sup>87</sup>. He also obtained a Ph.D. degree in Linguistics (Swahili Syntax), from London University. From July 1967 to March 1969, he was a lecturer in Linguistics and Swahili at University College of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. In 1970, he became Senior Lecturer in the University of Nairobi, becoming a full professor in 1978. He has supervised over 50 M.A. thesis in the last 25 years; in various fields of African Languages, Swahili Language and Literature.

Prof. Abdulaziz has many publications in the area of language and linguistics and has served on the editorial boards of a number of journals. His research interests are in Swahili and Bantu Linguistics, especially syntax and morphology, and the linguistics of African languages in general.

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<sup>86</sup> A painfully humble pan-Africanist, Mwalimu Nyerere experimented with African Socialism, but was not successful in this and later retired voluntarily.

<sup>87</sup> M.A. thesis on 18th century Swahili Poetry

- [Euphrase Kezilahabi](#) (b 1944) is a Tanzanian novelist, poet, and scholar. Born in Ukerewe, Tanganyika (now in Tanzania), he is currently based at the University of Botswana, where he became an Associate Professor at the Department of African Languages. He writes in Swahili, and has delivered talks on subjects such as 'Aesthetic Ambivalence in Modern Swahili' and 'The Concept of the Hero in African Fiction'. His works include: *Mzingile*, *Nagona*, *Karibu Ndani* and *Rosa Mistika*. Some of Kezilahabi's poems, such as those in *Kichomi*, stirred controversy for breaking with the formal traditions of Swahili poetry.
- Wallah Bin Wallah is perhaps the biggest name in Kenyan Kiswahili text-book publishing today. His numerous titles, geared towards students, include the *Kiswahili Mufti* series (for Standard 1 all the way to Standard 8). They are available from Longhorn Publishers.
- Another big name in Kenyan Swahili lit, perhaps the biggest in fiction, is Ken Walibora. Walibora is best known for his novel *Siku Njema* which became a KCSE secondary school set book. His other books include *Kufa Kuzikana* and *Ndoto Ya Amerika*. He is currently a Swahili Editor for Nation Media Group and recently authored a non-fiction book in English, about garish prison experiences.
- The novel *Kisima Cha Giningi* by Mohammed Said Abdullah is something special. A Sherlock Holmes-style novel, it has been studied as a school text but remains popular even without scholastic endorsement. At the heart of the novel's mystery is a water well (Swahili: 'kisima') at which the body of a wealthy heiress, Mwana wa Giningi, is discovered bearing stab wounds. She and her husband, Vuai, had been quarrelling and the police are quick to make a suspect out of him, but ace detective Bwana Msa has a different point of view...
- For Swahili learners, there are quite a number of major East African publishers producing a wide range of text books and literary material for different comprehension levels. They include: [Longhorn Publishers](#) (notably the 'Kiswahili Mufti' series by Wallah Bin Wallah), [Jomo Kenyatta Foundation](#), Vide-Muwa Publishers (notably the 'Kiswahili Creative Works Series'), [East African Educational Publishers](#) and [Mkuki na Nyota](#).
- To totally immerse yourself in the beautiful language, there is an online resource called [SwahiliHub.com](#). It contains news, translation services, stories, QFM swahili radio broadcasts, great videos, blog posts, KCPE and KCSE test papers, poetry ('mashairi ya sokomoko'), histories and much more.

## THE CASE FOR KISWAHILI AS AFRICA'S LINGUA FRANCA

*'When they want to bring down a people, an old trick they all employ  
When they want to destroy a people, it's the people's culture they first destroy...  
This was planned and well-orchestrated by men with other interests in mind  
From behind, they manipulated a total cultural decline...  
We never interfere with their culture, their religion still intact  
But they pounce on we like a vulture, with an underhanded attack!..'.  
- The Mighty Duke<sup>88</sup>, Don't Destroy Calypso Music (song)*

I have never made a secret of being a Pan-Africanist; in fact I'm sure I was a Pan-Africanist even before I knew what that meant. And there are few things that excite pan-Africanists like myself than the possibility of a *lingua franca* for our continent. It doesn't matter if not every single country participates (political realism makes that almost an impossibility) but if the majority of countries were to adopt a single language as the representative language of the 'Black' continent, that would be a day of glory; a social-political landmark in modern Africa.

Understand first that the current national boundaries are largely the legacy of European colonialism and make little sense to the African. Since there was a 'scramble for Africa', European powers divided the continent amongst themselves almost like a cake being shared amongst party guests. Their crooked, criss-crossing, demarcation lines paid little concern to the homogeneity of the land, with the effect that the national boundaries cut through communities, tribal land, grazing sites, animal migration routes, forests and even lakes and rivers<sup>89</sup>. The people divided by those rugged borders now look at each other as foreigners and even rivals (Ghana and Nigeria are a great example of that) whereas they are historically and genetically very close. Can you honestly tell a football crowd of Ghananians from a football crowd of Nigerians just by watching them? What about Rwandese and Burundians, or Kenyans and Tanzanians? One of the most recognisable East African tribes is the Maasai. They are mainly found in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. The same people, the same culture, the same language. They are scattered over a wide geographical area because their ancestors were pastoralists and used to travel over vast distances in search of pasture. Today, they would need passports and forex bureaus to traverse their ancestral stomping grounds the way their forbears did.

The idea, or complaint, that Africa's national boundaries are outdated colonial legacies is one that is hotly debated worldwide. For instance, the Associated Press reports that Kenyan novelist and scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o was one of the keynote speakers at a recent 'Towards an Africa Without Borders' conference hosted by the University of Wisconsin. The conference tackled such themes as Pan-Africanism and possible solutions to facilitate a united Africa. Other keynote speakers were US author and scholar Angela Davis and Kenyan historian and author Maina wa Kinyatti. This kind of discourse has been going on for quite a while now.

The information website [Blackpast.org](http://Blackpast.org) (an 'Online Reference Guide to African American History') gives an illustration of how dangerous the colonial boundaries turned out to be:

<sup>88</sup> A prize-winning Calypsonian from Trinidad & Tobago

<sup>89</sup> For example, the Serengeti and Maasai Mara Game reserves are really the same jungle but in separate countries

'Carved out of the west of Africa by Britain without regard for preexisting ethnic, cultural and linguistic divisions, Nigeria has often experienced an uncertain peace. Following decades of ethnic tension in colonial Nigeria, political instability reached a critical mass among independent Nigeria's three dominant ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast. On January 15, 1966, the Igbo launched a coup d'état under the command of Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi in an attempt to save the country from what Igbo leaders feared would be political disintegration. '

Still, it is very unlikely that all African nations would be willing to relinquish their boundaries in favour of a single Superstate (as [Libya's Col. Gaddafi](#) found out) but, left to their own devices, Africans would do away with most borders and increase trade and communication amongst themselves. As observed in [Kiss, Commander, Promise](#), the likelihood of socio-politico-economic blocs is probably more realistic than a melting away of borders.

According to an article entitled *Swahili Literature Through the Centuries*<sup>90</sup>, Swahili is the official language of Tanzania, one of two official languages in Kenya, and is widely spoken in Uganda. It is also spoken in nearby countries, including parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and Zambia, as well as adjoining areas of southern Somalia and northern Mozambique. It is the first language of several million speakers, often referred to as ethnic Swahili, who live along the coast of Kenya and Tanzania. It is also the native language among peoples living on islands near the East African coast, stretching for a thousand miles from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique. The number of Swahili speakers (estimated at 50 million) is constantly growing, thus enhancing its status as the lingua franca of the entire eastern Africa region. Education, trade and commerce, ecclesiastical use, and language policy have all contributed to its popularity both historically and in modern times.

In October 2013, Nancy K. Ayodi of Kenya's Maasai Mara University presented a paper entitled 'THE ROLE OF THE LINGUA FRANCA KISWAHILI IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA' at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Language and Development Conference in South Africa. Her well-researched paper makes very good points supporting Swahili's eligibility as a lingua franca, including:

- In 2005, the then president of Mozambique, Joachin Chissano, addressed delegates in an African Union Summit in Kiswahili. This was interpreted as a call to Africa to embrace Kiswahili for African nationalism.
- Governments led by President Julius Nyerere, Ali Hassan Mwinyi of Tanzania and President Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya found Kiswahili important for goals which were secular in nature.
- Swahili is widely used by the media. It is also widely used in trade as evidenced by its adoption by economic blocs like COMESA and EAC as a language of trade.

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<sup>90</sup> Written by Kenneth P. Lohrentz Interim, African Studies Librarian, University of Kansas Libraries



- Kiswahili is probably the most eligible single African language anywhere in Black (Sub-Saharan) Africa for transformation into the first indigenous African language for modern Science and Technology.

Also in October 2013, Literature professor Tom Odhiambo (University of Nairobi) published an article in the *Sunday Nation* (27/09/2013) in which he pondered why Kiswahili is yet to unite East Africa. Excerpts of his analysis:

'Why hasn't Kiswahili, the language of trade, colonial adventurism and colonial administration integrated the region and made us into a community? Kiswahili is the language that brought education, religion, the government, business to many communities in the interior of East Africa from the Coast...Why are our critics interested in literature in English at the expense of Kiswahili literature? This is an old question that gets dismissed by the tens of East African critics weaned on literature in English and ignorant of the incredible strides in writing in Kiswahili...'

Scholar Alamin Mazrui<sup>91</sup> has published a study entitled *Swahili Beyond the Boundaries: Literature, Language, Identity*<sup>92</sup>. In the book, Mazrui uses comparative literature to seek the identity of Swahili lit 'through the central concept of hybridity' (mixing of cultures). He notes that 'hybridity' is an inherent quality in all cultures. The book also examines ancient texts, poetic forms ('Aesthetics of Swahili verse') and translations ('Translation and the re-configuration of the Swahili literary space'), including a history of the translation of the Holy Quran into Swahili.

Kiswahili is by no means the only language that has been postulated as a lingua franca. Another eligible tongue is 'Hausa' (mainly spoken in Nigeria). Personally, I don't care which language becomes lingua franca as long as it is one that originated in the geographical space called Africa (ie. Has no 'colonial' tag).

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<sup>91</sup> Swahili poet/scholar ALAMIN Mazrui is not to be confused with ALI Mazrui of *Triple Heritage* fame

<sup>92</sup> Ohio University Press, 2007. ISBN 978 0 89680 252 0

## AFRICA THE BEAUTIFUL

*'Mwacha mila ni mtumwa' ('One who abandons his culture is a traitor') – Swahili proverb*

*'The problem with Africans is that we read the wrong books.'* - Julius Nyerere

*'When a king's palace burns down, the re-built palace is more beautiful'* - African Proverb

One of the most revered African leaders of all time was Tanzania's former president, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. A counter to the image of African leaders as money-grabbing, power-hungry tyrants, Julius Nyerere was humble to a fault and was always looking for ways to improve the lot of the common man. It was probably this drive that led him to introduce socialism to his country. Tanzanian experiment with African socialism (*ujamaa*), begun in the late 1960s and is today largely regarded as a failure (Most African countries are capitalistic, democratic, republics). In a 1962 speech, Mwalimu Nyerere spoke thus:

'Socialism - like Democracy - is an attitude of mind. In a socialist society it is the socialist attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern, which is needed to ensure that the people care for each others welfare.

The purpose of this paper is to examine that attitude. It is not intended to define the institutions which may be required to embody it in a modern society.

In the individual, as in the society, it is an attitude of mind which distinguishes the socialist from the non-socialist. It has nothing to do with the possession or non-possession of wealth.

Destitute people can be potential capitalists - exploiters of their fellow human beings. A millionaire can equally well be a socialist; he may value his wealth only because it can be used in the service of his fellow men. But the man who uses wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows is a capitalist. So is the man who would if he could!...

- Julius K. Nyerere, [\*Ujamaa - The Basis of African Socialism, 1962\*](#)

Mwalimu Nyerere was clearly a Pan-Africanist. An excerpt from yet another speech:

'I have been very concerned indeed about world reactions to recent events in Africa, and it seems to me to be necessary that I should make Tanzania's position clear. For the events of the past few weeks have once again demonstrated that although, our legal independence is officially recognized, our need and our right to develop our countries and our continent in our own interests has not yet been conceded in practice. The habit of regarding Africa as an appendage of Western Europe has not yet been broken...'

- [\*Tanzania Rejects Western Domination 1978\*](#), Statement by President Julius K. Nyerere

Mwalimu Nyerere gracefully handed over power in Tanzania (after the failure of *ujamaa*) unlike the many power-clinging Third World rulers who try to be president for life. He lived

so humbly after his retirement from public life that officials of his political party insisted on building a mansion for him. There is currently a movement in Tanzania to have him beautified as a Catholic saint (Not an online petition for proponents to 'like' but an actual Catholic-system proposal to have a departed do-gooder formally recognised by the Church). He will be remembered for many things (his humility, for one) but to me, he was a Pan-Africanist and a champion of the Swahili language. It is actually unfortunate that most of his speeches (Swahili: 'hotuba za Nyerere') are only available in translated English. The Swahili versions were much better.

Incidentally, Tanzania is the home the world-famous and anthropologically important Serengeti wildlife reserve. Any wild animal worth the trip to Africa is available here - from Big Cats to elephant herds. Some anthropologists believe that Early Man himself lived in the Serengeti before moving out to safer areas (and then spreading even further due to population pressure and the search for resources.) Kenya's super-popular Maasai Mara Game Reserve is actually part of the same jungle as Serengeti: a European-imposed national boundary runs through it, placing part of the reserve in Kenya and the other one in Tanzania. During the great annual wildebeest migration, over a million herbivores (wildebeestes, zebra, gazelles etc) cross over from the Mara side to the Serengeti side, trailed by predators, in what has perennially been described as the greatest show on earth. According to one nature documentary, the Serengeti-Mara savannah sustains so many large grass-eaters that it is 'the greatest concentration of beef in the world'.

Africa is a land of contrasts. Some punters argue that Africa is actually the richest continent in terms of natural resources. And yet, it remains the poorest in monetary terms. Still, for sheer genetic diversity, cultural richness and natural splendour, there's no place like it in the known world.

As Mwalimu Nyerere would have ended this if it were a speech: God bless Africa.

*'On arrival, a most agreeable sight greeted the visitor  
Arabian dhows sliced the ocean's surface like the dorsal fins of sharks  
Bone-white coral reefs jutted out of the glassy emerald waters  
Palm trees were green fireworks going off over white sands.'*

- Alexander Nderitu, *Remember the Lions* (poem),

[\*The Moon is Made of Green Cheese\*](#)

## **JEREMIAH'S WATERS: Why Are So Many Writers Drunkards?**

*'Write when you are drunk but edit when you are sober.'* - Ernest Hemingway

*'They say beer's been helping ugly men get sex since the 1860s  
But beer's been around since the time of Genesis  
The Sumerians had it circa 3000 BC  
And you should have seen the Greeks  
'Cause when they were drunk, they were freaks  
Singing and dancing, clowns doing tricks  
Since Creation, men have loved their drinks'*  
- Drinks (song), [The Alexander Nderitu Overture](#)



**SOBERING: A 2012 Ipsos Synovate report rates alcohol as the 2<sup>nd</sup>-biggest danger to road safety in Kenya**

For over a decade, Wahome Mutahi (R.I.P) reigned as Kenya's humourist-in-chief. His main outlet was a wildly popular humour column entitled 'Whispers' in the *Sunday Nation* (by miles the largest-circulation newspaper in the country). The column revolved around a parody of Mr. Mutahi himself (in the character of 'Whispers' aka 'Son of the Slopes') and a parody of his actual home life. Wahome Mutahi's narratives were often set at a 'local' run by a barmaid named 'Rhoda' and he'd sit around with friends, imbibing copious amounts of 'Jeremiah's waters' as they discussed everything from politics to womenfolk. 'Whispers' would often go home to his no-nonsense, prayer-warrior wife, 'Thatcher'<sup>93</sup>, stinking 'like a brewery'. Apart from his column, Wahome Mutahi authored several books, including *Pieces of a Dream*, *The Ghost of Garba Tula* and *Three Days on the Cross*. He promoted 'bar theatre' (ie. live theatre in pubs) in Kenya and run a public house called 'Whispers Citrus Bar' in Ngara, Nairobi, before his untimely death.

<sup>93</sup> Named after Britain's Margaret Thatcher aka The Iron Lady

James Murua, a worthy successor to Wahome Mutahi, made his writing debut as a blogger and is now a newspaper columnist. He has also written on the issue of 'Jeremiah's Waters' (including bar reviews). In one of his humour articles (published around the time the James Bond franchise was celebrating 50 years of existence), Murua fantasized about a Kenyan James Bond. He imagined the Kenyan version bellying up to a bar in downtown Nairobi and coolly ordering a glass of 'Muratina'<sup>94</sup> - shaken not stirred.'

*'I usually write at night. I always keep my whiskey within reach.'* – William Faulkner

Many writers, print journalists included, seem to enjoy either writing about beer/alcohol or imbibing it. Those who imbibe tend to be heavy drinkers or outright alcoholics. It is almost as if they believe alcohol helps their writing (the same way drugs are associated with live music bands, especially rock acts).

My editor friend Mona tells me that when she was pursuing a course in journalism in Tanzania, she interned at a newspaper where the main sub-editor, trusted with the headlines, was an old drunkard who was often away from the office. With the clock ticking towards the deadline, he would be brought in – haggard and stinky – to design the next day's headline. Mona would watch silently as the dishevelled man would read the lead articles and come up with arresting titles. Sometimes his headings were so good that the rest of the staff would burst out in applause, which pleased the old man tremendously.

*'Work is the curse of the drinking classes.'* – Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900)

In *Genuflection in the Sun*, humorist S. J. Perelman makes this assessment:

'I am not a teetotaller and enjoy a good snot as well as the next one, but for sheer delight in the region of the tonsils, none of them can even begin to compare with that strange combination of syrup, ice cream and carbonated water skilfully proportioned by some Master Dispenser at my favourite Ligget Fountain.'

Like S. J. Perelman, many scribes love to 'wet their throats', to get 'some delight in the region of the tonsils'. Bestselling author Wilbur Smith (*When the Lion Feeds, Elephant Song, The Seventh Scroll*<sup>95</sup>) describes how he first met his second wife, Danielle, to whom he now dedicates all his books:

'I'd had four or five beers, so I was hanging loose, as they say. I looked across the room, and there before my eyes, reclining like a leopardess on the sofa, was this gorgeous woman. So I walked across – she says I staggered slightly – I sat down at her feet and I've been there ever since.'

And here's comic poet Ogden Nash, waxing lyrical about *A Drink With Something in It*:

*'There's something about a Martini,  
A tingle remarkably pleasant;*

<sup>94</sup> A strong traditional beer from the Kikuyu community

<sup>95</sup> 'Wilbur Smith novels...are rippling yarns in which men are men and women are grateful.' – *International Express*

*A yellow, mellow Martini;  
I wish I had one at present.  
There's something about a Martini,  
Ere the dining and dancing begin,  
And to tell you the truth,  
It's not the vermouth –  
I think perhaps it's the gin.'*

Novelist Karanja wa Kang'ethe (*Mission to Gehenna*) is no fan of heavy binging. He once said to me:

'Heavy drinking is not recommended, even if you can afford it. I'd rather if a person had just one drink, or you buy the drinks and take them at home. Drinking in pubs is very dangerous. People will try to take advantage of you because they can see a beer bottle in front you...And alcohol lies – it can tell you that you are a rich man when you are actually poor.'

Oh, there's no shortage of sob stories that begin in a bar! I recently read about a man who was carrying a sizeable amount of cash who went into a pub one evening (while his car was being washed) and started knocking back beers just to pass the time. Before long, he was joined by a certain *atoti* (beautiful girl) who may or may not have been a prostitute (She may not even have been attractive – beauty is in the eyes of the *beer holder*). Anyway, he bought her drinks and they began talking. At one point, he excused himself to go to the loo...He swears that she must have slipped something into his drink while he was away because he remembers nothing beyond that point. All he knows is that he woke up in a lodging the next morning with all his money and other valuables gone. The name and other details of this gentleman are irrelevant to this research document because such incidents are as common as dirt. If you're interested in these kinds of sagas, all you have to do is set up a Google Alert with the requisite keywords and I guarantee you that you will receive e-mails every day. Sometimes, I think that every major crime in Nairobi (sorry, Nairobi) has a connection with a pub or alcohol. A senior army official nearly went bananas a couple of years ago after he lost a briefcase stuffed with Kshs. 1 million in cash, under circumstances almost identical to the story above. He must have been doubly embarrassed because his tale of woe made the news and some of his juniors must have read/heard about it.

And talking of women in bars, a celebrated TV personality revealed in a magazine interview that her first experience with alcohol was drinking Vodka at Carnival Restaurant, Nairobi, and passing out in the car park. It is very hard to picture this soft-spoken, impeccably dressed, much-admired TV host lying passed out on the ground at night, strangers ringed around her like hyenas at a carcass. By the same token, alcohol has made a lot of teenage girls lose more than just their dignity. One *atoti* told me that a certain alcohol brand (I won't promote it by mentioning its name here) is said to (putting it mildly) lead to the removal of ladies' underclothes. Let the youth heed the advice of their elders:

**'People will try to take advantage of you because they can see a beer bottle in front you.'**

In one of his tongue-in-cheek hit songs, rock-and-roll pioneer Chuck Berry<sup>96</sup> complained about the most excessively-drinking woman he had ever met. Dig this:

*'I walked into a beer tavern  
To give a girl a nice time  
I had forty-five dollars when I enter  
When I left I had one dime*

*Wasn't she a beer drinkin' woman?  
Don't ya know, man don't ya know?  
She was a beer-drinkin' woman  
And I don't want to see her no more'*

To illustrate how alcohol, like any other drug, can completely take over your life and destroy your future, let us attend to the true-life story of former beauty queen, Ann Njeri Mathu.

Anne Njeri Mathu is a former Kenyan beauty queen who nearly died from alcoholism. She is the author of the highly-recommended (by me) book, *Sober Again*, about her journey 'to hell and back'. [She spoke to NMG's Peter Oduor](#), revealing shocking information such as that her father introduced her to drinking and smoking and that she twice attempted to commit suicide. Her life began on a high – she attended the posh Bishop Gatimu Girls High School, went to Kenya Polytechnic, placed third in the annual Miss Kenya Beauty Contest and so on. She actually began boozing while still in high school (smuggling in the drinks) and this resulted in her grades going downhill. While in college, she joined the club circuit and got deeper into the habit. She got a job and bore two children but still carried on with the party life. At one point, when she was working for a city hotel, she was so far gone that she would 'drink to stay sober'. In other words, if she didn't drink, she would experience withdrawal symptoms like a drug junkie and be unable to function. Being a regular patron of drinking dens, it is not surprising that the men in her life were also heavy drinkers. She married a doctor who was an alcoholic and who died horribly 5 years later, due to drink. While in Germany, she married an ageing alcoholic with whom they would take 'alcohol for breakfast'. He didn't live long, either...The full details of her descent into hell, what she lost and where she is now appear in her autobiography, *Sober Again*, which is available at Amazon.

Writers (and other artists) appear to be particularly drawn to alcohol and other drugs (eg. performing artistes and their well-documented issues with hard drugs and prescription medicine). When I used to host a Spoken Word event<sup>97</sup>, my favourite opening line was, 'Welcome to Alcoholics Anonymous.' It was fun to make the drunkards present think that they had been lured into an intervention.

*'Not all chemicals are harmful. Without oxygen and hydrogen, for example, we wouldn't have water – a necessary ingredient in beer.'* – Joke in the *Reader's Digest* magazine

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<sup>96</sup> 'Lets' face it - if Chuck Berry was White, we would all be saying "Elvis who?"' – MSN.com article on the greatest musicians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

<sup>97</sup> Which later branched out into a general 'talent search'



In 2008, [LitVerse.com](http://LitVerse.com) put out a list of what they consider to be the 'Top 15 Great Alcoholic Writers' (especially as far as American literature is concerned). Their list:

1. Ernest Hemingway
2. James Joyce
3. F. Scott Fitzgerald
4. Charles Bukowski
5. William Faulkner
6. Jack Kerouac
7. Truman Capote
8. Edgar Allan Poe
9. Dorothy Parker
10. Dylan Thomas
11. Tennessee Williams
12. O. Henry
13. John Cheever
14. Raymond Chandler
15. Hunter Thompson

### **The River and the Source**

*'Almost without exception, alcoholics are tortured by loneliness.'*

- Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous

*'I didn't know what was wrong with my dad when I was a child...I didn't know it until much later in life. I knew he was an alcoholic, because he was drunk much of the time. He had 44 jobs in 34 years. He would punch out the boss from time to time and that's not a good move. We never knew if we were going to have a roof over heads or where the next meal was coming from. My mum started working...He (dad) would threaten to kill us...It was a dark childhood.'* –

Dean R. Koontz, No.1 New York Times bestselling author of the 'Odd Thomas' series



**DRUNKEN MASTER: Ernest Hemingway**

Ernest Hemingway (b 1899) has been described as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's greatest authors. After overcoming a few obstacles, he managed to publish his first book, *Three Short Stories*

*and Ten Poems* in 1923 and followed it up with *The Torrents of Spring*. The books were not commercially successful. At the age of 27, Hemingway found literary recognition with *The Sun Also Rises*, the story of a hopelessly romantic couple whom he portrayed as representatives of the 'lost generation.'

During World War I, Hemingway worked as a Red Cross driver. He was hit by shrapnel from an Australian bomb and later blasted in the knee by machine-gun fire as he tried to assist a colleague. After a long recuperative period, he was discharged and awarded a Red Badge of Courage. He wrote for newspapers and married Hadley Richardson, a woman eight years his senior. After their divorce in 1926, he married Pauline Pfeiffer, a former editor of *Vogue* magazine. In 1928, while working on the first draft of *A Farewell to Arms*, he learnt of his father's suicide using his own war revolver.

*A Farewell to Arms* is probably his best-known book and has been described as 'the best American novel to come out of World War I.' Hemingway's description of lines of tired soldiers marching in the rain, haggard and demoralised, became a sort of trademark. In 1940, Pauline divorced him for desertion. He married Marth Gellhorn and published *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, another classic.

During World War II, he flew unhurt on several combat missions as a correspondent for *Collier's* magazine. In 1953, he came to Africa on safari with his wife. He had some plane crashes in which his wife suffered two broken ribs while he ruptured his kidney and liver, damaged his lower spine and suffered a dozen concussions. He recuperated in Nairobi. That same year, he was conferred the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for *The Old Man and the Sea*, which is about the tragedy of man. He went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature the next year.

In 1960, Hemingway's health went downhill, both mentally and physically. He became depressed and by 1961 had undergone 25 electric shock treatments (to lift the depression). On July 2, 1961, shortly after returning from one of his many visits to the hospital, he placed the twin muzzles of a shotgun in his mouth and blew out his brains.

Many of his books came out posthumously: *A Moveable Feast* (1964), *Islands in the Stream* (1970), *The Dangerous Summer* (1985), *The Garden of Eden* (1986) and *True at First Light* (1999).

Death was never far from Hemingway's mind. In *Death in the Afternoon*, he wrote:

'All stories, if continued far enough, end in death and he is no true storyteller who would keep that from you.'

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, *for Whom the Bell Tolls*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death in the Afternoon* all end with death or suicide. The *Snows of the Kilimanjaro*, a semi-autobiographical novel, tells of a would-be writer who dies from an accident while hunting in Africa. It was turned into an audio book in the late 1990's, narration by Charlton Heston. Hemingway drank heavily and famously battled depression in the final months of his life. He reportedly said: 'Let's give my life a miss.'

But Hemingway was by no means the only famous writer that took his own life. The list of successful authors who have committed suicide over the years includes: Jack London, Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*) and L. H. Meyers (*The Root and the Flower*). Jack London wrote historical novels revolving around the South Pacific Islands. A TV series, *Tales of the South Pacific*, based on London's classic tales, was released by Pacific Picture in the mid 1990's. Author Irving Stone has written a biography of London entitled, *Jack London, Sailor on Horseback*. The book tells of how a man rose from the lowest levels of society, achieved spectacular literary success, made a fortune but later commits suicide.

And yet, being in a dark place, mentally, has enabled some writers to create their best works. They use writing as catharsis, working furiously to escape reality. John le Carré wrote his breakout novel, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, while in low spirits:

‘I know I was deeply unhappy in my professional and personal life, and that I was enduring the extremes of loneliness and personal confusion. I know I wanted to be in love, and that my own past, and my own inwardness, made this impossible.’

Le Carré turned a minus into a plus by re-redirecting his energies. In human psychology, this (turning negativity into something positive) is called ‘sublimation’.

‘Sublimation’ might be the ‘out’ that depressed/disillusioned writers need in order to beat their blues. In other words, if you're broke, then write about a character who is broke; if you're in despair with the social-political dispensation, then bring that in a work fiction or even non-fiction; if you're unlucky in love then write about a character who is also looking for love unsuccessfully. Readers might actually love your book because they identify with your ‘realistic’ characters. Helen Fielding is a good example of that. She turned 30-something angst into literary gold when she penned books like *Bridget Jones Diary* (about a goofy, love-seeking, self-depracting single woman) and its sequel, *The Edge of Reason*. Helen Fielding's books are shot through with humour and are by no means ‘pity parties’ for disillusioned people. Another UK author who made a fortune by turning her worst moments into money is Marian Keyes (*Sushi for Beginners*). Keyes became an alcoholic in her late teens and went so far off the rails, she unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide. She later took up writing as a kind of therapy and wrote several feel-good books that sold very well. By the age of 37, she had five bestsellers under her belt and was a multi-millionaire. Similarly, Russia's Leo Tolstoy was reportedly going through a dark depression, complete with suicidal thoughts, when he wrote *Anna Karenina* (1877) which became an international classic.

## A Farewell to Drunkenness

*'In my early days of wanting to be a writer, I thought I had to be an alcoholic, perpetually broke, and given to mind-numbing fits of depression.'* – Kingwa Kamencu, 'Unconventional Advice for Writers, but it Works' (article)<sup>98</sup>

*'I would argue that coffee has been far more important to literature than alcohol.'*  
- Joseph Finder

During a cocktail party at Nairobi University, following a public lecture by South African 'apartheid poet' Wally Serote, a print journalist embarrassed me when he drunkenly ordered a South African embassy official to serve us more drinks (You should have seen her face – she was offended!) I don't even know why he mistook her for a caterer – they were all in uniform. Another scribe, who is better known for his drinking than his writing, nearly got me killed in South 'B' when he provoked a bar fight after half a day of boozing. Because I was part of his 'entourage', I was attacked, which really annoyed me because I deliberately avoid such places and had never even witnessed a bar fight before, let alone been part of one.

This is not an article, it's an intervention. Kenyan writers, especially *journos*, need to ease up on the liquor. We're losing face.

*'But if you're still playing beer pong five years from now you may be on the wrong track.'*  
- Eric Idle, Whitman College commencement speech

### DEARLY DEPARTED

*'By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once; we owe God a death...  
And let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next.'*  
- William Shakespeare

Literary Africa has lost several greats over the last couple of years including Grace Ogot, playwright Francis D. Imbuga (*Betrayal in the City, The Burning of Rags*), Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*), Kofi Awoonor and Barbara Kimenyi. And since I have personally given up on 'Jeremiah's waters', allow me to pour some *literary* liquor in their memory:

*'Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From Rest and Sleep which but thy picture be,  
Much pleasure, then, from thee must flow;  
And soonest our best men with thee do go –  
Rest of their bones and soul's delivery!'*  
- John Donne, *Death*

<sup>98</sup> Daily Nation, 04/01/2014

## **On Writing**

*'Oh, I think there are as many fine writers as there ever were. I just worry there are not any good readers anymore.'* - Gore Vidal, American writer

*'Creative writing is considered to be any writing, fiction, poetry, or non-fiction, that goes outside the bounds of normal professional, journalistic, academic, and technical forms of literature. Works which fall into this category include novels, epics, short stories, and poems. Writing for the screen and stage, screenwriting and playwriting respectively, typically have their own programs of study, but fit under the creative writing category as well.'* - Wikipedia

Some communities in Central America believe that God created human beings because He likes listening to stories. Others believe that God created human beings because He loves *telling* stories! Without question, stories play a role in *all* human cultures – whether the tales are delivered orally, in print or electronically. Stories entertain us, distract us or just hold us captive while the storyteller teaches us something. At a speaking engagement, the famous life coach/motivational speaker Jim Rohn once said:

*'Novels are good. Sometimes an intriguing story keeps our attention so that the author can weave in the philosophy he or she is trying to get across. Ayn Rand<sup>99</sup> was probably better at that than anyone I can think of. *Atlas Shrugged*, some of those towering novels. The novel kept us intrigued but guess what she was doing all the time: feeding us her philosophy.'*

The written form plays a central role in modern storytelling. Even stories that will later be delivered to the masses via television, film, radio or stage performance are normally first captured and edited in a written/typed form. Prose (non-poetic, non-script) writing is probably the richest method of conveying stories, especially long ones. Writing good prose is an art, like music or dance, and it can take years for a scribbler to produce a story that will be generally accepted as 'a work of art' (ie. literature). One of the best writers of all time was William Golding (Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature). Below is a passage from Mr. Golding's novel, *Free Fall*:

*'I have walked by stalls in the market-place where books, dog-eared and faded from their purple have burst with a white hosanna. I have seen people crowned with a double crown, holding in either hand the crook and flail, the power and the glory. I have understood how the scar becomes a star. I have felt the flake of fire fall, miraculous and pentecostal. My yesterdays walk with me. They keep step. They are grey faces that peer over my shoulder.'*

Writings such as Golding's are so enjoyable to read, that one may read them over and over again (just for the pleasure). One critic said that Golding's stories 'read themselves like a dream.' It is probably such literary achievements that made Oscar Wilde say:

*'There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well-written or badly written. That is all.'*

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<sup>99</sup> Author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*

An endless debate has been going on about whether good writers (like Golding) are born or made. The answer probably lies somewhere in between – teaching an untalented person is hammering on cold iron but, on the other hand, even a gifted storyteller needs some instruction/training. Famed poet, Alexander Pope:

‘True ease in writing comes from art, not chance  
As those move easiest who have learnt to dance.’

OK, then, let's learn to dance...

## THE GREATS

*'Pwagu hupata pwaguzi'*<sup>100</sup> – Swahili saying  
(means that an expert discovers even bigger experts)

*'I can live for two months on one good compliment.'*  
– Mark Twain (author *Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*)

I have often said, in interviews, that my writing career began when my high school English teacher told her other students, 'I wish you could all write the way Alexander does!' But when I left high school, where I had always been No.1 with a pen, I discovered super writers who made me feel like a beginner. They are too numerous to mention here but they include William Golding (*Lord of the Flies*), Ian Fleming (who had a writing style similar to Golding's), Mark Twain (*Tom Sawyer*), William Faulkner<sup>101</sup> (*The Sound and the Fury*), John Steinbeck<sup>102</sup> (*Of Mice and Men*), Rudyard Kipling<sup>103</sup> (*The Jungle Book*), Agatha Christie (*Evil Under the Sun*), Adam Hall (*Northlight*), Graham Greene (*Our Man in Havana*), Len Deighton (*City of Gold*<sup>104</sup>), Trevanian (*The Summer of Katya*<sup>105</sup>), Salman Rushdie<sup>106</sup> (*Midnight's Children*<sup>107</sup>) and many, many others. Since then, I have been on a mission to become the best wordsmith I can be, in order to inspire others the way the masters inspired me. Let's examine some of the works of these greats and see if we can learn a thing or two.

Pulitzer Prize winner William Faulkner is widely regarded as one of America's greatest writers. Here's a sample of Faulkner's writing (from *The Sound and the Fury*):

" 'Hush,' Dilsey said. 'You go to sleep.'  
The room went black, except the door. Then the door went black. Caddy said, 'Hush, Maury,' putting her hand on me. So I stayed hushed. We could hear us. We could hear the dark.' "

Only a master like Faulkner would think up a line like: 'We could hear the dark'. Now that's literature! Faulkner wrote about people. In other words, his work was 'character-driven' (as opposed to 'plot-driven'). His own words:

'It begins with a character, usually, and once he stands up on his feet and begins to move, all I do is trot around behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says.'

<sup>100</sup> Direct translation: 'The thief encounters an even bigger thief.'

<sup>101</sup> Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner

<sup>102</sup> Pulitzer Prize winner

<sup>103</sup> Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

<sup>104</sup> 'A brilliantly drawn background, a huge cast and a plot as well-machined as a Bentley gearbox.' – *Evening Standard*

<sup>105</sup> 'Superbly controlled...tension, release and climax...one hell of a pleasure to read.' – *Washington Post*

<sup>106</sup> Winner of 3 Booker Prizes, including 'Best of the Booker Winners'

<sup>107</sup> 'I haven't been so surprised by a novel since I read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.' – *The Times*



This next passage comes from Faulkner's book, *As I Lay Dying*. Again, notice the emphasis is on the characters, not the surroundings or the immensity of their situation/challenge/mission:

'I told him not to bring that horse out of respect for his dead ma, because it wouldn't look right, him prancing along on a dun circus animal and her wanting us all to be in the wagon with her that sprung from flesh and blood, but we hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl began to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat with Cash, with his dead ma lying in her coffin at his feet, laughing.'

Works of literature such as Faulkner's are studied, especially in the West, in order to teach learners the techniques of the craft, to show students *how* to write effectively, to create images and even sounds in the mind of the reader:

'Literature is the property of all; its appeal is to all. But literature is an art, it employs techniques and offers problems that can be understood only through analysis; analysis means work.' – Edgar V. Roberts

And of course you can't have believable characters if they don't have believable dialogue (or soliloquies, as the case may be). Many writers tend to write extremely bookish/neat/wooden dialogue which fails because most people don't speak like that in real life. Here is an example of realistic (aka 'colloquial') dialogue:

'Don't you think perhaps –' she began.  
But Josephine interrupted her. 'I was wondering if now –' she murmured. They stopped. They waited for each other.  
'Go on, Con,' said Josephine.  
'No, no, Jug; after you,' said Constantia.  
'No, say what you were going to say. You began,' said Josephine.  
'I...I'd rather hear what you were going to say first,' said Constantia.  
'Don't be absurd, Con.'  
'Really, Jug.'

- From *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* by Katherine Mansfield

Not very 'neat', is it? But then again, neither is real conversation (or public speaking, for that matter). People sometimes talk over each other, interrupt rudely, forget words or names, fall off in the middle of a sentence, get distracted, go off track, stammer, and use such non-words as 'Ahh...' and 'Umm...'

John Steinbeck's slim novel, *Of Mice and Men*, has been called 'the great American novel of loneliness'. Set in the American West (cowboy country), it tells the poignant story of two male friends looking for work in the farms although their distant goal is to one day own a farm of their own where they can grow crops and 'live off the fat of the land.' But as all adults in the world know – it is one thing to have a Utopian dream and another to actually realize it. The ending of this story will startle even the most despairing readers.

*'If those other guys gets jailed, they can rot for all anyone gives a damn – but not us! And why? Because I've got you to look after me and you've got me to look after you, that's why.'* – From John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

*Of Mice and Men* is a true classic. It's a quick read, touches on matters of the soul, and resonates with people everywhere. Most people have grand dreams (especially when they are young). But as we have seen in every TV talent show there is (especially the insanely popular music contests), the chances of one's starry-eyed fantasy becoming a reality are very slim (not impossible, just odds-against). In Kenya, according to the registrar of companies, there are times when over 1000 new business are registered in a single month. Few of these will last through the year, some never even get started. *Of Mice and Men* prepares readers for life's challenges, like a friend reaching out to hold your hand when all other people have abandoned you.

John Steinbeck himself was an American farmer whose dream was to become a writer. His first three books showed no promise and have been described as 'financial disasters'. He returned to farming which he practiced for several more years before returning to the literary world. This time, there were no disappointments. He made his mark with such fiction books as *Tortilla Flat* and *The Red Pony* and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his acclaimed masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath* (which was later turned into an acclaimed movie, of the same title, starring Ward Bond. *Of Mice and Men* also met with success and was turned into a Western movie). Steinbeck's place in literature was sealed with his winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

After his death, Steinbeck's writings and personal pictures became the property of Stanford University, who purchased them from his sister, Esther Steinbeck. The papers include unpublished poems and short stories and about 400 letters to his friends and family.

The book title, *Of Mice and Men*, appears to come from the classic poem, *To a Field Mouse* by Robert Burns. Like the book, the poem (in 'olde English') tells of how hopes/dreams/plans can be dashed:

'The best laid plans of mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley<sup>108</sup>,  
And leave us nought<sup>109</sup> but grief and pain  
For promised joy.'

In *Ways of Escape*, novelist Graham Greene wrote:

'The main character in a novel must necessarily have some kinship to the author. They come out of his body as a child comes from the womb.'

And Graham Greene meant what he wrote. Greene's *The End of the Affair*, about an illicit war-time love tryst, is said to have been based on his own extra-marital affair with a woman named Lady Catherine Wanston. And this kind of thing – raiding your own life experiences

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<sup>108</sup> 'Gang aft a-gley' – Go wrong

<sup>109</sup> Nothing

for literary material, is commonplace. Magnus Pym – the hapless main character of Le Carré's *A Perfect Spy* – is based on the author's own life, especially his depraved childhood. Pym's charismatic father – described in the book as a con-man of epic proportions – is based on Le Carré's own father who was jailed for fraud.

*'I would like to write an erotic novel. But I have to wait until my mother dies.'*

- Isabelle Allende talking to David Frost on Al-Jazeera

America's Danielle Steel, who writes romances, must know a thing or two about men – she has been married five times, once to a convicted criminal and another time to a heroine addict. Her side of the story:

*'I had two indiscretions in my youth and they came back to haunt me. I am probably the most uptight, conservative person you will meet. I have been this way my whole life. That is why I married those two morons instead of just sleeping with them.'*

Husband No. 4, wealthy cruise ship owner John Traina, had this to say about Ms. Steel:

*'I thought I married a woman and realised I had married a storyline.'*

Like most love relationships, the Steel-Traina connection began magically but ended anti-climatically. In the dedication page of her 1989 novel, *Star*, Steel gushed: 'To the only man who has ever brought thunder and lightning and rainbows into my life. It happens once and when it does, it is forever.' The wealthy couple – who lived in a white mansion on San Francisco Bay – had a bitter divorce in 1996, with Traina winning a multi-million dollar settlement. Steel had a total of 9 children (5 with Traina), one of whom died from a supposed drug overdose<sup>110</sup>. But, love her or leave her, Danielle Steel remains one of the most stupendously successful authors of all time. During an autograph-signing session, a fan once asked her whether it was true that she had sold more books than the Bible, to which she replied: 'I hope not!'

*'I think that almost all of literature is about love...I love love.'*

Chimamanda Adichie, author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*,  
which she wrote because she 'wanted to write about love and war'

Should fiction writers weave their personal life experiences and personal philosophies into their works? Why not? Most do it consciously or subconsciously anyway. The product (article, book etc) will most likely be more 'realistic', engaging and ultimately profitable than fantasies spun entirely out of whole cloth.

*'A writer's material is whatever he cares about.'* - John Gardner, spy writer

*'You have to make the reader interested in the characters before the reader cares about what happens to the characters. And there has to be some kind of emotional pay-off at the end. My novels are driven by what happens at the end. I have never written a story where I couldn't see*

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<sup>110</sup> It was so traumatizing she got writer's block for the first time in her life

*the end.'* – John Irving, bestselling author of *The World According to Garp* and *A Son of the Circus*



**Nyeri Primary School: The real school where the central characters of *Kiss, Commander, Promise* went**

A famous businessman once said that 'Success is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration.' Becoming good at anything is usually labour-intensive and time-consuming, and literature is no exception. In the book *Technical Writing*, Maxine T. Turner writes:

'Late on a Sunday Afternoon as a team of engineers worked to meet a deadline for a technical recommendations report, the project manager threw his pen across the room, buried his face in his hands, and sobbed, "@#%&! I hate to write sooo bad!'

Ernest Hemingway, one of the most famous authors that ever lived, apparently had great difficulty honing his craft:

'Everybody my age had written a novel and I was still having difficulty writing a paragraph.'

So what did Hemingway do when he was having difficulty writing? Here's something from *A Moveable Feast*:

'But sometimes when I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue they made.'

Very *illuminating*, Mr. Hemingway. Moving on swiftly (hopefully to more useful information), we find that there are quite a number of good books/quotes on writing, some of them by respected writers. The oft-quoted Dr. Samuel Johnson had many gems of wisdom that would be of use to the modern-day wordsmith eg.

'A man may write at any time if he will set himself doggedly to it.'

And

'Language is the dress of thought.'

In *The Private Life of an Author*, Dr. Samuel Johnson offers even more insights:

'A man (writer) proposes his schemes of life in a state of abstraction and disengagement, exempt from the solicitations of affections, the importunities and appetite, or the depressions of fear, and is in the same state with him that teaches upon land the art of navigation to whom the sea is always smooth and the wind is always prosperous.'

And don't feel bad if you find yourself re-writing your material every time you review it. Most writers do that. Jeffery Archer said that he wrote 17 drafts to *As the Crow Flies*. Ernest Hemingway re-wrote the last page *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times (and each day, he re-wrote and edited the previous day's work). Novelist and short story writer Joyce Carol Oates once said, 'There are pages in recent novels that I have rewritten as many as seventeen times.' More quotes:

'Writing and re-writing are a constant search for what one is saying.' – John Updike

'You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it. That's why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence.' — Octavia Butler

'Creative writing is a continuous process that is going on in your mind all the time and you can't do it when people are talking to you.' – Frederick Forsyth, best-selling American novelist, on why he prefers to work away from cities

'“Writing style” means proper words in proper places.' – Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*

'Effectiveness of assertion is the alpha and omega of style.' - G. B. Shaw, *Man and Superman*

Salman Rushdie<sup>111</sup> was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1947 and currently resides in the UK. His books include *Shame*, *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and the controversial bestseller, *The Satanic Verses*, which is considered offensive to Islam. Concerning the Booker-prize-winning *Midnight's Children*, the *New York Times* had this to say: 'The literary map of India is about to be re-drawn... *Midnight's Children* sounds like a continent finding its voice. An author welcome to world company.' An excerpt from the beginning of *Midnight's Children*:

'I was born in the city of Bombay...at night...On the stroke of midnight as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined hands in respectful greeting as I came.'

<sup>111</sup> 'India has found her Günter Grass.' – *Sunday Telegraph*

And here's an excerpt from the novel *Ancient Evenings* by two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Norman Mailer:

'Crude thoughts and fierce forces are my state. I do not know who I am. Nor what I was. I cannot hear a sound. Pain is near that will be like no pain felt before. Is this the fear that holds the universe? Is pain the fundament? All the rivers veins of pain? The oceans my mind awash? I have a thirst like the heat of earth on fire. Mountains writhe. I see waves of flame. Washes, flashes, waves of flame.'

Just like musicians find comfortable genres to fit in (R&B, rap, opera, rock, reggae etc), you as a writer should not feel compelled to write like any particular writer. For example, writers like Norman Mailer could be very poetic in their descriptions (what some call 'waxing lyrical' on a subject) but there are other writers who were equally successful but were neither poetic nor lovers of poetry. Often, you will find that some writers are either good with characters or good with plots. Let's now examine some of the masters of the narrative form, people whose works were perceived as 'plot-driven' as opposed to 'character-driven'.

## THE PLOT THICKENS

*'We are a story-telling folk. For millennia, we have used the narrative device to educate, enlighten, entertain, frighten, enthrall and just plain tickle each other. That's how we roll.'*

- Chuck Lorre, sitcom writer/producer  
(*Greg & Dharma, Two & a Half Men, The Big Bang Theory* et al)

*'Oh, dear me, yes – a novel tells a story.'* – E. M. Forster, author of *A Passage to India*

### Fleming, Ian Fleming

Ian Fleming was born in 1908 and educated at Eton<sup>112</sup>. After a career in journalism and a stint in the navy, he moved to sun-soaked Jamaica. He had first visited the island in 1942 while working as an undercover agent in Bermuda. Four years later, he bought a property and built a villa he dubbed 'Goldeneye'. It was here that he first dreamed up a book series starring a suave secret agent character. As for the name of the character, he didn't want something outlandish 'like Peregrine Carruthers or Standfast Maltravers', he wanted something that belied the agent's exciting persona:

*'When I started writing books, I wanted to find a really flat, quiet, name and one of my bibles out here (in idyllic Jamaica) is James Bond's *Birds of the West Indies*. And I thought "James Bond" – now that's a pretty quiet name. So I simply used it.'*



**Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond**

At the age of 42 and on the eve of his marriage, he wrote *Casino Royale*, the first of the James Bond novels. By the time of his death in 1964, Ian Fleming's 14 Bond adventures had sold over 40 million copies and Bond became the most popular character in publishing history (now possibly overtaken by Harry Potter).

In 1965, over 6,782,000 James Bond paperbacks were sold in Great Britain alone. The biggest seller amongst them being *Thunderball*, which was translated into many other languages and

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<sup>112</sup> A prestigious school in the UK



went through several editions. According to the documentary *The Incredible World of James Bond*, 'In the fall-winter of 1965, *Thunderball* (the movie) was on the cover of every magazine imaginable.'

Ian Fleming's titles include *Dr. No*, *Goldfinger*, *The Living Daylights* and *Live and Let Die*. Apart from *The Spy Who Loved Me* (a Bond drama told from a female narrator's perspective), Fleming's books delivered danger and romance galore and it's not hard to see why they lent themselves so easily to film and comic books. In *Live and Let Die*, for example, Bond goes to Harlem which turns out to be the kingdom of 'Mr Big' – a no-nonsense voodoo baron and crime lord: 'Those he cannot posses, he crushes, and those who cross him will meet painful ends: like his beautiful prisoner, Solitaire, and her lover - James Bond.' Regarding *Live and Let Die*, a reviewer for the UK's *Sunday Times* gushed: '**Speed, tremendous zest, communicated excitement...Brhh! How wincingly well Mr. Fleming writes.**'

The following passage is allegedly from the book *State of Excitement*, an Ian Fleming book that was banned, and the writing is so crazy, I think it should be banned again! It appears that the author was himself in a 'state of excitement' when he jotted down the following lines concerning a trip to an Arab country:

'At first, someone had pulled my leg about eating sheep's eyes, forming a tiny gastronomic cloud on my horizon...But then not a single person was eating sheep's eyes and I wondered if this was a giant leg-pull by the Arabs. Could it be that while entertaining a British visitor in his tent, an Arab had thrown a sheep's eye into his mouth as a joke and the Brit had watched in horror as he munched on it and turned red in the face?'

This kind of flowery language/purple prose is often criticised (unless it is being used to create humour) because it tends to bury the meaning/story/point in a sea of words and because it is tiring to read for extended periods. Here, by contrast, is a straightforward, non-flowery, excerpt from *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain:

'We found a desolate, silent, mournful expanse. We never saw a human being on the whole route. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of useless soil, had almost deserted the country.'

Mark Twain, probably America's most celebrated writer, believed in syntactical elegance; an economy of words. He said: '**Use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences.**' Similarly, in *An Autobiography*, super writer Anthony Trollope wrote:

'The language used (in writing) should be as ready and as efficient a conductor of the mind of the writer to the mind of the reader as is the electric spark which passes from battery to battery.'

After Ian Fleming's death in the late 1960's, Gildrose Publications, owners of the James Bond literary copyright, chose John Gardner as his successor. Gardner had a curious past before becoming a thriller writer of note. He had worked as a Royal Marine officer, stage magician, theatre critic and journalist. His books included *The Garden of Weapons*, *The Quiet Dogs* and *The Secret Generations*. Since being picked as Fleming's successor, he has authored over ten

Bond tales, including *For Special Services*, *Icebreaker*, *Nobody Lives Forever*, *Broken Claw*, *The Man From Barbarossa* and *No Deals*, *Mr. Bond*.

## The Queen

*'I was thinking...You know that film I made - "The Witness for the Prosecution"<sup>113</sup>? You know, the story in "Prosecution" is amazing, the plot is fantastic. I (have) met many writers - Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Raymond Chandler: they have written screenplays for me. Brilliant characters, fantastic dialogue, but very bad plots. Agatha Christie: stale characters, ridiculous dialogue, (but) she plot like a f\*\*\*\*\* angel! I could be sitting here for the rest of my life and I could never make a plot so perfect. Unbelievable. It's like a billiard ball - how do you make it? It's perfect, it's round: where do you start? ... I tell you this, you may not want to hear it, but for every thousand Raymond Chandlers and William Faulkners, there is only one Agatha Christie.'* - Billy Wilder, filmmaker

Dame Agatha Christie is known throughout the world for her crime novels. Her books – including 57 detective novels – have been translated into every major language and sold an estimated 2 billion copies, making her the best-selling novelist of all time. Some critics say that only The Bible and William Shakespeare have sold more than Britain's Agatha Christie. *The Observer* has called her, 'The queen of crime fiction the world over'.

Agatha Christie's writing career began at the end of World War I, when she created character Hercule Poirot – a small Belgian detective with an egg-shaped head and a passion for order. He remains the most popular sleuth in fiction, without going as far as Sherlock Holmes. Agatha's many titles include: *Sparkling Cyanide*, *Passenger to Frankfurt*, *The ABC Murders*, *Death on the Nile*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *And Then There Were None*, *Mysterious Affair at Styles*, *Elephants Can Remember*, *Dead Man's Folly* and *Evil Under the Sun*.

*'Look at them (sun bathers) lying on that beach like slabs of meat on a butcher's table.'*  
– Agatha Christie, *Evil Under the Sun*

Although her characters were interesting and well-drawn, it was her plots – the narratives themselves – that stole the show. It can be argued that her work was 'plot-driven' not 'character-driven'. Emphasis on plot is common in thrillers (stories about dangerous events), adventure stories (eg. children's fiction targeted at school-going boys) and murder mysteries. Agatha came up with so many excellent plots that it is hard to believe that a single person wrote all those crime novels!

Agatha Christie's books carried a lot of 'suspense', as all good murder mysteries must. In a recent TV interview, thriller writer John Grisham said that the trick to creating suspense is to ask a question that will only be answered at the end of the book. Agatha Christie's books were full of questions, and more popped up as the stories advanced (ie. as 'the plot thickened'). For example, *Elephants Can Remember* begins with the side-by-side freshly-dead bodies of a British couple on a rural footpath. Next to them is their pet dog (still alive) and a single pistol. So detective Poirot clearly has his work cut out for him! Was it a suicide pact

<sup>113</sup> Based on a play by Agatha Christie

and if so what was the motive? Did one spouse try to kill the other and they ended up doing each other in? Did a third person do the deed and then try to make it look like a suicide pact?

*'Suspense will always find a market. Whether it's espionage written by John le Carre or legal suspense written by myself or Scott Turrow. Those books you will always probably find on the market. And then when we are gone, some other person will write medical suspense, something that has already been done.'* - John Grisham

And once you ask the initial question(s), you can still add 'sub-plots' (smaller stories with their own questions and answers) to your story. Sub-plots are also common in film. For example, in an action flick, a tough Marine (hero) might save the White House from a terrorist attack (plot) and fall in love with a beautiful female Secret Service agent in the process (sub-plot). A sub-plot in a movie is sometimes called 'the second story' or 'the second level of sell' and can greatly enrich the overall product (eg. a teenage girl might not care for guns and explosions but might enjoy the romance, identify with the female lead<sup>114</sup> character etc). Here's an example of a situation made more complex/interesting by the infusion of human emotions:

*'No mention of bed-and-breakfast work, setting up ex-military members of parliament for possible blackmail. But maybe this time a fairy godmother had got her spell right. Victim recruits agent. Love makes the world go backwards.'*  
 – From *The Secret Servant*, a novel by Gavin Lyall

You can also enrich your story with other things you find important – a philosophy ('crime doesn't pay' etc), the uniqueness of a culture (The Maasai, Kenyan White expatriates etc in *Rules of The Wild*), the beauty of a land (as in *White Mischief*, about colonial-era Kenya), the advancement of killing methods/devices (*Sparkling Cyanide* by Agatha Christie, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*<sup>115</sup> by Arthur Conan Doyle) etc. And of course, you want to make your characters as interesting as possible (Agatha Christie was good with humour, her tales were not gory blood-and-thunder types).

### Chase Royal

If Agatha Christie is the queen of crime fiction, then James Hadley Chase might be sitting in the throne next to hers, as King. The author of over 90 kinetic thrillers (50 of which were filmed), James Hadley Chase has been called 'the king of thrillers writers.' While most punters might dismiss his world-beating crime novels as the ultimate in pulp fiction, Chase did earn some critical acclaim. According to *Time & Tide*, 'Chase can run all but a few competitors into the ground.' Another book critic observed that '(James Hadley Chase) has many imitators but he alone is monarch.'

His **book titles were often very suggestive and eye-catching**. These include: *You're Lonely When You're Dead*, *My Laugh Comes Last*, *Get a Load of This*, *There's Always a Price Tag*, *You Find Him – I'll Fix Him*, *Strictly for Cash*, *You're Dead Without Money*, *Come Easy – Go Easy*, *I'd Rather Stay Poor*, *Safer Dead* and *More Deadly Than the Male*<sup>116</sup>. Interestingly, Chase novels

<sup>114</sup> In film, the main character's object of affection is herself/himself referred to as 'the romance'

<sup>115</sup> A Sherlock Holmes mystery

<sup>116</sup> 'An intelligent and harshly revealing piece of work' - *The Times*

were not popular in the US, where they are based. They were most popular in Europe and Africa. It has been suggested that one reason for this was because Chase was not an American and because American readers imagined that he gave away the plot in the book title. They didn't believe that he could pull the rabbit out of the hat after giving a title like *I'd Rather Stay Poor* (a hapless character tries to take a shortcut to riches and discovers there are no shortcuts to success?) and *More Deadly Than the Male* (has to be about a scheming/conniving woman). Be that as it may, Chase crime novels thrilled arm-chair crime solvers for decades and were re-printed many times, often with new cover graphics. The later covers have sexually stimulating images (absent in the early editions), usually of seductive-looking women, sometimes cradling pistols. This was largely marketing gimmickry. In actual fact, many of his characters were far from being the *femme fatales* you would expect from observing the book covers. Here's a female character resisting male advances in the Chase novel, *Just a Matter of Time*:

'Sex to me is not dropping my underwear to my knees and lifting my dress up to my neck and lying on a plush settee in an expensive restaurant where the waiters don't intrude after coffee's been served.'

Chase crime novels often featured naive but sympathetic characters who get caught up in a get-rich-quick scheme (involving a beautiful 'dame') only to learn that, in life, nothing good comes easily. Some of his book titles, eg. *Come Easy – Go Easy*, *There's Always a Price Tag* and *The Vulture is a Patient Bird*, hint at this philosophy. In one of his classic tales, told in the First Person narrative form, a male character tries to make good his escape, carrying a briefcase stashed with ill-gotten cash. He enters a building and dashes upstairs but his pursuants are closing in and he realises in the last that there's no way in hell that he will ever escape and enjoy the cash. The protagonist goes to a window and watches the people on the street below, just going about their everyday business. In a brilliant finish to the novel, the character opens the briefcase and 'pours' the money out. The people on the street can't believe their luck when it starts to rain money! The protagonist watches in amusement as they scramble violently for it... (Moral of the story: 'Easy come, easy go')

Chase deployed a wide range of good ideas and there has been speculation as to whether he wrote the books himself or with help from a writer (or team of writers) in America, where the stories were based. There have even been suggestions that the thrillers were written by Graham Green (*Our Man in Havana*) under the pen name of 'James Hadley Chase'. This theory is, however, beyond the pale since Graham Greene has a very impressive bibliography of his own. He would have had to live for a couple hundred years to come up with both his work and the Chase novels. 'James Hadley Chase' was, in fact, the pen name of British writer René Lodge Brabazon Raymond (24 December 1906 – 6 February 1985). An article in *Crime Time* magazine says:

'James Hadley Chase was born in London and initially worked as a book wholesaler. His real name was Rene Brabazon Raymond, also writing under the name of Raymond Marshall. His first novel, written apparently over some weekends in 1938 was "No Orchids for Miss Blandish", which achieved remarkable popularity, was made into a film in 1948, toured as a stage play and was remade as a film entitled Grissom in 1971.'

Featuring 'smouldering seductresses', bikini-clad models and other sexually-charged images on covers (as in the Chase novels) is a classic marketing technique used in 'pulp fiction', especially romance and crime titles. In a song entitled *Girl Trouble*, country singer Charlie Pride crooned:

*I go for women with killer looks  
The kind on the covers of mystery books.'*

Humorist S. J. Perelman was very well read (it's virtually impossible to be a good writer if you don't read a lot) and was a fan of crime fiction. He wrote an essay about a particular series of detective novels that were popular in America at the time, and his analysis – entitled *Somewhere a Roscoe* – itself became a classic. An excerpt from the essay:

'If ever a title was tailor-made for the masthead of Culture Publications, Inc., it's "Arms and the Woman," for in *Spicy Detective* they have achieved the sauciest blend of libido and murder this side of Gilles de Rais. They have juxtaposed the steely automatic and the frilly panty and found that it pays off.'

Here's another extract from *Somewhere a Roscoe* that once again hints at Perelman being a very wide reader:

'About two years ago, I was moody, discontented, restless, almost a character in a Russian novel. I used to lie on my bed for days drinking tea out of a glass... In short, I had become a remarkable combination of Ras-kolnikov and Mark Tidd.'

In *Somewhere a Roscoe*, Perelman noted that, although engrossing, the *Spicy Detective* series had a habit of repeating the same scenes/descriptions in different works and only making slight adjustments to the action/names. *Spicy Detective* allegedly re-worked the following murder scene more times than a cow chews cud:

'From the doorway a roscow<sup>117</sup> said "Kachow!" and a slug creased the side of my noggin (head). Neon lights exploded inside my think tank...She was dead as a stuffed mongoose...I wasn't badly hurt. But I don't like to be shot at. I don't like dames to be rubbed out when I am flinging woo at them.'

Some aspiring authors sample the works of highly stylistic writers like S.J. Perelman, Salman Rushdie and Norman Mailer and think, 'I could never write like that!' The good news is that you don't have to, in order to become successful. (Why be a carbon-copy of somebody else, anyway?) There are people who write beautifully and never crack the bestseller lists and there are stories that are not literary masterpieces but which connect with the masses (eg. A true story of a Sudanese child soldier that pulls the heartstrings of the readers). Often, a seasoned writer inadvertently comes up with a unique style, called a 'voice'. Some author voices are so individualistic that even if you came across a book with no cover or credits, you could still guess who the author was (Robert Ludlum is a good example). And since there are many styles/techniques, some writers deploy all of them, like weapons, and try to create 'a book that has everything': love, hate, good guys ('goodies'), bad guys ('baddies'), the right

<sup>117</sup> roscow - (Dated slang) pistol

pace, humour, suspense, surprise, red herrings, violence etc. A *Washington Post* review described Stuart Woods' novel *Run Before the Wind* thus: 'The book has everything – love, sex, violence, adventure, beautiful women and power-hungry men, terrorists and intrigue.' Stuart Woods' other books include *Grassroots* and *Deep Lie*.<sup>118</sup>

Another writer who packs 'everything' into his books is Britain's Jack Higgins who turns out about one book per year (and has made millions from his writings). A master of fictional 'high adventure', Jack Higgins is the author of *The Eagle Has Landed*, *Sheba*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *A Prayer for the Dying*, *The Wrath of God*, *Hell is Always Today*, *Drink With the Devil*, *Bloody Passage* and many other high-octane titles. Prince William (UK) is said to be a big fan. According to *The Times*, Jack Higgins 'uses almost every thrillerism' in the trade in order to excite his readers.

Higgins was brought up in Belfast, Ireland, and tried his hand at a wide range of occupations, from Circus Roustabout to truck driver. Then he wrote *The Eagle has Landed* (1974), about a Nazi plot to kidnap Winston Churchill during WWII, and the rest is history. *The Eagle has Landed* has reportedly sold 26 million copies and has been translated into 50 different languages. In 1995, Leeds Metropolitan University awarded him an Honorary Doctorate.

### Crime and Punishment

Mukoma wa Ngugi is a Kenyan/American novelist, poet, and a literary scholar. He is the son of novelist/scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Petals of Blood*). Mukoma is fast gaining an international reputation as a crime novelist, perhaps Kenya's answer to Ian Rankin. He is the author of *Black Star Nairobi* (Melville, 2013), *Nairobi Heat* (Penguin, SA 2009), and also has a poetry collection entitled, *Hurling Words at Consciousness* (AWP, 2006). He was shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2009.

Mukoma wa Ngugi's latest novel, *Killing Sahara*, follows a detective team as they investigate the case of a dead American in Kenya. Even before the sleuths unravel that mystery, a bomb goes off at Nairobi's swish Norfolk Hotel...

*Killing Sahara*, a sequel to *Nairobi Heat*, is set in the American college town of Madison, Wisconsin, where a young white woman has been found dead on the doorstep of a visiting Rwandan professor. Concerning Mukoma's books, a review in *The Con Magazine* said:

'Forget Dostoyevsky for a moment, *Killing Sahara* explores very well the connection between good and evil in an African context. The absurdity of thieves and thugs, prostitutes, politicians and cops putting aside their daily vocations to enjoy a beer and roast goat-nyama choma, in the parlance-under the same roof.'

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<sup>118</sup> 'Almost too plausible...one of the most readable espionage novels since *The Hunt for Red October*.' – *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*



**Crime writers on an Al-Jazeera TV talk show. In a brown African shirt is Mukoma wa Ngugi and on screen is Irish crime novelist Ian Rankin.**

*White Mischief*, written by James Fox, is one of Kenya's most engaging crime narratives, made all the more compelling by the fact that it's a work of non-fiction. It is also a riotous exposé of the lifestyles of the Happy Valley set of pre-Independence Kenya. It hinges on the murder of Josslyn Hay, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Erroll, whose corpse was discovered with a bullet through the head in January 1941 around the area now known as Dagoreti Corner. James Fox was only one of many writers/journalists who tried to piece together the Agatha Christie-esque murder mystery. Others include Rupert Furneaux (*The Murder of Lord Erroll*) and journalist Cyril Conolly. Heavily researched and beautifully written, *White Mischief* is, nonetheless, probably the best-known book on the case. *Time Out* called it '...one of the most dazzling feats of reportage in recent years.' The *Economist* said, 'Leave P. D. James on the shelf, tuck Dick Francis away in the saddlebag, James Fox's investigation has everything you look for in a thriller.'

In related 'news', Kenyan author Juliet Barnes has written a book called *The Ghosts of Happy Valley*, a history of Kenya's Happy Valley houses, in which she explores their 'tragedy, scandal and dubious legacy'.

John le Carré<sup>119</sup> (real name David Cornwell) was born in 1931 and educated at Bern and Oxford universities. He taught at Eton and worked in the British Foreign Service for five years before turning to novel-writing. This third book, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, became a massive hit and was later filmed. His forte is crime/spy fiction mainly centred on the now-ended Cold War and drawing on real-life espionage dramas such as the infamous Cambridge Spy scandal. His books include *A Perfect Spy*, *Smiley's People*, *Our Game*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *The Constant Gardener*. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, 'John le Carré has created a fictive world which he has made almost as familiar as that of Dickens...In terms of skill, scope and ideas, it is streets ahead of most contemporary fiction.' And according to *Time*, 'Le Carré makes all his alleged competitors – the Ludlums, the Clancys, the Trevanians, even the Deightons – look like knuckle typers.'

<sup>119</sup> 'Simply the world's greatest fictional spymaster.' – *Newsweek*



Len Deighton was born in London in 1929. He worked as a railway clerk, a photographer for the RAF, a waiter, a book illustrator and an art director. His first book was *The Ipcress File* which was published in 1962. It was an immediate and spectacular success. Since then, he has published more than 20 books of fiction and non-fiction – including spy stories, and highly researched war novels and histories – all of which have recieved international acclaim. Len Deighton's titles include *Funeral in Berlin*<sup>120</sup>, *An Expensive Place to Die*, *MAMista*, *City of Gold*, *Yesterday's Spy* and the 'Bernard Samson' series which contains at least 6 spy novels<sup>121</sup>. *The Ipcress File* is believed to be the template for modern spy fiction. According to *Today*, 'Len Deighton is the inspiration for Le Carré and Forsyth and a master of his craft.' Some of his books have been adapted for TV and film, notably the 'Game, Set & Match' spy series (*Berlin Game*, *Mexico Set* and *London Match*). Here's an excerpt from *Mexico Set*, for which *Sunday Times* dubbed Deighton, 'The poet of the spy story':

'The waves hitting the beach exploded across the sand in great galaxies of sparkling phosphorescence. Everywhere, the coast was littered with flotsam: broken pieces of timber from boats and huts and limbs of trees torn apart by the great winds.'

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<sup>120</sup> 'A ferociously cool fable, even better than *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*.' – *New York Times*

<sup>121</sup> 'Len Deighton really is something special' - *Sunday Times*

## KENYAN SCRIBES

*'Just as a baker bakes because he is a baker, and a farmer farms because he is a farmer, a thief steals because he is a thief, a writer writes because he is a writer.'*<sup>122</sup> – Author Meja Mwangi

*'I am not gifted in business and cannot make it in farming. My life is in writing.'* – John Kiriamiti, author of *My Life in Crime*



An assortment of [Kenyan writers](#) at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Authors Buffet event

- Meja Mwangi is an established Kenyan novelist with considerable experience in film and television. He has worked for the French Broadcasting Corporation in Nairobi and the audio-visual department of the British Council. He has been involved in scriptwriting, casting and direction, audio engineering. He is however best known as a novelist. Meja first made a splash with the 1974 novel *Kill Me Quick* which won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize. He would in later years scoop many awards including the Jomo Kenyatta Prize again (for *Going Down River Road*, 1977, and *The Last Plague*, 1981); the Wahome Mutahi Prize (for *The Boy Gift*) and the Deutscher Jugendliteratur Prize (for *Little White Man*). His other titles include *Carcase for Hounds*, *The Cockroach Dance*, *Weapon of Hunger*, *Bread of Sorrow* and *The Return of Shaka*. *Carcase for Hounds* is about the Mau Mau struggle and was the basis of the film, *Cry Freedom*. Meja has also written several children's books and been translated into German, French, Dutch and other languages.

- Grace Ogot (*Land Without Thunder*) was a kind of Kenyan literary ambassador. She wrote extensively on the Luo (of Western Kenya) and their culture, in both English and Luo. For those schools, institutes, researchers, historians and other entities interested in African cultural studies, African literature or comparative literature, Grace Ogots books are a good place to begin.

According to an [article by Peter Nganga Nguli](#), Ms. Ogot might be 'the first African woman writer to be published in English'. Her first novel, *The Promised Land*, was published in 1966

<sup>122</sup> *Sunday Nation*, 14/12/2013

and chronicled the struggles of Luo pioneers migrating to Tanzania in search of greener pastures. Her second novel, *The Graduate*, came out in 1980. Her short story collections include 1968's *Land Without Thunder* (about traditional life in Western Kenya), *The Other Woman and Other Stories* (1976) and *The Island of Tears* (1980). Grace Ogot was a founding member of the Writers' Association of Kenya.

*'I am reminded that ideas are bulletproof. In that regard I have one. Since this young generation cannot concentrate long enough to read a short story let alone Maillu's "Broken Drum", let us find a new means to re-tell our tales.'* - Macharia Gatundu, [\*The People newspaper\* \(June 9, 2013\)](#)

- Several months ago, in a writers' group, someone mentioned that there was a planned home visit to veteran Kenyan writer, David Maillu. I excitedly waited for the trip to materialise but nothing happened. I have met many Kenyan writers, young and old, but I have never actually met Maillu. I have read his fiction since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, we're 'friends' on social media, and I have been to a couple of events where he was present – in traditional African garb – but that's about the extent of our contact. I think that we should meet, but I can't just turn up at his door – I am a writer not a vacuum cleaner salesman or two-bit real estate agent. I would prefer to be properly introduced – preferably by one of those purple-prose-spouting poets in our writing groups.

David Maillu entered the writing scene in the early 1970's with such titles as *Unfit for Human Consumption*. He has since published about 70 books and still has more 130 manuscripts pending publication. He writes in 3 languages - Kikamba, Kiswahili and English – possibly every genre there is - short stories, academic articles, novellas, novels, Young Adult fiction, essays on social-political issues and religious material. He has a holds a doctoral degree in African Literature and Political Philosophy and is these days best known for his religious writing, in particular, *Ka – The Holy Book of Neter*. His largest published novel is *Broken Drum* which contains over 1000 pages.

In an article entitled '[Could David Maillu Be Africa's Most Consummate Artist?](#)', journalist and arts promoter, Ogova Ondego, avers that Maillu is not just a 'creative writer, novelist, essayist, playwright, poet, artist and theologian specialising in African Religion' but also also 'a musician, guitarist, composer, painter and designer'. In terms of sheer scope, Maillu leaves all other Kenyan writers in the dust.

### PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A WORKAHOLIC

*'I won't leave any unfinished manuscripts. I'll live until I am 200 years old, and I'll write all the stories that are in me. Put it on my tombstone: "He finished his work and went home".'* – Harold Robbins, author of *The Carpetbaggers*

Some writers have extraordinary dedication and discipline. Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope wrote regularly 3,000 words before breakfast. Frank Richards – creator of the Billy Bunter series – wrote up to 80,000 words per week for the boys' comics *Gem*, *Magnet* and *Boy's Friend*. Bestselling British author Barbara Cartland (*Shadow of Sin*, *Glittering Lights*) penned over 500 romantic novels, averaging a staggering 23 books a year! Close behind her is Ursula Bloom with 420 published novels. Denise robins, author of *House of the Seventh*

*Cross* and *It Wasn't Love*, wrote more than 170 novels. Martin Cruz Smith (*The Indians Won*) reportedly wrote 60 novels between the ages of 24 and 39. Robert Leigh wrote up to 24 books per year!

Romance writer Nora Roberts has authored more than 200 books (some under the pen name J.D. Robb). In 2013, she earned \$23 million from her writings. America's James Patterson and Danielle Steel have both published over 100 novels apiece and both are Guinness World Record holders - Patterson for most bestsellers on the *New York Times* Bestseller List and Steel for the longest unbroken stay on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. Patterson is now famous for co-writing books with other authors and thereby increasing the output. He now releases over 10 books a year and claims to have over 50 manuscripts (including screenplays and graphic novels) in the works! It is estimated that over the last 3 years, a quarter of all hardback novels sold in America were written by Patterson.

*Ka – The Holy Book of Neter* has so far received mixed reactions. The main problem (with critics) is that it keeps being compared to other religious books like the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran. Some even referred to its release as the 'launch of a new religion' (ie. 'Neterianism'). Maillu refers to such comments as 'innacurate' and is adamant that *The Ka* does not displace any other religions books, nor is it a 'new' religion. The book was written by a team of African scholars/writers based on a wealth of research findings and is not just useful for African religious study but historical and academic study as well. On [his website](#), Maillu asserts that everything portrayed in the book has always 'been there', but 'What has been absent in that (traditional African) worship has been a published Holy Book.' He further explains the role of Neterian Worship:

'African Religion is not an additional religion to the world. It is a religion that is part and parcel of world religions. It is the law of God to his people, hence, a God-given religion.

African concept of God and worship is holy, hence, the law of African Religion is holy law.

The business of the launch of the Neterian Worship is purely spiritual. It is not a business that creates a new God, but a business of worshipping the one the only God of all creations. It is simply an approach of worship, or a kind of spiritual song based on the cultural values of the black race; and one that is relevant and meaningful to their business dealings with God. This approach of worship is also open to any other race or individual persons such as may find satisfaction and inspiration in it.'

In an article entitled '[A Look at the African Spiritual Book](#)', poet and PEN Kenya president, Khainga O'Okwemba weighs in on the subject:

'Little attention is given to Maillu's work of scholarship. Tucked in his vast library, for example, is the controversial book, *Ka: The Holy Book of Neter*, the African religious book that should stand alongside the Bible and Quran. The book is a culmination of research work conducted by scholars Prof Osaga Odak, Prof ABC Ochola Ayayo, Prof

Sam Munyoki, Seba Masubo Magoiga, James Kangwana, and Dr David Maillu himself, who chaired that committee of experts.

The fact that there is no revealed religious book among Black people like the Bible and the Quran does not suppose that Africans are irreligious. Yet the absence of that spiritual book has been used as a fundamental basis to superimpose foreign religions, in particular, Christianity and Islam, and wrought other cultures on Africans. The collective African spiritual summation into a book is a milestone in the noble project of retracing, reclaiming, and restoration Black people's lost glory. Ka is the soul, what the legendary Senegalese Egyptologist Prof Cheikh Anta Diop called "immortal principle," that which escapes from the decaying body of the dead. It is a force which cannot be destroyed and continues to exist after death.

Neter is God. *Ka: The Holy Book of Neter* means man's spiritual awareness, his immortality and environment, all which glorify God. The concept of immortality is not new to Africa. In African religion, God is a force, is energy, is not gendered, and there is no original sin as in Christianity, where poor Eve is blamed.'

*'The function of a man is the exercise of his non-corporeal faculties or "soul" in accordance with, or at least not divorced from, a rational principle.'*

- Aristotle, *Ethics*

Enough about religious writings. Kenya, I am happy to report, is currently enjoying something of a Literary Renaissance evidenced by the fact that:

- The newspapers are dedicating more acreage to books and authors eg. *Saturday Nation's* multiple 'Literary Discourse' pages
- We have several TV shows, or segments of TV shows, dedicated to books. These include KTN's *Book Review* and NTV's *AM Live*
- Radio shows featuring books and authors eg. KBC's [Books Cafe](#) (formerly 'Books & Bookmen') and [AfricaCreates Radio](#)
- New literary organisations have been formed, including book clubs and writers' groups like Kwani?, StoryMoja, POWO (Poets & Writers Online) and FEMTEL (Female Storytellers)
- A wealth of new, exciting authors has arisen, writing everything from sci-fi to erotica
- A rush of books, physical and electronic, have come on stream. Many are self-published. With [e-books](#) and [Print-on-Demand](#) technologies spreading fast, self-publishing might be the wave of the future; the fate of traditional publishing remaining obscure.
- Writers are starting to become more visible in mainstream culture and even politics, some of them have become *bona fide* 'celebrities'

StoryMoja has launched a romance series dubbed Drumbeats. The series will consist of romantic fiction centered on East Africa and is expected to become Africa's answer to Mills & Boon/Hurlequinn. They so far have about 7 titles available, in digital format only (for mobile phones, e-readers and computers). The forces behind the the project include writer/editor Vaishnavi Ram Mohan, writer/editor Faith Gatimi and writer/promoter Muthoni Garland.

In an article entitled, 'The Harvest is Great, we Need Literary Critics' ([published in the Saturday Nation](#)), literary critic and university lecturer, Prof. Chris Wanjala (*Against Bearded Men*) has written:

'Today, librarians cannot cope with the number of books which are being released by publishers.

John Sibi-Okumu and David K. Mulwa are present-day playwrights who were also Dr Porter's and Dr Josephat Karanja's graduates, respectively. Sibi-Okumu has authored more than six plays to date; David K Mulwa has more than 10...

The harvest is great; what we need are literary critics to pore over the products and report to us what they see in them.'

The current renaissance began in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and was aided in no small part by technology. In 2001, I wrote Kenya's first e-novel, [When the Whirlwind Passes](#). In 2002, Binyavanga Wainana won the Caine Prize for African Writing for a story originally published online. Along with other scribes like Parsalelo Kantai, Binyavanga founded the Kwani Trust which provided an outlet for aspiring writers to see their work in print. Kenya's Yvonne Owour won the 2004 Caine Prize for a story entitled *Weight of Whispers*, published by Kwani?. Kwani? also published material by Muthoni Garland (Caine Prize nominee), poet Stephen Partington, Nigeria's Chimamanda Adichie (also nominated in 2002 alongside her friend Binyavanga, who won) among many others. Meanwhile Caroline Nderitu had been championing 'dramatised' (performance) poetry as opposed to the written word. She performed at many corporate, government and education-related functions and earned true celebrity status (culminating in a Head of State Commendation medal from the President Kibaki for promoting the arts). Muthoni Garland founded StoryMoja which promoted literature, reading and affordable books. The Spoken Word craze reached Kenya and – in a few years's time – hundreds of 'poets' mushroomed all across the country. Wahome Mutahi died, sparking a search for a possible successor. [Blogs](#) and [art-related websites](#) multiplied, introducing such names as [James Murua](#) and [James Wamathai](#) to the arts scene. PEN Kenya Centre was formed. Young motivational and fiction writers arose, many of them using the Internet and other technologies to promote their work. Ageing novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature, generating excitement/inspiration. Locally, journalist Ng'anga Mbugua won two Wahome Mutahi Lit Prizes back to back. [E-books](#) began to replace physical books around the world with the aid of specialised 'e-readers'. Online bookstores like [Amazon](#) grew while some traditional bookstores, like America's famous Borders book chain, closed shop. Anthony Mugo won the inaugural Burt Award (Kenya), organised by the National Book Development Council; Kenya's first Kshs 1 million literary jackpot.





**ENDELEA STYLE HIYO HIYO: President Mwai Kibaki (left) conferred a 'Head of State Commendation' to Caroline Nderitu (in head dress)**

Let's close this section with some direct quotes from successful authors around the globe:

*'Writing is an escape from a world that crowds me. I like being alone in a room. It's almost a form of meditation.'* - Neil Simon

*'Often, you have to fail as a writer before you write that bestselling novel or ground-breaking memoir. If you're failing as a writer – which it definitely feels like when you're struggling to write regularly or can't seem to earn a living as a freelance writer – maybe you need to take a long-term perspective.'* – J.K. Rowling

*'Non-fiction opens me up to insights on a subject. Fiction allows me insights into the complexities of humanity. I can't do without either. So I read both.'*

- Zukiswa Wanner (SA/Kenya), author of *The Madams*

*'Professional edit, professional blurb, professional cover...and most importantly, professional author. Treat this endeavour as what it is: a business – with everything that word entails. I certainly wouldn't have released anything to the public without at least one other person proofing and helping me edit my books. I'm lucky to have been pretty good at graphic design, so I did my own covers. But if you have no or little experience, get somebody who knows what they're doing to do it. The world doesn't need any more badly Photoshopped stock images as e-book covers. I uploaded the book and then started to get to grips with the whole "marketing" thing, and deduced that a low price point was the way to go; 99p in my case. I could also make re-edits when necessary – which were easy to do, given how quickly Kindle Direct Publishing allows you to upload new versions.'* – Bestselling e-book author Nick Spalding<sup>123</sup>

*'There are all sorts of theories and ideas about what constitutes a good opening line. It's tricky thing, and tough to talk about because I don't think conceptually while I work on a first draft — I just write. To get scientific about it is a little like trying to catch moonbeams in a jar.'* -  
- Stephen King

<sup>123</sup> Earns over £100,000 a year from self-publishing



*'I wished to be published and I wished more than anything in the world to be a writer.'* -  
J.K.Rowling

*'I do it (writing) for the sheer love of it...I loved doing it when I wasn't making any money out of it, why would I not want to do it if I stopped making money now? I did it for many years without making much money. You do it just to see how far you can push this, and there's always a new frontier.'* - Dean Koontz

*'He would write it for the reason he felt that all great literature, fiction and non-fiction, was written: truth comes out, in the end it always comes out. He would write it because he felt he had to.'* – From *The Shining* by Stephen King

*'I decided to study ebooks on Kindle for a few months and then have a go at publishing my own. I enjoy writing guest blog posts and doing my own PR. It takes time to fit in around the writing, but it's definitely worth a shot. I write a guest post or an interview at least once a week – on my own and other writers' websites. I also have a blog on my website, plus a spot called "Murder They Wrote", where I interview other crime writers. I chat with my readers on Facebook, Twitter and by email. I also attended crime festivals for two years. So when I self-published my first novel, I had lots of support from people who I'd supported too.'* - Mel Sherratt, author of *Taunting the Dead*

*'To ward off a feeling of failure, she joked that she could wallpaper her bathroom with rejection slips, which she chose not to see as messages to stop, but rather as tickets to the game.'* – Anita Shreve

*'Writing books is the closest men ever come to childbearing.'* – Norman Mailer

*'When I was a kid, I used to read Japanese and Chinese poetry. I was a weird little kid...And I read something called a "Haiku"...So I created something for Black people, for Afrocan-american people, called a "Low Coup". The difference is: we can't count the syllables. The Japanese have time to count the syllables, we don't have time to count the syllables. These are just short (poems).'* - Amiri Baraka: *The Power of the Word* US poet Amiri Baraka, in a talk entitled "The Power of the Word"

### **Scribbling Rivalry: Writing Families**

*'People ask me that – whether I'm competitive (against other writers). I don't care. This is the way I'm wired. I compete with myself. I hope (John) Grisham does well. I hope Stephanie Meyers does well, etcetera etcetera.'* – James Patterson, the world's No.1 bestselling thriller writer

*'Live your own life, run your own race. Don't worry about what mum said or dad said. We all have our own path and our own journey on this planet. And if you follow it, you'll be happy - it's going to lead you to joy. If you don't, you end up miserable.'* - Tyler Perry, theatre and film writer/producer<sup>124</sup>

*'Why be jealous when I have the same opportunities as the person who is blessed?'*  
– Pastor Randy Morrison



**Caroline Nderitu and younger brother Alexander Nderitu in a joint interview for *The Star* newspaper**

A columnist for a small-town newspaper was interviewing me and he kept asking whether there was any writing rivalry between my and my elder sister (the recipient of a Head of State commendation). I replied in the negative but he kept pushing. It was clear the he wanted to use sibling rivalry as the angle for his article but I refused to provide any dirt and he instead focused on my e-book innovations. To his credit, the final article was quite flattering to me. About a year later, Caroline and I did a joint interview for *The Star* newspaper, article by Catherine Mukei, and that also went well.

<sup>124</sup> Most notable works: The 'Madea' series of movies fashioned from his stage plays, starring himself as a wise but opinionated Black woman

It is not uncommon for writers to spring from the same family: Sam Kahiga (*Paradise Farm*) and Leonard Kibera (*The Grapevine Stories*) are brothers<sup>125</sup>; Mukoma wa Ngugi (*Killing Sahara*) and his younger sister Wanjiku wa Ngugi (*The Fall of Saints*) are children of novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Petals of Blood*). In an article for the *Daily Nation* (21/03/2014), Mukoma wa Ngugi wrote:

'It is not surprising to me that we are a family of writers. Wanjiku's novel, *The Fall of Saints*, has just been published by Simon and Schuster.

Tee has a collection of short stories and Nducu a novel coming from East African Educational Publishers.

By the end of this year, we shall have four published authors in our family. One more published sibling and we are entering the Guinness book of world records!'

Wahome Mutahi (*The Dream Merchants*) was a print journalist and now two of his three children are also journalists. Across the border, poetic Somali rapper K'naan is the grandson of a famous Horn of Africa poet and the nephew of noted singer Magool.

Further afield, we have the McDermott siblings - Cate, Alexandra, and Don - whose collaborative writings are targeted at young Americans. We also have twin brothers Chad and Carey Hayes who wrote the script for the blockbuster film, *The Conjuring*, together. In theatre, we have historically had such relatives as Josef and Karel Čapek (*The Insect Play*<sup>126</sup>) and George and Ira Gershwin creating plays together.

The world's most famous writing siblings are probably [the Brontë sisters](#): Anne, Emily, and Charlotte. The Brontës were a 19th-century literary family from Yorkshire, England. They gained fame as poets and novelists and many of their works are now considered 'masterpieces of literature'. Their classic works include *Jane Eyre* (by Charlotte), *Wuthering Heights*<sup>127</sup> (by Emily) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (by Anne).

For me, writers being related doesn't mean much. It's like two siblings being farmers<sup>128</sup> or doctors or lawyers. I don't even know why anyone would want to compare 'Alexander Nderitu' and 'Caroline Nderitu' (as brands). We read different material and, as a consequence, we write in different genres.

Commenting on one of my book-promotion efforts on social media, an arts critic commented: 'You are an inspiration, Alex, just like your sweet sister!' Now, that's the kind of thing I like to hear: people being appreciated for what they're doing, not being placed in negative comparison with others. For the last few years, I have been working like a dog to promote Kenyan literature. I have also been trying very hard to make writers look 'cool'. I have supported many initiatives that promote literature and been involved in the mentoring upcoming scribes. I don't have to do these things. But I am more interested in collaborative

<sup>125</sup> They collaborated on the book *Potent Ash*

<sup>126</sup> Or *And So Ad Infinitum*

<sup>127</sup> Who in the world has never heard that title?

<sup>128</sup> In fact, in Tetu where Caroline and I grew up, almost everyone is a farmer

efforts that boost our trade than in petty jealousies/rivalries. There are times I have bought books at book launches, with no intention of actually reading them – I was just promoting local talent. For example, when Binyavanga Wainaina returned to Kenya (from the US where he was lecturing at the Chinua Achebe Centre), Kwani organised a book launch for his book *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, at Kenya Railways Headquarters. The day of the book launch, PEN Kenya members were paying a courtesy call on ageing Kenyan writer Marjorie Macgoye (*Coming to Birth*) at her home in Nairobi. I attended the Marjorie visit and made sure the others were also aware that there was going to be a book launch later that day. In the evening, I attended the book launch and purchased the book but never broke its protective covering. My initial intention was to donate the book to StoryMoja's Start-a-Library project. At the time, I was working as the head writer of a magazine. The Monday after I bought the book, I gave it to our magazine editor to whom I had broached the idea of a Book Review section. A couple of days later, she told me that she really enjoyed reading the book as it brought back memories of her own childhood. I decided to read the book myself and found it so stylish and funny that I decided against donating it after all.

The point is that I don't look at fellow writers as competitors. I see them as peers<sup>129</sup>/friends/comrades and I would rather see them succeed than fail. We are all servants of literature. **Nobody 'owns' literature.** You make your contribution and move on (either through death or retirement).

## FOSTERING A BOOK CULTURE

*'My dad happened to be in (the) investment business, so I would go down to his office on Saturdays and so on. At age probably seven or something, I started reading all these books that were around the place. So I had a fifteen-year jump on many people...I started investing when I was eleven. I started reading about it (investments) when I was seven.'* – Warren Buffet, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, in an interview with *Forbes* magazine editor

*'Reading culture – very important. So our young people don't read. Please read. Please read. Please read. As a Chief Executive, you must go to talk to donors' forums for fundraising. So if you don't read, what are you going to say?'*  
- Jason Nyantino, CEO of Medeva, on TV's *Young Rich*

Due to my promotional efforts, I am loathe to demoralize aspiring writers by giving harsh criticism. When I am placed in a position where I have to give an opinion of somebody's writing – especially a fan of mine – I usually look for the 'strong points' and talk about those. Sometimes the work is pretty bad and I have no choice but to tell them that their work is unreadable (some of it can't even be edited, it just needs to be thrown away).

One day, a PEN Kenya colleague and I were leaving a building after 'gracing' (or perhaps disgracing) a women writer's group where we had helped analyze submitted creative writing texts. My colleague was of the opinion that I had been too laid back – I didn't criticize any of the writings that were read out for analysis. It had been like a good-cop-bad-cop show: he tore mercilessly into the submissions (based on his own likes and dislikes) while I

<sup>129</sup> I am actually trying to popularize 'peer reviews' whereby established authors give blurbs on the covers of other writers' books

adopted a more diplomatic approach. As we walked out of the building, he asked me why I had refused to criticize the works. 'I am tired of arguments between writers. I am kind of like the UN of Kenyan literature, or whatever.' He laughed as if it was the funniest thing he had heard all week: 'Ha! Ha! United Nations of Kenyan Literature? That's a good one! *Ati UN.*'

I have zero interest in petty rivalries between writers, publishers and even literary critics. What I am interested in, at the present time, is the promotion of a reading culture in Kenya. There are many efforts to this end in various parts of the country and there is a strong possibility that we will succeed. The key demographic is the youth. If the culture of reading - expanding and exercising their brainpower - is not introduced to them at an early age, then it is unlikely that it will ever take root. Research<sup>130</sup> has shown that prolonged exposure to passive forms of entertainment, like television, makes people 'dumber' while [active methods of entertainment/recreation \(nature walks, reading, cerebral games\) increase intelligence](#) and rationality. In his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Prof. Neil Postman accuses television of reducing people to almost zombie-like states of passiveness by destroying their ability to think and make rational arguments during discourse (Maybe that's why TV broadcasting is also referred to as 'programming'!) There's a slogan that I use in some of my book ads that reads: '**FIGHT PRIME TIME. READ A BOOK**'. I have to confess that I didn't come up with it myself, I found it among the comments on a Stephen King online promo video, but I tend to agree with it. And speaking of Stephen King, here's some insight on how he got into the writing business...

Stephen King always dreamt of being a writer so, as a young man, he became an avid reader:

'I was just in love with reading. I was in love with my girlfriend but sometimes, you know, if I had been given a choice, if they had said, "You can have your girlfriend or you can have books", I would have had to say, "Let me sit down and think about that." '

The first time he met a renowned writer in the flesh (in this case, Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*), King was star-struck:

'I was flabbergasted with amazement that that guy was there. And I remember he was wearing this beautiful suit. It was like a Wall Street guy suit. And I was thinking "Jesus, he doesn't really look like a writer." But he was.'

Today, Stephen King is the bestselling author of such novels as *Misery*, *The Stand*, *The Shining* and *The Drawing of the Three*. Many films have been made from his books. He is known all over the world and has appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine.

The one thing that no established writer disputes is that if you want to be a good writer, you need to start by being a good reader. For instance, young writing sensations Cate McDermott, Alexandra McDermott and Don McDermott claim to be avid readers with 'close to 1,000 books' at their home in Newtown. Reading is what inspired them to become writers and they now own a publishing company called the [Sibling Writery](#).

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<sup>130</sup> Postman, et al.

When I was growing up, in small-town East Africa, we had a rich family friend who lived in a stoteryed house in the suburbs. The most impressive thing about his house, to me, was the vast library. Even in an upstairs 'TV room' where we kids watched videos (on tapes, not DVDs), there were shelves lined with novels. I used to spend hours retrieving and returning the paperbacks on the shelves. Those folks had everything from pulp fiction (Nora Roberts, Stephen King, Adam Hall, Jack Higgins) to lit masterpieces ranging from Leo Tolstoy (*War & Peace*) to Milan Kundera<sup>131</sup>(*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) and Vikram Seth (*A Suitable Boy*). I now doubt that my 'uncle' read all those books (although in conversations with my parents, he seemed very well informed on world matters) but I have no doubt that his library changed lives. I discovered a lot of good fiction in that house. His children also grew up to be avid readers – later pursuing highly intellectual careers. The books in your house – or lack of such – might have a bigger impact on people's lives than you imagine. If you fill your home library with good books – even if you're not much of a reader yourself – you will tranform lives because [someone will read them](#) – your spouse, children, visitors, the help etc. 'By the end of (reading) a book, something must change,' a local writer once lectured to aspiring writers at a Nairobi university. 'It affects you.' Like me, a visitor might come into your house one day, and be changed forever.

*'A room without books is like a body without a soul.'* - Cicero (106BC - 43BC)

*'There is no mistaking a real book when one meets it. It's like falling in love.'*  
- Christopher Morley (1880-1957)

## LITERATURE CITIES

*'The word has changed the world in many ways...There are many stories here. We want those stories: stories that impact the individual, stories that impact the society.'* – Prof. Tom Odhiambo, critic/literature lecturer, speaking at Nairobi's Goethe Institut in April 2014

*'I came here with an open mind, and it has been expanded...It's the greatest life experience I have ever had.'* – Talk show queen Oprah Winfrey at the Jaipur Literature Festival (India)

One of my pet ambitions currently is to have Nairobi recognised by UNESCO (and the rest of the world) as a 'Book Capital'- a city where literature thrives. The idea was first mooted during an Arterial Network meeting in Nairobi but the lady who introduced us to UNESCO literary cities was not willing to deal with 'the politics' of the process (the submission has to be made by the Mayor's office<sup>132</sup>). I offered to take up the mantle. I was already involved in a project to compile a list of all published Kenyan writers in order to show how sizeable, influential and economically useful they can be (as well as create a community feel)<sup>133</sup>. When the idea of Nairobi as a 'literature city' was floated, I thought of all the books set in Nairobi<sup>134</sup>, the second-hand books displayed on almost every street, the Spoken Word (ie. oral literature) craze, the current literary renaissance, the incessant book launches, international book festivals, the innumerable aspiring writers and the international acclaim that some of

<sup>131</sup> 'Among the top European post-war writers.' – *Sunday Nation*

<sup>132</sup> The Governor's office, in our case

<sup>133</sup> If you are a published writer (online or offline) and would like to join the list, you can contact me via [www.AlexanderNderitu.com](http://www.AlexanderNderitu.com)

<sup>134</sup> Eg. *Going Down River Road*, *My Life in Crime*, *The Minister Daughter* etc

our novelists have already achieved. And Kenyans are innovative. Just the other day, I came across an article by Grace Kerongo entitled, 'Speed Date a Writer at Blankets and Wine'<sup>135</sup>. According to it, the event was an initiative of Kwani Trust in order to 'open up our minds to the wonderful art form of writing'. The people involved, in an outdoor picnic-style music and lifestyle event, were 'authors, musicians, poets and thespians'. Elsewhere, StoryMoja is on course to break a world record for the largest number of people simultaneously reading the same text aloud. They have tapped thousands of schoolchildren for the attempt, the reasoning being that it would be a great thing if the young Kenyan generation grew up with a world record in *reading*, that would be a major boost for our reading culture and child literacy in general.

My aim is to make the case for Nairobi as a 'book capital' and then present this information to the Governor's office for them to then submit it to UNESCO for official recognition.

### **More about UNESCO World Book Capitals**

The first World Book Capital was Madrid (Spain) in 2001. Subsequent World Book Capital Cities have been Alexandria (Egypt) in 2002, New Delhi (India) in 2003, and Antwerp (Belgium) in 2004. Montreal (Canada) was the World Book Capital City in 2005, succeeded by Turin (Italia) in 2006, Bogotá (Colombia) in 2007, Amsterdam (The Netherlands) in 2008, Beirut (Lebanon) in 2009, Ljubljana (Slovenia) in 2010, Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 2011, Yerevan (Armenia) in 2012, Bangkok (Thailand) in 2013, Port Harcourt (Nigeria) in 2014 and Incheon (Republic of Korea) in 2015.

The aim of the candidate programmes will be to promote books and foster reading during a 12 months period between one World Book and Copyright Day and the next (23 April).

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<sup>135</sup> *The Star*, May 24/25, 2014



## **Crazy Like a Fox: Humour Writing**

'Everybody needs to laugh.' - Tyler Perry, promoting his stage play, *Madea Gets a Job*

'Every good story deserves to be embellished.' - James Wamathai, writer/journalist/blogger

'The Internet continues to be a great way to shop because there are very few real stores that will let you make purchases and then hang around, masturbating.' – Comedy writer Seth Meyers (TV's *Saturday Night Live*), hosting the Webby Internet Awards

### **Puns**

Puns are a great way to create humour. Sometimes, especially during speech, they occur accidentally, and that's why you will often hear a speaker say, 'No pun intended', just before or after punning. Newspapers (and the media in general) love puns. They are especially common in headlines eg. 'ETHIOPIA, INDIA COME UP ROSES AS KENYA'S FLOWER SECTOR GOES TO SEED'<sup>136</sup> and 'PIGS BRING IN THE BACON FOR FAMILIES IN BUSIA'<sup>137</sup>

However, it is necessary to distinguish puns from 'syntactical ambiguity', which can also produce amusing results. Syntactical ambiguity occurs when you structure a statement in such a way that it becomes open to more than one interpretation. For example, I once saw an ad on the Sarit Centre notice board that said: '1 BR APARTMENT IN WESTLANDS. LOOKING FOR A FEMALE ROOMMATE. WIDE AND SPACIOUS.' So what is 'wide and spacious' – the apartment or the ideal roommate? Puns are intended to be funny/witty. Syntactical ambiguity is an example of poor writing. Remember Anthony Trollope's advice:

**'The language used (in writing) should be as ready and as efficient a conductor of the mind of the writer to the mind of the reader as is the electric spark which passes from battery to battery.'**

Wahome Mutahi was a great author – I have read reviews of everything he has ever written<sup>138</sup>. Apart from his long-running humour column in the *Sunday Nation*, he also wrote books, many of which displayed his unflagging sense of humour. Here's a pun-filled passage from his book, *Pieces of a Dream*:

'Competition in the funeral undertaking business is not only becoming stiffer these days – it has developed into a cut-throat affair in which only the fit survive. This was clearly demonstrated when a Gauteng family, which earns a living, if you like, by burying the dearly departed, claimed a rival undertaker was bent on killing their flourishing business and burying it for good. The family went on to allege in a TV interview that their rival was using deadly underground tactics, so to speak, to bring them down. According to the family, the culprit hired thugs who broke into their funeral parlour in the dead of night...Although the family sees this as a grave problem, they are confident that their unnamed rival does not stand a ghost of a chance in the business and are prepared to fight to the death...'

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<sup>136</sup> *The East African*, 04/01/2014

<sup>137</sup> *Daily Nation*, 'Seeds of Gold' Pg.9, 12/04/2104

<sup>138</sup> That's funny, right? Some of my jokes fall flat, like suicide jumpers.

*'I can laugh at anything except God and disability.'* – Wahome Mutahi

Tim Vine is a British stand-up comedian whose speciality is short (often one-line) jokes, especially puns. He once held the world record for the most jokes told in an hour (over 400) but he lost it to an Australian comedian (who read his instead of reciting from memory). Let's pluck a few grapes straight from the Vine:

'The advantage of easy origami is two-fold.'

'When I was young, my mother used to beat me with the telephone – I was always on the receiving end.'

'I was taking the M3 out of London and a cop said, "Put it back!"'

'When I was in school, the school bully used to rub my head against a giant piece of sandpaper – I was no *match* for him.'

'...I got a job as a litter removal man. I didn't have any training, I just thought, "I'll pick it up as I go along". And then after that, I was selling helium balloons at the same time as being the pilot of a hot-air balloon – it was actually very hard trying to hold those two jobs down.'

'One-armed butlers: They can take it but they can't dish it out.'

'I met my girlfriend in a Jacuzzi – yeah, she was a *bubbly* girl. She was a nudist – I wore the *trousers* in that relationship!'

'At the moment, I am reading *My Life* by Bill Clinton, which freaked me out because I didn't realize he knew anything about *my* life.'

Tim Vine's comedy DVDs come highly recommended. They include *Punslinger*, *Joke-a-motive* and *So I Said to This Bloke*.

## Absurdity/ Farce

*'I never forget a face, but in your case I'd be glad to make an exception.'*

- Groucho Marx (1890-1977), legendary comedian

*'The colour drained slowly from my face, entered the auricle, shot up the escalator, and issued from the ladies and misses' section in the housewares department.'*

- S.J. Perelman, *The Love Decoy*

Joseph Heller was born in 1923 in Brooklyn New York. He worked in the advertising departments of *Time*, *Look* and *McCalls*. During this time, he got the idea for what would turn out to be his seminal novel: *Catch-22* (a World War II thriller). Working on the novel in spare moments and evenings at home, it took him 8 years to complete the manuscript which was first published in 1961. His second novel, *Something Happened* was published in 1971 and *Good as Gold* in 1979. He also wrote a stage play entitled *We Bombed in New Haven*. His more recent books include *God Knows* and *Picture This*. I have rarely encountered a writer as downright funny as Joseph Heller. His ideas were fresh, original and often hilarious. In *God Knows*, for example, Joseph Heller takes the Biblical story of David, King of Israel, and (while maintaining historical accuracy) re-tells it in a more realistic fashion. Told from a 1<sup>st</sup>-person perspective, 'David' tells his own story, eager to reveal his true nature – not as a 'pious bore' but a lover, fighter and (plagiarised) poet<sup>139</sup>. In the Bible, there is a scene where David, while a soldier, is captured by the Philistines and brought before their leader but manages to escape by pretending to be mad. Here is Heller's version of the events:

'I rolled my eyes about full circle in their sockets and regaled him with my very admirable imitation of a Jewish laughing hyena. In all ways I could think of, I feigned myself mad at their hands. I scrubbed at their gates making canine epileptic noises, and I let my spittle fall down over my beard.'

And then there's the scene where young David (who married King Saul's daughter) returns from a victorious military campaign and danced with the jubilant Israelite crowds that welcomed them back home. Since men in those days wore tunics (rather like dresses) and underwear hadn't been invented, Joseph Heller tries to imagine what David's dance *really* looked like:

'...I danced harder and harder with all my might, kicking up my heels and my knees higher and higher until the skirt of my tunic was awirl around my waist and I knew at last that my tossing genitals were in open view and could be observed by all present except the blind and the dying. We drank like Ephraimites and perspired like pigs.'

S. J. Perelman was one of comedy's greatest natural resources. He was 'first and foreskin a humour writer for the *New Yorker*', where his brother-in-law, author Nathaniel West, was an editor. Perelman also authored books and wrote scripts for Hollywood (in particular for the Marx Brothers who were comedy legends), especially after Nathaniel West's untimely death in a car crash. His short stories and mini stage plays have been compiled into many books,

<sup>139</sup> 'Joseph Heller is the outstandingly clever ideas-man of modern fiction...brilliantly inventive.' – *Sunday Times*

the most revered of which is *The Most of S. J. Perelman*. Other titles include *Crazy Like a Fox*, *Dawn Ginsberg's Revenge*, *Chicken Inspector No.23*, *Baby it's Cold Inside*, *Eastward Ha!*, *Acres and Pains*, *The Swiss Family Perelman* and *The Last Laugh*. Perelman was awarded the US National Book Award Special Achievement prize and has been described as 'a comic writer of genius' (*The Jewish Chronicle*).

Perelman loved farce (A farce, common in theatre, is a situation that is so ridiculous that it is completely divorced from reality). Like most humourists, he would project himself into his stories but make his character a caricature and the fictional world a crazy wonderland. Perelman was well-travelled and knew the back of his hand as well as he knew foreign countries and cities. In the story *White Bimbo, or, Through Dullest Africa With Three Sleepy People*, he mentions Africa:

'Take one thing with another, there are few places I know better than the heart of Africa. Set me down in Bechualand or the Cameroons and I will find my way home with less difficulty than I would from Rittenhouse Square or Boylston Street.'

In the short story, *Garnish Your Face With Parsley and Serve*<sup>140</sup>, Perelman describes a certain dubious pastor (a familiar character in Kenyan society) thus:

'Fox-nosed, sallow, closely related to God on his mother's side, Antannae has been by turns and insurance technician, reception clerk in a cut-rate mortuary and a used-car salesman. From the side, he dimly resembles a spider, an effect he tries to counteract with a ghastly veneer of benevolence.'

As with most comedians/humourists Perelman (or, more accurately, his alter ego) is convinced that, through no fault of his own, he cannot function in 'normal' society and disaster lurks around every corner. In the article, *To Sleep Perchance to Steam*, he analyzes the Electric Comforter (an electrically heated blanket). The manufacturer's manual says that the invention is quite safe as the conditions necessary before it can do any harm are virtually impossible to occur simultaneously. Perelman is not convinced:

'Given half a chance, I know I could fulfil these conditions, difficult as they seem. As one who puts on a pair of rubbers when he changes a fuse only to find himself recumbent on the floor with eyelashes singed, I'll go further. I bet I could pass through a room containing the Electric Comforter in the original gift box and emerge with a third-degree burn.'

Like Wahome Mutahi after him, Perelman loved to *play with words*, to have *fun* with the language itself:

'And you were cruel,' I said.

'I'm sorry,' added Quigley.

'Why did you add Quigley?' I begged him.

He apologized and subtracted Quigley, then divided Hogan. We hastily dipped the slices of Hogan in Karo, poured sugar over them, and ate them with relish.

<sup>140</sup> See *The Most of S. J. Perelman*

- From *The Love Decoy*

Hold the applause - there's more absurdity. In *Eastward Ho!*, he falls instantly in love with an air stewardess (this is from the days when flight attendants all looked like fashion models) and decides to propose to her right there and then<sup>141</sup> :

'My treasure, I speak without consulting the Guinness Book of Records. Nevertheless I believe this to be the only clean proposal made at thirty-seven thousand feet. Will it be accepted?'



Let's get serious for a minute (if that's possible near Perelman) and analyze the man and his contribution to literary humour. Reviewing *The Most of S. J. Perelman*, one critic raved: 'Button-cute, rapier keen, wafer thin and pauper-poor is S. J. Perelman...he owns one of the rare mouths in which butter has never melted...'. In a lengthy article after the death of Perelman, an online book reviewer and fan of Perelmania - simply called '[Ralph](#)' - made the following assessment:

'He was one of the great stylists of the century. He said his inspiration was George Ade but reading Ade, with his fables and morals, doesn't force us to laugh out loud, as we must, if we have even the slightest bit of wit in us, with Perelman. He's closer to Mark Twain or the early Dickens or Benchley - or even Jerome K. Jerome - than Ade.

His style is one they used to call "deadpan", but it is better defined as elaborately droll. He used to write for the Marx Brothers, and there is an element of Perelman in those fried speeches of Groucho Marx...

For Perelman, the world was delightfully foolish, and the America of 1935 - 1955 became parody of itself.

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<sup>141</sup> I am not sure this is what motivational speaker Myles Monroe meant when he wrote a book entitled *Maximize the Moment!*

This world-weariness was owned guarded, staked out, and exploited by the New Yorker intelligentsia – Perelman, Kaufman, Thurber, Benchley, Dorothy Parker, E. B. White, J. D. Salinger, John Cheever. Theirs may have been a series of ill-concealed yawns, but they were all underlaid with a rich sardonic whimsy...'

TV comedy star Groucho Marx is mentioned in the above passage. Below are some of his jokes:

'I find TV very educating – when somebody switches it on, I go to the next room and read a book.'

And (talking to a woman at a party):

'If you want, you can leave in a huff. If that's too fast, you can leave in a minute and a half<sup>142</sup>.'

You can almost tell that these jokes were written by a literary mind. In *The Hindsight Saga: Fragments of an Autobiography*, Perelman talked about his work with the Marx Brothers:

'I knew that he (Groucho) liked my work for the printed page, my preoccupation with clichés, baroque language, and the elegant variation. Nevertheless I sensed as time went on that this aspect of my work disturbed him; he felt some of the dialogue I wrote for him was "too literary"...I tried to convince Groucho that his comedy was unique, a kaleidoscope of parody, free association, and insult, but he brushed me aside. "That's OK for the Round Table at the Algonquin," he said impatiently. "Jokes – that's what I need. Give me jokes."'

*'Easy writing makes hard reading.'* – S. J. Perelman, in TV interview

James Thurber (1894 – 1961) was an American novelist and illustrator. He served as managing editor and staff writer for The New Yorker. One of the greatest American humorists, Thurber is best known for his classic short story, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* which revolves around a timid man with grandiose and ultra-macho day dreams. A movie dubbed *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* came out in 2013.

Alan Coren is one of the funniest men that ever lived. Born in London in 1938, Coren has been the Editor of *Punch* magazine and a television columnist for the *Mail on Sunday*. He has written twenty-odd books (mostly odd) which include *The Dog It Was That Died*, *All Except the Bastard*, *Golfing for Cats*, *The Collected Bulletins of Idi Amin*, *Tissues for Men*, *Something For the Weekend* and *The Rhinestone as Big as the Ritz*. The *New York Times* has described him as 'Marvellously deft and funny. The natural heir to Thurber and Perelman.' And according to the *New Statesman*, 'Alan Coren was born with a silver *spoof* in his mouth. He has no equal.' *Something for the Weekend*<sup>143</sup> – a collection of 31 humorous short stories - is probably his best book so far. Here's the book's official description:

<sup>142</sup> Pun on 'huff'

<sup>143</sup> 'Superbly inventive...extremely funny...full of unexpected comic feats.' – *Sunday Telegraph*

'Offshore, the invasion fleet of man-eating batsmen girds its loins for the final assault, to our left Ernest Hemingway crouches over the most important bridge hand of his career, to our right a duck from outer space hurtles from House of Commons in uproar at the news that the Princess of Wales has chucked a stun grenade at Bob Geldof, while the terrible shenanigans behind us may readily be identified as the noise made by a shrieking horde of lawyers about to be run over by a nun in a Porsche.

Where can we possibly be, but in the lunatic world of Alan Coren, where Mister Men fornicate before lunch and God makes all Her own curtains?

Once again, the funniest writer alive outstrips all his previous excesses to bring you something – you might even say everything - for the weekend.'

In one of the stories (*But Answer Came There: Nun*), the protagonist is out driving on an otherwise normal night when he spots – get this – a Catholic nun driving a Porsche! Intrigued, he gives chase while wondering under what circumstances a nun would be zooming in a luxury car at night:

'Press foot down, take bend, or some of it, see traffic light ahead, light still red, Porsche still at light, hit brake, slew, slow, stop. Porsche go *thrum-thrum-thrum*, clutch half-in, straining against torque like pedigree Exocet (missile) under starter's orders.'

But it's an 'unequal battle' because the nun is going like a 'bat out of Heaven':

'Roll through in pursuit, still got Christmas tree in back, tree fall over, reek of amputated needles, box of glass balls hit floor, go off like toytown musketry...'

And here's some absurdity from British actor David Niven's first memoir, *The Moon's a Balloon*:

'What we must do...is find out where we stand, then get behind ourselves and push ourselves forward. We must get right down to the very roots, right down to rock bottom, then bring the whole thing up in one common pool.'

The humorous memoir was a massive success. Reviewer John Kenneth Galbraith said: 'David Niven is a truly brilliant writer – gifted in description, wonderful with dialogue, and more accomplished in high and low comedy than anyone I can think of since the early Waugh.'

### **Contrast/Playing Opposites**

*'A Conservative is a man who sits and thinks, mostly sits.'*

— US President Woodrow Wilson

*'I was always in search of a one-armed economist so that he could never make a statement and then say, "on the other hand..."'* - US President Harry Truman (1884 – 1972)





**A President and his bodyguard dancing? Nope – just the Redykyulus comedy troupe being, well, ridiculous!**

In his comedy special entitled *The Daywalker*, top South African standup comedian Trevor Noah confesses to having being disappointed when, on ascending to the presidency, Jacob Zuma started acting 'presidential' and respectable and dressing formally. Trevor's argument was that 'We (comedians) work opposites' and Zuma being dignified was depriving comedians of 'material' they could work with. 'This is a guy who took a shower to cure AIDS,' Trevor said, referring to an incident where Zuma had confessed to knowingly having had unprotected sex with an AIDS-infected woman but taking a shower afterwards. Zuma had also married a fourth wife shortly before becoming South Africa's president and images of him dancing in his Zulu tribal attire during the traditional wedding ceremony had circulated around the world. Trevor says that when Zuma became president, comedians worldwide were waiting with bated breath for him to do something odd (like the tribal dance) so that they could have something humorous to talk about. The antiquated dancing and other antics/rants may not be funny in themselves (eg. if a traditional dance troupe was doing a dance number for tourists), but when they come from *an unexpected person*, they could be hilarious.



**Top SA comedian Trevor Noah (left) and American comedian/talk show host Kamau Bell**

Another example of presidential humour is in the viral video of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni rapping a song that would later be dubbed, *Do You Want Another Rap?* There was nothing funny about the song itself – believed to be a modified traditional Ugandan folk poem – and the president is formally dressed and moderate of speech. But the fact that a sitting *president* had decided to 'spit some rhymes' for the youth was amusing to many: the song was professionally re-mixed (to add a proper soundtrack) and the video went viral, shown around the world during news broadcasts.

And talking of Hip Hop, the video of a Japanese monk (called 'MC Happiness') rapping freestyle also went viral on YouTube and hit news channels. MC Happiness is old and he raps religious teachings, but the image of a Japanese monk doing something that is most associated with urban, streetwise (Black) boys is very amusing. It's not what you expect. To that point, if an attractive lady walked down the street in a short skirt and high heels, that would not be cause for laughter (although it would be well worth the watching). But if the girl's boyfriend were to walk the same street in her miniskirt and heels – especially exaggerating the femininity angle – that would make almost everyone in sight smile, laugh or stop to take pictures. Why? Because it's the exact opposite of how you *expect* a man to walk down the street.

'Epic Rap Battles of History' is a series of YouTube videos by two young male entertainers named 'Epic Lloyd' and 'Nice Peter'. The series features rap battles between historical figures like Napoleon, Beethoven, Hitler, Shakespeare and Cleopatra or modern-day public figures like Barack Obama, Lady Gaga, Sarah Palin and Stephen Hawking. 'Epic Rap Battles of History' has been dubbed the most successful YouTube series ever. Tens of millions watch each episode. 'Epic Lloyd' and 'Nice Peter' play the characters (going to great lengths to look and sound the part) and do the rapping themselves. They also use advanced green-screen technology to give a 'realistic' and relevant background to each character. The videos are not just triumphant rap music achievements but are usually very funny and cleverly written. A lot of research clearly goes into the background of a historical figure before rap lyrics can be penned for his or her avatar. The humour is enhanced by the 'playing opposites' principal. The mere spectacle of a figure like Beethoven or Sarah Palin battle rapping is amusing, even before you hear the words. Below are some of the lyrics from the Epic Rap Battle between historic pacifists Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr:

**Gandhi:**

*You want to battle wits?  
See who's a better pacifist?  
I fought the caste system  
But you still cannot touch this  
Slumdog skillionaire, first name Messiah  
Rap so hot, I spit yoga fire  
Everything you preach, I said it first  
Why don't you jot own these lines  
Plagiarise my whole verse?  
Leave your thoughts on the door  
Like the real Martin Luther  
I'm not thinking you shall overcome this, Junior*

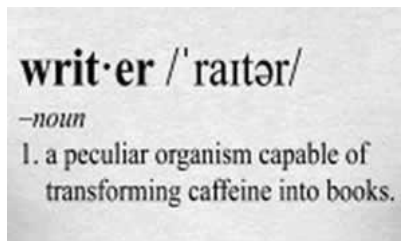
**Martin Luther King, Jr:**

*I'm the king of civil rights from the city to suburbia  
No shoes, no shirt, but I'm still gonna serve ya  
Make you swallow your words  
So you can break the fast  
And thank God Almighty that you can eat at last  
I admire the way you broke the British power  
But I have a dream – that one day you'll take a shower  
Like the 'H' in your name, you ought to remain silent  
Flatten your style like bread – naan violence.*

**Non-Fiction**

*'Income tax returns are the most imaginative fiction being written today.'* – Herman Wouk,  
author of *The Cain Mutiny*

*'They say diamonds are forever – so is herpes, so be careful.'* – XFM radio host Nick Ndeda



Non-fiction work can be just as amusing as made-up tales, and perhaps even more so for the fact that the characters and situations are real. A marvellous example of this is *Bring on the Empty Horses*<sup>144</sup>, a biography of Hollywood itself, written by British-born actor David Niven, who won an Oscar during the Golden Age of motion pictures. More fun than a barrel of monkeys, *Bring on the Empty Horses* became a massive bestseller and was critically acclaimed. Book critic J. K. Gilbraith said, 'Were David Niven not a famous actor, he would be thought a brilliant writer. And after this book, he will surely be thought a brilliant writer.' Here's an anecdote from the book:

'Being a "clap"<sup>145</sup> doctor, "Dockie" Martin was a very useful member of the community. Venereal disease increases in direct proportion to promiscuous fornication, so with Hollywood not being famous for the chastity of its citizens, it was inevitable that through the good doctor's waiting-room passed the most famous private parts in the world.'

Another one, concerning a fellow actor:

'Russian-born, George, a giant grizzly of a man, had a face, even in his twenties, which looked as though he had rented it on a long lease and had lived in it so long he didn't want to move out.'

<sup>144</sup> Published by Coronet Books (Hodder & Stoughton)

<sup>145</sup> Slang for 'gonorrhoea'

And here's another one which explains the book's quirky title:

'Mike Cruz was the director of the *Charge of the Light Brigade* and his Hungarian-oriented English was a source of joy to us all. High on a rostrum, he decided that the right moment had come to order the arrival on the scene of a hundred head of riderless chargers (war horses). "Okay," he yelled into a megaphone – "Bring on the empty horses!" (Errol) Flynn<sup>146</sup> and I doubled up with laughter.'<sup>147</sup>

The following passage is from a sports article in *The N. Y. Times*, written by Ira Berkow. Clearly designed to spark humour, it supposedly gives solid advice on how to popularise sports:

'We need heated arguments on the field between participants and officials, like in baseball...We need blood, like in ice hockey...We need bruising collisions, like in (American) football, and a proper number of concussions per game.'

This passage comes from a non-fiction short story entitled *Confessions of a Coffee Addict*:

'Virtually all Americans are addicted to coffee. I am one of them. I didn't start out that way. Back in my prime – before the age of ten – I bounded out of bed at six in the morning, bursting with energy.'

And here's a snippet from an entertainment magazine:

'Your girlfriend has seen you naked and yet she's still hanging around. It's a good sign. It means she's not repulsed easily.'

- Alice Levitt, 'Turn Her Into a WWE Fan', article for *WWE Magazine*

Amusing quotes (usually from famous people or politicians) are other instruments used to add humour to non-fiction work. They are very common in newspapers and magazines. Some magazines, like *Readers Digest*, have entire pages populated with quotes. Below are some examples of 'quotable quotes':

'Youth is wonderful – too bad it's wasted on children.' – George Bernard Shaw

'The secret of staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly, and lie about your age.' - legendary US comedienne Lucille Ball

'Of those who say nothing, few are silent.' – Thomas Neil

'If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking.' – George S. Patton

'I want you to understand that also I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience.' – Ronald Reagan, US president

<sup>146</sup> A famous and controversial Hollywood actor

<sup>147</sup> 'David Niven gives a marvellously readable account of his contacts with Hollywood.' – *The Scotsman*

'And I know many of you have been looking for Sarah Palin's new book...I found it somewhere between FICTION and NON-FICTION, in the FANTASY isle...Do you think when Sarah Palin was in school, she was voted "Least Likely to Write a Book and Most Likely to Burn one"?' – Robin Williams, *Weapons of Self-Destruction* (comedy special)

'At age 70, Roger Moore is streets ahead of most men. When he was the screen's most laid-back 007 since someone walked across a film set carrying a horizontal plank, he was surrounded by Bond belles of every size, colour and bust measurement.'

- Paul Callan, *Women's Journal Magazine*

'If you have never seen (racy) pictures of (raunchy pop star) Rihanna, then you're under-utilizing the Internet.' – XFM radio host Nick Ndeda

'This is why I talk to you about the importance of education. You can't even rob a person right without at least a high school education. I ain't lying.' - US Comedian Michael Colyar<sup>148</sup>

## Poetry

Even poetic works can carry humour. Here are some examples from diverse sources:

*'Some primal termite knocked on wood  
And tasted it, and found it good  
And that is why your cousin May  
Fell through the parlour floor today.'*

- Ogden Nash, *The Termite*

*'"Pro" is the opposite "con" – that fact is plainly seen  
If "progress" means moving forward, what does "congress" mean?'*

- Nipsey Russell, US poet and comedian

*'The King of Hearts had all these tarts  
That he wanted to make straight  
So he drew an arrow to the straight and narrow  
But they couldn't get past the gate.'*

- Anon

*'I've done something new for this fight  
I wrestled with an alligator, I done tussled with a whale  
I done handcuffed lightning, thrown thunder in jail  
Only last week, I murdered a rock, injured a stone, hospitalised a brick  
I'm so mean, I make medicine sick  
Last night I hit the switch in my bedroom  
And was in the bed before the room got dark.'*

- Mohammed Ali, hyping his upcoming 'Rumble in the Jungle' boxing match against George Foreman<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> *The Michael Colyar Project* (comedy special)

*'...dis poem is still not written  
dis poem has no poet  
dis poem is just a part of the story  
his-story her-story our-story the story still untold  
dis poem is now ringin talkin irritatin  
makin u want to stop it  
but dis poem will not stop  
dis poem is long cannot be short  
dis poem cannot be tamed cannot be blamed  
the story is still not told about dis poem  
dis poem is old new  
dis poem was copied from the bible your prayer book  
playboy magazine the n.y. times readers digest  
the c.i.a. files the k.g.b. files  
dis poem is no secret  
dis poem shall be called boring stupid senseless  
dis poem is watchin u tryin to make sense from dis poem  
dis poem is messin up your brains  
makin u want to stop listenin to dis poem  
but u shall not stop listenin to dis poem  
u need to know what will be said next in dis poem...'*  
- Allan Mutabaruka<sup>150</sup>, *Dis Poem*

*'And on the sixth day, God took some carbon and hydrogen,  
Added a dash of oxygen, a pinch of phosphorus and a modicum of nitrogen,  
And carefully mixed it all up before placing it in a pre-heated oven.  
And when the first man finally emerged, naked and alone,  
He looked up at the celestial beings in their dazzling white robes  
And said: "All right, who's the comedian who stole my clothes?"'*  
- From the Poem *Red Giants and White Dwarfs* ([The Moon is Made of Green Cheese](#))

### **Fish out of Water**

Ok, here's an idea for a sitcom: A wisecracking teenage hip-hopper from a violent inner city is sent by his mother to live with his wealthy uncle's upper-class family. Sound like a good setup for a comedy? Plenty of possibilities for laughs? You bet! But it has already been done – that was the premise for the hit 1990's sitcom, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, starring Will Smith. It aired on KTN TV, shortly after VOK/KBC's monotony on TV broadcasting was broken, and it took Kenyan teen audiences by storm. *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* launched Will Smith into the stratosphere (he was a millionaire while still in his teens) and is now better known as an A-list film star.

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<sup>149</sup> *When We Were Kings* (1996), documentary film

<sup>150</sup> Reggae poet/singer

The fish-out-of-water paradigm is visible in virtually every TV comedy. In Kenya, the 'mshamba' (villager-in-the-city) paradigm is the loom on which countless jokes continue to be woven. There is even a top comedian who goes by the name 'Mshamba'.

TV comedies that rely heavily on a character being completely out of his depth/comfort zone include *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *My Hero*, *My Favourite Martian* and *Parent-Hood*.

### **Funny vs Straight**

One of the most enduring techniques in comedy – all the way from theatre to the big and small screen – is to juxtapose two completely different main characters, making them clash in all ways imaginable (speech, manners, dressing, taste, lifestyle etc). The most common application for this method is to make one character play 'funny' while the other one plays 'straight' (serious, no-nonsense). The person playing 'funny' is sometimes also referred to as 'the clown' or the 'monkey'. The person playing 'straight' usually acts as a soundboard for the monkey's jokes/antics. The 'straight' character works best when he/she is *so serious* that this in itself becomes funny (a notable example being Steve Carrel's character in TV's *The Office*). The irony about 'straight' characters is that they are sometimes the funnier ones in the show, or in real life (Think Sheldon Cooper in TV's *The Big Bang Theory*). One of the most famous comedy duos of all time were Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. In their laugh-out-loud comedy routines, Dean played the 'straight man' to Lewis' 'monkey'. They started out in nightclubs and created a sensation. They went on to conquer Hollywood where they starred in a series of hit comedies all based on the same premise (funny vs straight). Because Lewis played the 'monkey', he was thought to be the funnier one in real life. This perception brought tension into the working relationship and eventually the pair broke up. Dean Martin would go on to become a mega star (especially as a member of Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack) while Lewis' star dimmed. (Dean Martin was actually a multi-talented entertainer who could also sing and act to an international standard.) According to former partner Jerry Lewis, 'Dean Martin had an infinite sense of comedy, especially (when combined) with his sense of timing, which was impeccable.'

*'You're not too drunk if you can lie on the floor without holding on.'* – Dean Martin, US comedian/singer/ actor

Another comedy duo that made a fortune out of the funny vs. straight premise was the TV duo of Sonny Bono (multi-talented singer/actor/writer) and his wife, singer/actor Cher. Their highly-rated TV variety show was called *Sonny & Cher* and usually opened with light-hearted banter between the couple. Cher played 'straight' while Sonny played the 'monkey'. In one routine, she actually compared him to Tarzan's pet monkey, 'Cheetah'. When he took offence, she apologised – and then offered him a banana! Fans were sometimes shocked by Cher's harshness towards her husband (her role was mainly to cut him down) but according to Wikipedia, Sonny himself wrote her lines. Because they were both singers, were legally married and Cher was so beautiful (she had a ravishing American-Indian look and very long straight hair), the duo quickly became a worldwide sensation. Sonny himself paid tribute to Cher's beauty. In one routine, he joked that the first time he saw her singing – with such impressive range, modulation and pitch - he thought to himself, 'My golly – that girl has a terrific *body*!' An accomplished singer, Sonny was famed for the hits *And the Beat Goes On* and *I Got You Babe* (which he sung countless times with Cher). The couple would eventually



break up and go their separate ways. Bono died in a tragic skiing accident while Cher went on to become a somewhat controversial rock-and-roll superstar.



**A scene from the *Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour***

The Smothers Brothers were a comedy-and-folk-music duo that burst onto the American TV scene in the late 1960's. Their act consisted of the two musically-inclined brothers endlessly ribbing each other, often with regard to a song they were about to perform. Sometimes, the back-and-forth between them got so intense that they never sung the intended song at all! Tom Smothers played the 'monkey' while Dick Smothers played the sober/serious role. Audiences ate up their 'sibling rivalry' brand of comedy and CBS took a chance them by giving them a prime time slot, opposite the top-rated TV show of the time, *Bonanza*. Nine other shows had previously gone head-to-head with *Bonanza* in the ratings war and lost. But the clean-cut duo was accepted by young and mature audiences alike. In 1968, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, as it was called, finally overtook *Bonanza* in the ratings! According to a BBC Four documentary, the Brothers' problems with the network began when they were prevented from airing risqué or 'controversial' material. In particular, they were opposed to the Vietnam War and had discouraged people from signing up to fight. Their show was cancelled (for which they successfully sued the TV network) but they continued to perform and release their material in the form of 'comedy albums' featuring humour and music.



*'This nation is divided as never before. The Democrats alone are divided into three political factions: the New Left, the Old Left and what's left.'*

– From *The Smothers Brothers TV show*

TV SHOW	FUNNY CHARACTER	STRAIGHT CHARACTER(S)
<i>Sanford &amp; Son</i>	Old man Sanford	Lemont (Sanford's son)
<i>Everybody Loves Raymond</i>	Raymond	Ray's stoic wife, Ray's envious brother
<i>The Fresh Prince of Bel-air</i>	Will Smith	Will's Uncle Phil, Will's cousin Carlton
<i>Sonny &amp; Cher</i>	Sonny	Cher
<i>The Big Bang Theory</i>	Nearly everyone except Sheldon	Sheldon (and sometimes Penny)
<i>Two and a Half Men</i>	Charlie	Charlie's brother, Allen
<i>Modern Family</i>	Gloria	Gloria's elderly husband
<i>Rob</i>	Rob	Rob's Mexican wife
<i>Everybody Hates Chris</i>	Chris	Chris's no-nonsense, penny-pinching mother

### Shock Value/ Pushing the Envelope

*'This man is a genius. Who else can take all the forms of comedy – slapstick, satire, mime, standup – and turn it into something that will offend everyone?'*

– Comedian Robin Williams at the *Roast of Richard Pryor*<sup>151</sup> (TV)

*'The only reason you (Charlie Sheen) got on TV in the first place is because God hates Michael J. Fox*<sup>152</sup>.*'* – Anthony Jeselnik, *The Comedy Central Roast of Charlie Sheen*

Comedians, perhaps more than any other category of entertainers, push the boundaries of political correctness and public taste. While many comedians, especially stand-ups, have had stellar careers with 'clean' (family-friendly) material, many others are increasingly trying to get laughs by 'saying what other people are afraid to say.' Successful clean comedians include Jeff Foxworthy (*Blue Colour Comedy* DVDs) who has sold more comedy albums than anyone in history<sup>153</sup>.

Risqué comedians justify their violations of accepted norms by claiming that what they say is 'just comedy/jokes' and should therefore not be taken seriously. They also often cite 'freedom of speech' as a shield. The very titles of some comedy specials hint at the controversial nature the content: *Raw* (Eddie Murphy), *1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Comedy* (Martin Lawrence), *Freedom of Speech* (Eddie Griffin), *Race* (Paul Mooney), *Jokes I Can't Tell on TV* (Red Foxx) and *Nigger, You're Crazy* (Richard Pryor).

<sup>151</sup> Pryor – Groundbreaking Black comedian; inspiration for many of today's African-American standup comedians.

<sup>152</sup> Michael J. Fox was the award-winning star of the hit TV sitcom, *Spin City*. After leaving the show due to Parkinson's Disease, Charlie Sheen took over as the lead actor

<sup>153</sup> 10 platinum albums, according to *The Comedy Central Roast of Jeff Foxworthy*

Paul Mooney is a Black comedy legend. His DVDs include *Race*, *Analyzing White America* and *Know Your History: Jesus Was Black and so Was Cleopatra*<sup>154</sup>. He used to write for Richard Pryor and, more recently, had a segment on the Dave Chappelle Show called 'Ask a Black Dude.' He mainly talks (or rather complains) about White people. While he is revered by comedy fans as one of the funniest people ever, many of those same fans would aver that he is arguably more racist than the 'White folks' he rants about. Most of his jokes are in the vein:

'White people love to look at their family tree. Just *look* at it. Because if they shake it, a nigger might fall out.' – From *Race* (DVD)

During the DVD recordings for Mooney's standup comedy specials, it is common to see offended White audience members leaving early, but he just laughs it off. For over 30 years now, he has been mining the subject of race eg.

'And White folks are nosy. Just nosy. "Why does a bee make honey?". You're not a bee, why do you give a f\*\*\*?' – From *Race* (DVD)

In 2007, US shock comedian Kathy Griffin offended conservative Christians while accepting a TV Emmy Award by saying:

'A lot of people come up here and thank Jesus for this award. I want you to know that no one had less to do with this award than Jesus. S\*\*\* it, Jesus. This award is my god now.'

Asked about her remarks backstage a short time later, the standup comedian said: 'I hope I offended some people. I didn't want to win the Emmy for nothing.' Her speech was immediately condemned by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, which termed the remarks as 'obscene and blasphemous'. Her utterances later caused 'a firestorm of controversy' in popular culture, none of which fazed Griffin who – along with Joan Rivers and Phylis Diller before her – belongs to a very small group of female comedians who made their mark through risqué humour. A letter from Kathy Griffin (via her publicist) later dismissed the controversy thus: 'Am I the only Catholic left with a sense of humor?'

But shock value in itself doesn't make one a comedian. As Eddie Murphy said in *Raw* (paraphrased), 'You can't have a cuss show...It's not like I came out here and said "#&0@\*\*%&!" and "@\$%&\*!!" and then left. I told some jokes in between.' You can't be a comedian, or comedy writer, if you're not *funny*. The jokes come first. And in any case, even with Freedom of Speech provisions, you can still be prosecuted like any other hate-speech/slander/obscenity disseminator if you cross the line (the judge might not think you're funny), so you should think twice – or even thrice – before writing racist, tribalistic, slanderous or otherwise politically-incorrect material. In the action-comedy *Men in Black*, Tom Lee Jones' character says, 'Ma'am, I assure you that the F.B.I has no sense of humour we're aware of.' You might find out the hard way that the same is true for many gov't departments, religious institutions, political organisations and individual people.

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<sup>154</sup> Actually, Cleopatra was Greek; and so was Alexander the Great, after whom the Egyptian city of Alexandria is named

To end this section on humour, here are 3 humour articles:

1. A Konkodi in Parliament! (The first humour article that I personally ever wrote)
2. President Obama's humorous 2013 Gridiron dinner speech
3. Ali G's 2004 Harvard Commencement Speech (probably the craziest college graduation speech ever)

**A KONKODI IN PARLIAMENT!**<sup>155</sup>

By Alexander Nderitu<sup>156</sup>

*Imagine, for one scary moment, that a tout was elected into parliament. Alexander Nderitu explored the possibility.*

Can any two categories of people be as far removed from each other as touts and the Honourable Members of Parliament? The mention of the word 'tout' conjures up images of a sheng-speaking, rude-mouthed, door-swinging ruffian who only just managed to escape being a thug. In contrast, the mention of 'MP' conjures up images of a distinguished-looking, pot-bellied, middle aged man (women are hopelessly outnumbered) in a dark business suit, driving a luxury car.

So let's flip the script. Let's throw a spanner in the works. Let's take a konkodi from the mean streets of Nairobi, make him the Minister for Roads, and see how he handles himself in the unfamiliar environs of the National Assembly, where the manicured lawns are as level as ponds, the library-like silence is attributable to a lack of quorum (or mass slumber) and any jovial foot-thumping may readily be identified as the celebration following an announcement that MP's pay perks will be hiked once again....

Leader of Official Opposition: There have been numerous complaints by road users on the slow progress of the Mbagathi Way upgrade. Could the new Roads Minister comment on the matter?

Konkodi: Ata ni vizuri umetaja hiyo rodi ju hapo kuna issue moja Biggie kama Notorious. Maze, hao wathii walitengeneza rodi poa ya tarmac alafu sasa wanaweka simiti juu yake. Kwani ni keja ndiyo waweke simiti?

Female MP: Mr Speaker, could you direct the new Member to communicate in English which happens to be the country's Official Language? I have no idea what he just said!

Konkodi: Ati nibonge kingoso? Kwani mimi ni mlami? Na nyinyi mamasa sa zingeni mnapenda kujifanja mababi!

An MP who is also a Lawyer: I agree with the Lady MP. I think this fellow has no grasp of House rules. He is still wearing a conductor's uniform!

Konkodi: Nawakilisha ma-boyz wangu. Noma iko wapi?

Hon. MPs: Shame! Shame!

Mr. Speaker: Order, members! I assure you that the new Member will be informed of the rules in due time. This is his parliamentary debut.

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<sup>155</sup> Konkodi – Urban Nairobi slang for a PSV tout/conductor. The whole article contains Nairobi slang (sheng) that might be obscure to non-Kenyans

<sup>156</sup> My first-ever humour column, published about eight years ago

Leader of Official Opposition: Be that as it may, I think the Minister for Roads agreed with me that the on-going construction of Mbagathi Way is controversial to say the least. Despite being only three kilometers long, it has been under construction for a year and it is not even halfway through. On top of that, the amount of money involved is scandalous. I think this is yet another White Elephant project by the government!

Opposition Mps: Hear! Hear! Scandal! Anglo-leasing! Etc

Mr. Speaker: Order! O-order!

Lawyer MP: I think that the leader of Official Opposition is using the Mbagathi Way issue to slander the government in advance of the General Elections. The reason why the construction of the road is taking so long is that a tarmac foundation had to be laid before the concrete surface could be laid. The reason for the expense is obvious – building concrete structures is never cheap.

Leader of Official Opposition: Those millions could have been better spent. There are starving Kenyans in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country.

Lawyer MP: Concrete roads last much longer than tarmac. We're actually saving money on re-carpeting and repairs.

Leader of Official Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I am pointing out the government's warped priorities when it comes to public spending.

Konkodi: Tuliza boli, bro, uwanja mdogo. Ata mimi siungi gava mkono kwa swala hili. Lakini ju wameshajenga nusu, hakuna haja ya kupiga hii project ngeta sasa. Afadhali tuvute pumz. Wakishaa murder, tutaenda tusorore hiyo something. Labda itakua rodi ingine ya power.

Lawyer MP: I move that we declare this fellow to be under McNaughton Rules – he is insane and should therefore not be taken seriously!

Konkodi: Unaita nani mwenda? Tusizoeane sana! Sisi makonkodi hatucheki na watu!

Lawyer MP: Are you threatening me?

Konkodi: Nikishika nare, mimi ni mnoma! Conje huniona anatoroka masaa!

Lawyer MP: Mr. Speaker, will you allow this character to issue thinly veiled threats right from the floor of the House or will you have him escorted out with a stern warning?

Mr. Speaker: The Standing Orders call for free speech inside the House but I will not tolerate any more unwarranted attacks from either side!

Konkodi: Huyu mbuyu anajifanya obohoo lakini hanitishi! Achunge sana tusikutane kwa rodi!

Hon. Members: Shame! Resign! Step down! Etc

Security Minister: When you rattle a snake, you must be ready to be bitten by it!

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Konkodi: Mo fire! Mo fire!

Mr. Speaker: I am getting tired of babysitting adults. It looks like these days, adulthood is a moving target!

Hon. Members: You're too old! Resign! Retire! You have rattled a snake! Mo fire! etc

Until next time, here's a piece of advice for drivers to live by: 'ALWAYS DRIVE SUCH THAT YOUR LICENCE WILL EXPIRE BEFORE YOU DO.'



**PRESIDENT OBAMA'S HUMOROUS GRIDIRON (DINNER) SPEECH (transcript)<sup>157</sup>**

Washington March 9, 2013

'With all these new faces, it's hard to keep track of who is in, who is out. And I know it's difficult for you guys as reporters. But I can offer you an easy way of remembering the new team. If Ted Cruz calls somebody a communist, then you know they're in my cabinet. (Laughter)

'Jack Lew is getting started on his new role as Treasury Secretary. Jack is so low key, he makes Tim Geithner look like Tom Cruise. (Laughter) Don't worry, everybody, Jack signed off on that joke or a five year old drew a slinky. (Laughter) I don't know which. (Applause)

'Another big change has been at the State Department. Everybody has noticed that obviously. And let's face it — Hillary is a tough act to follow. But John Kerry is doing great so far. He is doing everything he can to ensure continuity. Frankly, though, I think it's time for him to stop showing up at work in pantsuits. (Laughter) It's a disturbing image. (Laughter) It really is. (Laughter) I don't know where he buys them. He is a tall guy. (Laughter)

'And even though I'm just beginning my second term, I know that some folks are looking ahead to bigger things. Look, it's no secret that my Vice President is still ambitious. But let's face it, his age is an issue. Just the other day, I had to take Joe aside and say, "Joe, you are way too young to be the pope." (Laughter) "You can't do it. You got to mature a little bit." (Laughter)

'Now, I do want to end on a serious note. I know that there are people who get frustrated with the way journalism is practiced these days. And sometimes those people are me. (Laughter) But the truth is our country needs you and our democracy needs you.

'In an age when all it takes to attract attention is a Twitter handle and some followers, it's easier than ever to get it wrong. But it's more important than ever to get it right. And I am grateful for all the journalists who do one of the toughest jobs there is with integrity and insight and dedication — and a sense of purpose — that goes beyond a business model or a news cycle.

'This year alone, reporters have exposed corruption here at home and around the world. They've risked everything to bring us stories from places like Syria and Kenya<sup>158</sup>, stories that need to be told. And they've helped people understand the ways in which we're all connected — how something that happens or doesn't happen halfway around the world or here in Washington can have consequences for American families.

'These are extraordinary times. The stakes are high and the tensions can sometimes be high as well. But while we'll always have disagreements, I believe that we share the belief that a

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<sup>157</sup> [http://www.politico.com/story/2013/03/president-obama-gridiron-club-dinner-speech-2013-full-text-transcript-88654\\_Page3.html](http://www.politico.com/story/2013/03/president-obama-gridiron-club-dinner-speech-2013-full-text-transcript-88654_Page3.html)

<sup>158</sup> This line caused controversy in Kenya, especially on social media, for comparing Kenya with Syria which was then experiencing political upheaval. The controversy died down when it became apparent that the remarks were not made during a serious/formal speech.

free press — a press that questions us, that holds us accountable, that sometimes gets under our skin — is absolutely an essential part of our democracy.

So I want to thank everybody for not just a wonderful evening — and, Chuck, I want to thank you for your outstanding presidency — but I also just want to thank you for the work that you do each and every day. And in the words of one of my favorite *Star Trek* characters — Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise — “May the force be with you.” (Laughter and applause.)’

**ALI G HARVARD GRADUATION SPEECH (2004)**

Written and performed by Sacha Baron Cohen (aka 'Ali G')



**'Professor' Ali G at Harvard**

'Booyakasha - Professor G indahouse *aiii*. Big shout out de Harvard massiv [SIGNS 'H'] I iz done a capital 'H', coz Harvard iz the place innit? - u see I ain't no ignoranus. Things like 'apple' and 'orange' do not start with a capital letter, unless dey iz at de start of a sentence - but some of you brainboxes probably know dat already innit.

'Me name be Ali G and me represent de UK [SIGNS]. For those of u who didn't study geography de UK is a place over one hundred MILES away from here, de capital of it is? Anyone? Not u geography square! ....yes, it is Liverpool. U iz clever and quite fly if u don't mind me sayin. First of all, I iz got to say I iz a bit nervous speakin to so many of you - at least me would be if I weren't totally mashed. Normally de only public-speaking I does is to 12 people - and it's well easy all me has to say iz me name and de words "not guilty".

Checkit, me agreed to speak here today coz me wanted to talk to de brightest minds of our generation, to see what makes Harvard de most special university in de world, and also coz dey agreed to pay for me flight over here and hotel room. Sorry to bring dis up now, but when u iz told dat your hotel bill is bein paid for, u naturally assume dat dat includes essential extras like breakfast AND special interest pay-per-view movies. Imagine my surprise den dis morning, when I was given a bill for \$164. Me was actually tryin to SAVE Harvard money by buying the 24-hour 'slutfest' packages at \$19.99, rather dan paying for individual films at \$11.99 each...

Anyways, I digest. It iz a well big honour to be arksed ere today. To fink dat so many great people has been educated ere like Lyndon Banes Johnson, or as he is better known - JFK, George Clinton was also ere I fink , and de one before him, and also...William Tell - is he one of your lot, probably, and dat bloke wiv de hat, but most importantly dat really fit honey from *Star Wars* - if u iz out dere, me'd love to - me iz stayin at de Best Western Hotel - me's got a really nice room, altho since dis morning dem has put a parental lock on de tv.

As I stand here today lookin at all of you, on this, your first day of university - I fink of all de fings me can offer you - wisdom, experience but most importantly of all 22 ounces of de finest Morrocan chronic. Well, Dat iz if de Ex-Lax works - to be honest I usually go at 11 in de morning - but nothing dere - infact me'd appreciate it if one medical students here wouldn't mind takin a look...

Hearmenow, u iz de most cleverest students in America - some of u iz probably brilliant at counting - ye know...1,2,3...4.... I could continue...easy. Others of u will be brilliant at English - have memorised de whole alphabet 'a to x' and even be able to spell words like 'hippototamus'.

I iz also well clever - me was so brainy dat me finished me education 6 years before any of u - at de age of 15 - de teachers had to admit dat dere was nothing else dat dem could teach me. U students has come from every corner of de US from de rainforests of Arizona to de deserts of Alaska. Some of you iz probably never even seen a black man before.....allo

Dere is all types of people ere, and it's fantastic to see dat Harvard has finally let in so many women...

Relationships should be brought into dis -de 20th century - u women out dere shouldn't have to do de cookin and de cleanin when u come home from work - u should do it before u leave in de morning.

But more importantly it's wikid dat in Harvard young women and men gets to learn so many amazing subjects...

For those of u studying history, u probably learnt a lot about de Presidents. Like who was Jefferson, and what did Lincoln give America - apart from de town car.

Some of u iz de best legal students in de country. U would know wivout even thinking, how to get someone off a charge of possession. And if any of u do, then can me remind u - Room 204 at the Best Western. Just do me a favour put your ear to de door, and don't come in if u hears me shouting 'Natalie, play wiv me light saber'.

Let's talk about de finances of all dat knowledge dat's been dropped on u. It costs \$38000 a year to go to Harvard...

All you fathers out dere u iz made choices - wiv dat money u could have bought top of de range Lexus but instead u chose to invest in ya kids future. IZ U MENTAL? If u iz got other kids me hopes u don't make de same mistake again innit. Does u realise how many honeys u can get wiv a Lex. 'allo sweetness my son's got a Harvard degree' [FEMALE VOICE] 'wot, who cares?'

Or [MAKES CAR NOISE, MIMES WINDING DOWN WINDOW AND STICKING ELBOW OUT] allo darlin, wanna check out de dvd player in de back aiii.' [her] 'wot's dat?' [me] 'it's ostrich leather'... So students give it up for your parents.

Let's talk bout de future - your future. A lot of you iz probably worried bout employment. Unfortunately most of u WILL end up gettin jobs - especially now u iz got de burden of a degree.

You iz de elite, u will be tomorrow's captains of industry. Sittin infront of me is probly da next Bill Gates, Donald Trump...or even Ronald Mcdonald. And even if you can't all be Ronald himself, most of you iz probably McDonald's Team Leader material. By da way, if any of u ever gets to do business wiv Sir Ronald, a word of hadvice - don't mention de size of his feet....him iz well sensitive about it. Me mate Dave hactually met him, and he said dat even tho him may seem like he's always smiling, dere's a sadness in de eyes...coz of dem feet. All de money in de world - and science still can't do nothing. Maybe dat's something dat some of u M.I.T. nerds can fink about innit...

Anyhow, u iz gotta fink bout de problems in de world coz u iz gotta sort dem out innit. Look at da envirolment - global warming is so bad, dey say in 100 years time, all de rainforests will be gone and all de ice caps will have melted. Actually, 100 years time, we ain't gonna be around den, so don't need to worry about dat one.

But dere is other fings - look at de state of family today - girls is havin sex at younger ages, dere's an increase in absentee fathers and more and more people is havin affairs - but we shouldn't just concentrate on de good fings. Believing in something is easy. Actually doing something is harder. Actions speak louder dan birds.

U has all got de potential to become great Americans. And remember America is de greatest country in de whole world ...apart from Jamaica...and Holland...but u iz definitely in de top 20. ?U people iz de future, u has de chance to change de world, to hactually improve de life of de poor, OR U could goto Wall Street and earn millionz - get plasma screen, chinchilla coat, a series of relationships wiv gold-digging hoes happy to de de most disgusting sexual favours for some bling. Don't waste de opportunity dat g-d has given you - see u in Wall Street.

Let's wrap dis up now, coz I fink me feels somethin movin down below. So, what iz I hopin to take away wiv me from dis time in Harvard? - new friends, different ways of finking about de world, and as many laptops as me mate Dave has managed to nick from your dorms, while u has been sitting ere listening to me stalling.

But I has got ideals too. Just like de great civil rights leader Martin Luther...Van Dross, I has a dream...of little black girls and little white girls...playin wiv each other....Jah bless - bigupyaself Princeton...and keep it real... wesside.'

## **HIGHER LEARNING: Do Universities Kill by Degrees?**

*'I don't want anybody to fail in school and so on and so forth...I just feel (that) in a digital world ...where content is going to be king, we are creative producers...I feel our (education) system is still governed in a slightly colonial and very patriarchal way.'*

– Binyavanga Wainaina, author of *One Day I Will Write This Place*

*'And to think Blacks spend all their money on big colleges  
Still most of you come out confused'*

- Arrested Development, *Mr. Wendal* (song)

So this radio journalist calls me one night (a few months ago), and he's laughing. 'You don't want intellectuals anywhere near you, eh?' he says. I have no idea what he is talking about. He didn't wake me up, but I *was* on the road to slumber.

'What's that?' I croak.

'Your research paper. I am reading it right now<sup>159</sup>. You have really given professors the one-two punch. Ha! Ha!'

He is referring to a paper I wrote a couple of years ago, entitled *Changing Kenya's Literary Landscape (2012 Onwards)*, and which I had e-mailed to him some months previously. I mumble some comments and then ring off and go to sleep...

That phone call disturbed me. My paper addressed very specific issues of creativity (in the world of letters) and was by no means an indictment of higher learning or professors. Everyone knows the importance of education. Even a drunken bum falling in and out ditches will still advice you that 'education is the key', 'get all the education you can get' etc.

My area of interest is the Humanities. I am a Creative and have worked in various creative capacities in my life, from designing graphics to constructing stage plays and penning novels. My argument, in *Changing Kenya's Literary Landscape (2012 Onwards)*, is that you can't get an artistic talent from a school. But you can improve on one eg. If you have the potential to become a film director, you can learn the art and science of film-making from an institute like Kenya Institute of Mass Communication. This will give you the practical skills necessary to translate ideas into filmed presentations and the certification will improve your chances of landing a job in the requisite industry.

Here's an even better example: Usain Bolt of Jamaica is currently world recorder holder for the 100-metre sprint, essentially the world's fastest man. So how did he become so fast? By amassing degrees in Physical Education from the best universities in the world? No – it's a gift, a talent. He is very young (in his twenties) and he just happens to have the *natural ability* to run faster than everyone he has ever competed against.

By the same token, legendary boxing trainer Cus D'Amato (trainer of Mike Tyson who became the youngest world heavyweight boxing champion) said that, while there is no talent

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<sup>159</sup> I'm guessing he's single – there's no way my non-fiction can be stimulating enough to keep young men away from their wives/girlfriends in the middle of the night! (The fiction, maybe)

called 'boxing'<sup>160</sup>, some people do have 'a natural aptitude for throwing punches'. So, as a trainer, his task was to refine that ability to its highest form:

'A boy comes to me with a spark of interest. I feed the spark and it becomes a fire. I feed the fire and it becomes a roaring blaze.' - Cus D'Amato, Mike Tyson's trainer and foster father

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<sup>160</sup> Modern boxing is as much a science as a sport – an opponent who is much smaller or weaker than you can still knock you out if you're not careful



## THE RIVER BETWEEN

*'Literature is to my mind the great teaching power of the world...'* - W. B. Yeats, famous poet

I am willing to concede that the novels chosen as school texts usually have aspects or attributes that can be used to teach students literary techniques, like satire or metaphor, and educators also feel that they are 'safe' for the teaching of 'comprehension', 'grammar' etc. Even an internationally bestselling pop fiction novel might not have much literary merit (although it might have a great plot, interesting characters etc). Here, by way of example, is a prolific book reviewer called Ralph<sup>161</sup>, comparing the late American humourist S. J. Perelman with other literary greats:

'Perelman is a writer who does not prosper under close examination. He's not like (F. Scott) Fitzgerald or Hemingway or Dickens or even (Perelman's brother-in-law, Nathaniel) West himself: the more you look, the more mysteriously their writings become. Looking deeply into Perelman is like analyzing a joke. *Why is it funny?* It always turns a bit sour when you do that...he was at his best with sardonic upper-class humour – the juvenile humour of a Yale or Brown senior, the word play of graduate students at Harvard or Columbia, the wit that mocks all those who lack the east-coast knowledge and assurance, especially those who trade in the bathetic dross of Hollywood.'

But as I articulated in my previous treatise, most mass-market paperback writers are not trying to write school text books (many of them don't even care about awards). They want to make money, they want to entertain the world and they want to fulfil a dream/goal. Bestselling American author, John Grisham<sup>162</sup>:

'What I'm trying to do is hopefully write a high quality of popular fiction. This is not literature. I'm not pretending that it is.'

I have read a couple of Grishams and they were really good. Excellent fiction. Very enjoyable. I particularly liked *The Rainmaker*. I have watched a couple of films based on the books including *The Rainmaker*, *The Firm* and *The Pelican Brief* but in my opinion, they are very poor substitutes for the originals. I would advise readers to heed the idiom: never judge a book by its movie.

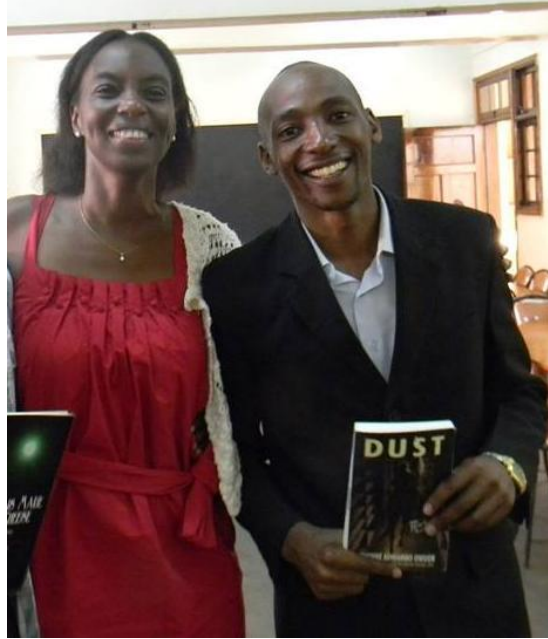
When it comes to the subject of 'literature' vs. 'pulp fiction', I am of the opinion that critics should not judge one by the standards of the other, or claim that one is superior to the other just like products in a supermarket, these are different. I don't know why it is so difficult for some critics to accept that literary and pop fiction are like two different hills on the overall literary landscape, and there's a river between. Some authors do navigate the river but sooner or later most of them dock on one side or the other.

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<sup>161</sup> <http://www.ralphmag.org>

<sup>162</sup> Grisham sold 60,742,288 books between 1990 and 1999, according to *Publishers Weekly* magazine

- Kenya's Yvonne Owuor is an alumna of Kenyatta University (BA, Linguistics and History), the UK's Reading University (MA - TV and Video for Development) and a Chevening scholar. She made her literary mark in 2003 when her short story, *Weight of Whispers*, won the Caine Prize for African Writing. She has since written a novel entitled, *Dust* (Kwani Series, 2013).



**Yvonne Owour (left) with Alexander Nderitu who is holding a copy of Yvonne's *Dust***

- Nigeria's Chimamanda Adichie – who received rock star adulation when she gave a public lecture at UoN in late 2013 - studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half before moving to the United States. After studying communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, she transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University. She received a bachelor's degree from Eastern University, where she graduated *summa cum laude* in 2001. She is the author of the novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and of the short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and *Americanah* (2013).



**IN CONVERSATION: Nigeria's Chimamanda Adichie (left) and Kenya's Binyavanga Wainaina at a literary forum in the US**

- James A. Michener (b 1907) became known throughout the world as the author of such bestselling novels as *Tales of the South Pacific*, *Hawaii*, *Centennial*, *Texas*, *Sayonara*, *The Fires of Spring*, *The Drifters*, *The Source* and *Space*. He was graduated *summa cum laude* from Swarthmore College and did research work at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Virginia, Ohio State University, Harvard, the University of St. Andrews (Scotland), and the University of Siena (Italy). He taught at Colorado State College and Harvard.

Michener shot to fame with his very first book, *Tales of the South Pacific*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and became the basis for the Broadway musical, *South Pacific*. *Texas* was filmed starring Julia Roberts. *Hawaii* is a biography of the Hawaiian Islands: from their formation via volcanic action to the World War II battalions that fought there, and beyond. The novel has over 1,000 pages and several generations of characters. The *Cleveland Press* described *Hawaii* as, 'Massive, magnificent – astonishing achievement.' The *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* said, 'James A. Michener's powerful new novel will be read and re-read. It deserves every honour, a major literary prize, fascinating saga.' In 1983, Michener was officially awarded the title of 'National Treasure' by the President of the United States. Here's a passage from early in the millennial saga, *Hawaii*:

'While volcanoes still played along the chain, China developed a sophisticated system of thought and Japan codified principles that would later enrich the world. While the islands were taking their final form, Jesus spoke in Jerusalem and Muhammad came from the blazing islands with a new vision of Heaven, but no men knew the heaven that awaited them on these islands.

And so...the islands waited. Jesus died on a cross, and they waited. England was settled by mixed and powerful races, and the islands waited for their own settlers. Mighty kings ruled India, and in China and Japan, while the islands waited.'

## KILLING CREATIVITY/ENTREPRENEURSHIP

*'So I want to talk about education, and I want to talk about creativity. My contention is that creativity is as important in education now as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status...**We are educating people out of their creative capacities.** Picasso said this, he said, "All children are born artists". The problem is to remain an artist as we grow up.'* – [Ken Robinson](#), former university professor (UK)

At a Creatives Academy function at Daystar University, Nairobi, one ageing professor lamented the lack of esteem accorded to the Humanities, saying that universities are are paying less and less attention to this area despite the fact that 'Humanities are the very things that teach us who are as human beings.'

According an illuminating podcast on social commentary website [SmellsLikeHumanSpirit.com](#), the modern school system rose in tandem with the Industrial Revolution and is therefore chiefly geared towards producing workers (or 'human resources', if you prefer) for industries and established institutions<sup>163</sup>. If this is true, then **it explains a lot**. The formal school system – from elementary to tertiary levels – does appear to be principally concerned with preparing people for 'the job market' (not even entrepreneurship). To such a system, the Arts (music, dance, literature, acting etc) are of little or no value. Subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, Medicine, Hospitality, Front Office, Food & Beverages etc would of course be deemed more 'practical'.

Another complaint about our modern school system, worldwide not just locally, is that it places so much emphasis on examinations and certificates that **actual practical learning** is in some cases overlooked. Below is an excerpt from the *Education* pullout of *The People* newspaper, article by Mireri Junior<sup>164</sup>:

'Kenya's university education is being criticised for not producing well-trained graduates who can take up the challenges in the job market as anticipated by employers both in the public and private sector.

'Fresh graduates from local universities have failed to live up to expectation (sic) of employers and have indeed projected a pale shadow of their good grades when it come to practical work. Kennedy Olang'o, a secondary school head teacher, says; "I have witnessed a case where a fresh graduate could not handle a Form One lesson after graduating with an honours degree"...

'Dr. Tom Ochola, a lecturer at the University of Nairobi, attributes this to system which was adopted from the colonial masters where examinations are used to pass verdict one whether one is bright or not...'

I would like to weigh in here: At one time, I did contractual work for a government department. I was impressed to see that the gov't was, finally, giving jobs to many young

<sup>163</sup> Some might call that a 'conspiracy theory', but if you knew the propagandist origin of that term, you wouldn't use it in arguments

<sup>164</sup> 'Kenyan Universities Criticised', *The People* newspaper (01/02/2013, Pg 21)

people. The image of a civil servant as a dull, reluctant, even lazy, middle-aged person was changing. From the receptions to the corridors and offices, one came across smooth, smartly-dressed young men and women fresh out of college, bursting with energy. However, within my first few days, a 20-something female graduate (from a very prestigious university off Thika Rd) had asked me the spelling of 'mwananchi' and 'paradigm'. I was polite in my response but in my head, I was wondering: *How can a Degree Holder struggle with such basic words? And how can a Kenyan of any education level not know the spelling of an everyday word like 'mwananchi'?*

Mireri Junior's article continues...

'He also argues that with the unemployment rates surging and the economy growing too slowly, most employers demand degree certificates.

' "What I get doesn't matter in the list (sic); what I want is a degree because this is what has become a requirement in the job market," says a fourth year student at the university of Nairobi who is taking a course he doesn't like...

'Many students are of the opinion that they have been reduced to reproducing machines, where lecturers expect their students to reproduce their lecture notes given in classes and lecture halls during exams. This has killed innovation and mastery of skills leading to inadequate entrepreneurship...'

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

*'Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave.'* - Frederick Douglas

The importance of education cannot be gainsaid, especially in the Third World. A poorly educated visual artist (a euphemism for 'painter' and 'sculpter') from Kenya got opportunity to travel to the Netherlands (Mundial Festival) and the UK. On his return, he told me he was considering upping his education level. He said that almost 90% of the workforce in the UK (his estimate) had college degrees. Could this be the reason that they are a First World nation while we are 'at the back of the class', so to speak? Great Britain is not even a large country in terms of land mass. But they have conquered most of the world (from America to Australia to Hong Kong). Could education be the key that puts the 'great' in Great Britain? For sure, it is part of the reason (if not the entire secret).

Education is fundamental to modern living. Anyone who says different is either a fool or a propagandist pushing an agenda (like trying to keep you wallowing in ignorance while he and his kind run away with all the important positions and plum jobs.) I would encourage every Kenyan youth to seek the highest level of education possible (and I am an artist – a category of people not thought to value education). It's for your own good.

Wangari Maathai was described as a bright pupil during her childhood, but Lady Luck really smiled on her when the convent school she went to (under tough resistance, as education for girls was not deemed important in those days) was one of those selected to send graduates to the US under what became known as the Kennedy Airlift: a program to send young Africans to American colleges for further education. These young people were being primed to become future leaders of their societies in the soon-to-be independent African states. The remnants of the Kennedy Airlift still refer to themselves as The Airlift Children and remember their historic trip with nostalgia. Wangari Maathai arguably became the first woman from Eastern and Central Africa to gain a PhD (1971). She made her name in nature conservation (she had a Masters degree in Biology) and later joined active politics. Over 30 years after the airlift, she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her 'contribution to sustainable development, human rights and peace'.

*'You cannot lead if you do not read'* – Bishop T.D.Jakes

According to Citizen TV, former Tetu MP, F.T. Nyammo, is 'possibly the largest private investor in education in the country.' He is said to have interests<sup>165</sup> in:

- Inoorero University ([Chancellor and proprietor](#)). Inoorero was formerly 'Kenya School of Professional Studies'
- Longhorn Publishers
- F.T. Nyammo Secondary school
- F.T. Nyammo Foundation (sponsors education of needy schoolchildren)

F.T. Nyammo is an economics graduate of the University of London and has been the vice chairman of Kenyatta University College.

<sup>165</sup> Sources: [The Star](#), [Hapa Kenya](#), [Kemu.ac.ke](#) et al



TV's Julie Gichuru, USIU alumna<sup>166</sup>, talks about Longhorn Publishers

The UoN Department of Literature dates back to 1956, the days of the then Technical Royal College. Back then, it was known as the 'Department of English'. Some of the UoN alumni that have distinguished themselves in the world of letters are:

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o - novelist, critic; twice-nominated for Nobel Prize for Literature
- Micere Githae Mugo - writer, scholar
- Wahome Mutahi - Thespian, Writer and Columnist
- Tom Mshindi - Chief Operating Officer, *Nation* Newspapers (NMG)
- Wangethi Mwangi - Former Editorial Director, *Nation* Newspapers
- **Dr. Eddah Gachukia - Educationist, Academician, Riara Schools founder**
- Dr. Henry Chakava - Chairman at East African Educational Publishers
- Dr. Fred Okengo Matiangi - Cabinet Secretary at Ministry of Information Communication and Technology
- Prof. Francis Davis Imbuga – Playwright, Academician
- Jimmi Makotsi - Publisher, Creative Writer
- Prof. David Rubadiri - Diplomat, Poet

In a downloadable document on the [UoN website](#), Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, the current Head of the Department of Literature, expounds on her docket:

'The Department of literature occupies a very important role in the study of African literature not only in this country but also in the region, and in the continent. This department is credited with the revolutionizing of the literature curriculum when Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong, Owuor Anyumba and Okot Bitek led their African colleagues in demanding the democratization of the study of literature. The Department set the pace for the rise of African literature within faculties of Arts across Africa. This was a significant intellectual and pedagogic direction which provided the philosophical basis for the study of African literature in faculties of humanities/arts on the continent...' <sup>167</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Also attended Warwick University and University of Wales (UK). Source: [Nairobi Wire](#)

<sup>167</sup> More information on UoN Dept. of Lit available at: <http://literature.uonbi.ac.ke>





**Literary critic Prof. Chris Wanjala**

Prof. Chris Wanjala and Prof. Tom Odhiambo (both of UoN) regularly contribute to the literary pages of the newspapers, as does Kingwa Kamenchu who is an alumna of UoN (Bachelor of Arts – History, Literature) and has a Masters in African Studies from Oxford University, UK. Prof. Chris Wanjala has also taught literature at Egerton University, Njoro in Rift Valley.

## KNIFE TO A GUNFIGHT

*'The whole point about reading is that without reading, you don't understand narrative and without narrative, you don't understand life...And I think if you don't read, there's no going forward because you'll never understand quite where you're going or how you got where you are now.'* - Bestselling UK writer Anthony Horowitz

If you read jobs/vacancies sections of the dailies – especially the Friday papers – you will have noticed that a university degree is rapidly becoming a basic requirement in most office environments. The number of people attending universities has grown rapidly since the 1970's, or thereabouts. Many colleges that were associated with universities have been upgraded to full universities and the public universities have themselves grown in infrastructure, programmes and student population. During his tenure (ending in March 2013), President Mwai Kibaki gave an unprecedented number of charters to various institutions of higher learning, making them eligible to offer degree courses. According to the *East African Standard* (08/02/2014), there are now 31 public universities in the country. Their combined intake for 2014 was around 53,135 students (with the rapidly-expanding Kenyatta University taking a record-breaking 5,491 admissions).

According to Mount Kenya University's magazine, *Varsity Rover* (April 2013 edition), MKU has the highest percentage of professional-approved courses amongst private universities in Kenya while the University of Nairobi has the highest percentage overall. The *Varsity Rover* cites the Kenya Year Book as the source of the information. The full list of percentages in the approved-courses<sup>168</sup> stakes was as follows:

1. University of Nairobi – 16%
2. Mount Kenya University - 13%
3. Kenyatta University - 11%
4. Jomo Kenyatta University  
of Agriculture & Technology – 9%
5. Moi University - 7%
6. Maseno University - 7%
7. Baraton University - 7%
8. Kenya Methodist University - 7%
9. Kabarak University – 2%
10. Presbyterian University – 2%
11. Strathmore University – 2%
12. Egerton University – 2%
13. Masinde Muliro University – 2%
14. Kimathi University – 2%
15. Kenya Polytechnic University – 2%
16. Inoorero University – 2%
17. Great Lakes University – 2%
18. Mombasa Polytechnic – 2%
19. Africa Nazarene University – 2%

<sup>168</sup> Approving bodies include the Council for Legal Education, Pharmacy and Poisons Board and Kenya Medical Laboratory Technicians & Technologists Board

With so many thousands of students jubilantly graduating each year, the marketplace has become ever more competitive. When I worked for the government (ending in June 2013), almost every single civil servant I knew doing part-time classes (either for first degrees or Masters). The government has a hierarchical employee system that classifies workers into numerous 'job groups' designated by various alphabetical letters. One way to climb into a higher job group/income bracket is to have a high educational level.

But it is not just in government that higher education is esteemed – large companies are increasingly frowning on CVs that don't include a college education. Some vacancies have such general criteria as 'A university degree in any related field' or even 'Any university degree.' It's as if they believe you're more trustworthy/reliable if you've been to university. So if you go to a job interview with graduates while all you have in your arsenal is a diploma or some short-course certificates, you're bringing a knife to a gunfight. Unless there's something very special about you, it will be hard to convince the panel that you're better than the people who have spent years 'in campus', learning a trade or subject.

Of course, there's always entrepreneurship but if you watch TV shows featuring successful entrepreneurs, like K24's *Young Rich*, you will notice that most of them went to university. Some of them dropped out – but at least they got in (most successful dropouts get their big idea in college and then leave to pursue it). College expands your mind, opens you to new people and new experiences that you would most likely wouldn't have found elsewhere.

## THE STORYTELLING GIFT

*'It's a gift. It's given...Whether it's painting or music or writing, it's a gift and we should be grateful for it.'* – Sidney Sheldon, bestselling American novelist<sup>169</sup>

*'Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one learnt in school.'*  
- Albert Einstein

While writers like James Michener were highly educated and loved universities<sup>170</sup>, there were other successful writers, like Shaaban Bin Robert, Dashiell Hamett and Frédéric Dard, who made it big despite being on the opposite end of the education spectrum.

Shaaban Bin Robert, ['the Father of Swahili Literature', was a primary school dropout](#). His widely-studied books (in schools, ironically) include *Kusadikika*, *Pambo la Lugha* and *Wasifu wa Siti Binti Saad*. His poem *Utenzi wa Adili*, though, emphasizes the importance of education.

America's Dashiell Hamett dropped out of school at the age of 14 and held several petty jobs before turning into full-time crime-fiction writing. He made a mark with such bestsellers as *The Dain Curse* and *The Maltese Falcon* and went on to become America's No.1 detective writer. Despite having questionable academic credentials, **Dashiell Hamett influenced an entire generation of crime writers.**

By the time of his death, Frédéric Dard (author of the 120-volume San Antonio series of pun-crammed thrillers) was the top-selling French-language literary act. There are over 100 million copies of his books in print! Dard, a blue-eyed school dropout, began his writing career in 1949. He penned thrillers in which he mixed sex and violence with elaborate portmanteau puns, gave his characters outlandish names and occasionally interrupted the flow of the stories to lecture his readers on everything from politics to death. Working on an electric typewriter, he was able to hammer out 4 books a year - and make a fortune. *Newsweek* had this to say about the man, whose writings were too slangy for translation:

*'Frédéric Dard has created a world in which countless French readers can recognize their nation's passions and prejudices...High style is instantly deflated by childish absurdity. The eternal of love and death are dismissed with a pornographic pun.'*

**It is important to note, however, that prolific authors are usually very well read (even the dropouts), as evidenced by their vast vocabularies, scope and reference to other works or authors. The difference is that they don't do their study/research within a school system - in order to pass a particular exam or reached attain a particular academic qualification.**

*'To bore the audience is a cardinal sin.'* – Popular literary proverb

<sup>169</sup> With an entry in the Guinness Book of Records as the 'World's Most Translated Author'

<sup>170</sup> Michener eventually donated his fortune, some \$40 million to a single university, happy to live a simple life with his wife – and write books.

Paul Theroux is known the world over for his travelogues (the latest of which mentions Kenya)<sup>171</sup>. Commenting on *The Great Railway Bazaar* (a railroad trip from London to Asia), the *N. Y. Times* said, 'The most consistently entertaining book...in a long time.' And that's a book about travelling on trains. It conjures up memories of Charles Miller's much-read *The Lunatic Express* (about the building of the Kenya-Uganda railway). Though, non-fiction (and voluminous to boot), *The Lunatic Express* is so stimulating, its cover description refers to it as 'An entertainment in history.' Along the same lines, a book by Stephen Ambrose on the eventful building of the US's transcontinental railroad is entitled, *Nothing Like it in the World*<sup>172</sup>. What an enticing title!

Paul Theroux's other books include, *The Family Arsenal*, *The Black House* and *Saint Jack*<sup>173</sup>. A sample of his writing (from *Saint Jack*):

'Middle age has all the scares one man feels halfway across a busy street, caught in traffic and losing his way, or another one blundering in a black upstairs room, full of furniture, afraid to turn on the lights because he'll see the cockroaches he smells.'

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 'Paul Theroux will successively startle you...shock you...impress you...but never, never bore you.' That's key: 'Never bore you.'

**I'm not anti-higher education (or multiple degrees), I am anti-boredom. And so are most readers.** That's why you have to *force* students to read some set-books ('Analyze that passage for 20 marks' etc) but they will *willingly* buy and read a romance novel or spy thriller. They have nothing against books, African authors, or 'literature' as a subject. They just don't want to be bored to death (ie. they have genuine health concerns). When thriller writer James Patterson turned his hand to writing for kids, he found out a remarkable thing that almost all Kenyan kids below 14 can identify with: they had never read a story book that they themselves liked. All their reading material had been foisted on them. James Patterson then started the now-famous website ReadKiddoRead.com in order to guide parents into helping their children find books they will enjoy, from classics to modern fiction.

James Patterson's best-known children's book is *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. The book is filled with humour (ie. it is NOT boring) and even the cover is designed to appeal to young kids. That's a much more powerful technique of marketing books to kids; definately better than saying: 'Read this obscure book by some boring author or I'll flank you and you won't go to a good high school.'

*'Do what you love no matter what. I had an English teacher in high school who told me to quit right then and there. My first novel, "The Thomas Berryman Number", was turned down by 37 publishers...then it won an Edgar Award. Millions of readers love my books...I'm glad I didn't give up writing because of one teacher's comment.'* - James Patterson, the world's top-selling author<sup>174</sup>

<sup>171</sup> But he also writes fiction

<sup>172</sup> 'This magnificent tale of high finance, low finagling and workers hacking through 3,200 km is magnificently told.'  
- *Newsweek*

<sup>173</sup> 'There's never a dull moment!' - *San Francisco Chronicle*

<sup>174</sup> Holder of the Guinness World Record for most New York Times bestsellers of any author

At the age of only 27, Ken Follet published the book *The Eye of the Needle* which became an international bestseller and a distinguished film. Since then, he has written more than ten successful books, including the non-fiction bestseller, *On Wings of Eagles*. He has a knack for 'ransacking history for thrills' and many of his thrillers are 'period pieces'. These include *Lie Down With Lions*, a spy novel about Russians in Afghanistan; *The Pillars of the Earth*, a religious thriller; *A Dangerous Fortune*, a 19<sup>th</sup> century tragedy revolving around the accidental drowning of a student; and *A Place Called Freedom*, a historical novel about a White slave who falls in love with a beautiful heiress. On *Lie Down With Lions*, one critic raved: 'There's no dull paragraph.' I have read the book, and I concur. No part of the sizeable book is boring: the pace, the writing, the descriptions, the characters, the plot – everything is so well done that the entire process of reading it feels as effortless as watching a movie. How I wish that all Kenyan novelists would aspire to write such 'readable' works! (Incidentally, I would not recommend *A Place Called Freedom*. Apart from a couple of sex scenes, the book is almost boring enough to be introduced into the 8-4-4 syllabus.)

An example of how properly-utilised talents can become goldmines can be seen in the impact made by members of the unforgettable Rat Pack. 'The Rat Pack' was a term that the media used to refer to a music/comedy supergroup led by crooner Frank Sinatra in the 1950's and '60's. The other members were: singer/comedian Dean Martin, singer/tap-dancer Sammy Davis Jr (the only Black member), actor Peter Lawford and, last but not least, comedian Joey Bishop. Each was was a superstar in his own right, so when they all got together and gave shows in the 'entertainment capital of the world' (Las Vegas), they revolutionized showbusiness. According to the award-winning documentary, *The Rat Pack*, 'there has never been anything like it since.' Their full cultural impact is still being analyzed – they involved themselves in social issues (racial integration) and politics (the election of J. F. Kennedy in particular). They all became global superstars and generated millions of dollars. An interesting thing about them is that they were all poorly educated. Sammy Davis Jr never even went to school – he was just a talented dancer and singer. By the time he was 25, he had toured the US, from coast to coast, more than 20 times. The narrator of *The Rat Pack* surmises: 'Like Pied Pipers, they led us out of the doldrums of the Fifties, into the new frontier of the unprecedented. **Five men who never even finished high school taught us that talent could overcome every disadvantage.**'

*'The world needs the Rat Pack  
Who will do obeah<sup>175</sup> to bring Sinatra back?  
The Hit Men<sup>176</sup> are in the room  
And Walter's howling at the moon!'<sup>177</sup>*

- [The Alexander Nderitu Overture](#), *Caviar on my Toast* (song<sup>178</sup>)

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<sup>175</sup> Obeah - Voodoo

<sup>176</sup> 'Hit Men' - Reference to the book, *The Hit Men* that describes how music moguls promote their artists/songs

<sup>177</sup> Walter - Walter Yetnikoff. One of the impresarios mentioned in *The Hit Men*. Author of the memoir, *Howling at the Moon*

<sup>178</sup> A Calypso inspired by Ernest Hemingway's love for caviar on toast

### THE COLOUR PURPLE

In my previous research paper, I talked extensively about purple prose and where writers should avoid it. You have to understand, and appreciate, that formal education has grown by leaps and bounds (worldwide) in the last 200 years or so. It is very difficult to impress people using needlessly difficult language or complex words. People who do this, either in writing or in speech, often appear pretentious and even childish. Purple prose is, however, sometimes employed for comic relief, especially amongst college-educated people. Examples:

**Normal prose:** Beggars cannot be choosers

**Purple prose:** Sorting on the part of mendicants must be interdicted

**Normal prose:** There's no use crying over spilt milk

**Purple prose:** It is fruitless to become lachrymose of precipitately departed lactile fluid

**Normal prose:** All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy

**Purple prose:** Exclusive dedication to necessitous chores without interludes of hedonistic diversion renders Jack a hebetudinous fellow

**Normal prose:** Birds of a feather flock together

**Purple prose:** Members of an avian species of identical plumage tend to congregate



## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDITORS

*'Every writer needs an editor. They are the unsung heroes of the book world.'*  
- Alexander Nderitu, *Changing Kenya's Literary Landscape (2012 Onwards)*

Many Kenyan writers complain about editors butchering their work, or making too many suggestions, but these are usually sentimental, not realistic, concerns. One poet returned some unnecessary poems to her anthology after a professional editor had weeded them out. Some self-published authors bypass editors completely and then find their work being criticised for typos and other errors. Some intellectuals launch books written in purple prose and containing boring content/titles and then wonder why the public is not interested in their 'monumental' work.

Real-world editors can greatly improve a piece of writing. Just having a fresh pair of eyes analyse your work can help you make it much better by giving you a new perspective. And there's no shortage of editors in the country (I have noticed that a lot of book editors are journalists, often newspaper editors and sub-editors).

The following two articles tell us more about editors and what they do...

### [Why Every Writer Needs an Editor](#)

Written by Bobbi Linkemer

Every writer needs an editor. No exceptions! Just for starters, there are several stages of your writing in which you might need an editor to help:

- Clarify your concept
- Plan and organize your material
- Think globally about how the parts fit together
- Read for content, consistency, and style
- Craft a catchy title
- Check for grammar, punctuation, and typos

If you are writing a book, you may even need more than one editor, since different kinds of editors specialize in different aspects of preparing a book for publication. Read more at <http://www.sellingbooks.com/why-every-writer-needs-an-editor/>

### **'Authors Get Help from Editors and Readers'**

Written by Bruce L. Cook of [Author-Me.com](http://Author-Me.com):

It's common for writers to seek an editor to improve their work prior to release. As a writer progresses in the craft, assuming one has the dollars, the consideration for editorial services may grow. In purchasing editorial help, an author faces a wide choice of editors, each with a different slant on the process.

Here are a few kinds of editors who work with a manuscript prior to submission to and/or acceptance by (or just submission to) a publisher.

**Copy Editor** (one that reads for wording, grammar, style)

**Editor** (one that goes beyond by considering structure, relevance, purpose, etc.)

**Print-on-Demand Editor** - When an author considers POD publishers and finds some charging very high prices, it's almost standard for them to charge a high price to evaluate the book. Instead of providing a useful, constructive criticism, these publishers/printers simply hire someone to fill in a lengthy form.

Such a pantheon of editors can intimidate new writers, often exploiting a natural lack of confidence when it comes to someone's first publication.

Then there are readers:

Readers employed by agents or commercial publishers – hired to evaluate and review submitted manuscripts

**Author's reader** – someone the author asks to read a book

**Author's critical reader** – someone who agrees to find problems in your manuscript

Too often a friend who reads someone's book will "stroke" them by saying the manuscript is fine and should become a best seller overnight. At the same time, some writers want to avoid evaluation by a critical reader.

Two qualifications to consider when giving a book to someone for a critical reading.

1. The critical reader should be an active reader of books in the genre
2. The critical reader should be encouraged to be critical. (For example, instructed to find a set number of main problems (not typos, etc.) in the present version of the manuscript.)

The editorial function essential when it comes to improving a manuscript. It is wrong to charge unfair prices for this when publish a print on demand book. At the same time, when hiring an editor, expect to pay more than would be appropriate for a clerk or barista in a coffee house.'

An example of a modern editor is [Billy Kahora](#). Billy is the current Managing Editor at Kwani Trust and has edited 7 issues of the Kwani journal and other Kwani publications, including *Nairobi 24* and *Kenya Burning*. He is also an Associate Editor with the *Chimurenga Chronic* and a columnist for *One World* magazine. Billy is a past recipient of the Chevening Scholarship and an Iowa Writer's Fellowship. He has an M.Sc Creative Writing from University of Edinburgh, U.K and a BJournalism from Rhodes University, South Africa. He was a judge of the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize and 2012 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. He is also a judge for the new Etisalat Prize based in Nigeria.

Billy's own published work includes the non-fiction novella *The True Story Of David Munyakei* and articles in *Chimurenga*, *McSweeney's*, *Granta Online*, *Internazionale* and *Vanity Fair*. He wrote the screenplay for the film *Soul Boy* and co-wrote the gritty award-winning film *Nairobi Half Life*. His story, *Treadmill Love*, was highly commended by the 2007 Caine Prize judges while *Urban Zoning* was Caine shortlisted in 2012.

## THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

*'Writers are now starting to do a bit of their own marketing instead of just sitting at home waiting for the books to sell by themselves.'* – Stanley Gazemba, author of *Calloused Hands*

The Kwani Trust family celebrated their 10th anniversary between 27th – 30th November 2013 by hosting a series of literary, creative and artistic events that reflected on contemporary writing and its place in the literary history of Kenya, East Africa and the continent at large. The event doubled as a book launch for Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's debut novel, *Dust*, and the East African edition of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's acclaimed third novel, *Americanah*. During the celebrations, Yvonne Owuor spoke at Kenyatta University and Chimamanda at Nairobi University. Yvonne is best known for her story *Weight of Whispers* which was published in the first edition of the Kwani journal (2003) and later won the Caine Prize for African Writing (an accolade earlier won by fellow Kwani stable-mate Binyavanga Wainaina<sup>179</sup>). The chief speaker at Chimamanda's book launch was Muthoni Likimani (*Fighting Without Ceasing*) who at the time was 88 years old. Later, at UoN, Chimamanda would speak affectionately of the literary matriarch: 'Now, I am going to go and read all her books,' she said. Ms. Likimani herself was thrilled to be there, happy that she is not forgotten/ignored. 'I was the guest of honour!' she told me, months later. Muthoni Likimani is also a regular invitee to StoryMoja events, PEN Kenya activity and the newly-fangled Daystar University 'Creatives Academy' (a brainchild of youthful writer Kinyanjui Kombani).



**OLD IS GOLD: Muthoni Likimani speaks at Daystar University. To her right is author Ng'ang'a Mbugua (*This Land is Our Land*).**

The new generation of literati is also more innovative than the old guard. For example, Kwani? has come up with a 'Kwani Literature Tour' that takes books to young readers across the country. By 'pressing flesh', they are able to give talks, answer questions, donate books, interact with stakeholders etc. In May and June 2013, they visited readers in several secondary schools and universities, introducing them to African and Kenyan creative contemporary writing. Kwani? also runs creative writing competitions (like the Kwani

<sup>179</sup> For *Discovering Home*

Manuscript Prize), organises festivals, retreats and book launches and participates in existing literary events such as the StoryMoja Hay Festival and the Nairobi International Book Fair.

The annual StoryMoja Hay Festival, founded by Muthoni Garland (*Tracking the Scent of My Mother*<sup>180</sup>) and produced by Aleya Kassam has become the most exciting literary event in the region, drawing numerous foreign literati and journalists. In 2013, it was ranked on a tourism website as 'one of the top reasons to visit Nairobi.' (You know you're going great guns when a book festival is listed as a tourist attraction!)

Let the record show that the youth never rejected their forerunners. If anything, it was the other way around. They were attacked by critics and called 'literary gangsters', non-intellectuals, and so forth. In fact, I have noticed that 'the Kwani crowd' no longer bothers with detractors. They won. They became mainstream. They are now winning awards/scholarships/fellowships, being invited to give talks, receiving local and foreign media coverage and so on. They have shamed their critics. Did they have a rocky start? Yes – but so did almost every successful literary or non-literary enterprise going: ask entrepreneurs. If you were to stack up Kwani's journals, one on top of the other, they resulting pile would be taller than the Oxford dictionary (I know this because I am comparing the two right now). And Kwani did this in only ten years. Some of their detractors have been in the literary world (as lecturers, critics, journalists etc) for a long time and never published anything that was critically acclaimed, commercially successfully or award-winning. Some don't have a single book to their names – and they have been around for decades. (Maybe that's why Kwani doesn't bother with detractors any more – they sail on different seas.)

There's a question that some literary critics have become accustomed to asking interviewees these days. It is: '**Kwani or the canon?**' (on choice of reading material). In my view, this question is now irrelevant as in the foreseeable future, Kwani and Kwani-type material will make up a large part of the canon. At the present time, to study 'creative non-fiction in Kenya' without analysing the Kwani publications is to miss the whole boat.

*"I'm sensing a lot of tension now that I'm rappin'  
But the kids used to look up to you, what happened?  
Me on the contrary, hand covered with platinum  
Different colour coupes<sup>181</sup> but I'm in love with the black one"*  
- Lloyd Banks/G-Unit, *Stunt 101* (rap song)

<sup>180</sup> Nominated for the Caine Prize for African Writing

<sup>181</sup> Coupes – (slang) Could mean either 'cars' or 'girls': take your pick

## KIDNEYS FOR THE KING

*'I know that young people today are busy, they've got lots of things to do; they've got far too much work, they've got friends, they've got sport, they've got computer games, they've got social networking. And it seems to me that the most important thing about a book is that when you write it, a pair of hands should come out of the book and grab the kid by the throat and keep them there. So you've got to hold on to them for every chapter, for every paragraph, for every line, for every word. When I'm writing a book, even if I've got a word that's maybe got five syllables in it, I'll look at it and say, "Wait a minute, maybe that word could be shorter, maybe it could have two syllables."' - Bestselling UK writer Anthony Horowitz*

*'Life is a school of continue learning...You don't know everything.'* – Pastor Randy Morrison

The Kenyan literary scene has for quite some time now been plagued by self-styled critics, usually academics, who appear to rubbish literary works based on their own tastes and prejudices as opposed to the merit of the works themselves. For instance, if they are of an advanced age and not into the new literatures being produced by the new generation of writers, they dismiss all such work wholesale; nit-picking and accentuating the negative while ignoring the positive. It is as if they are too stuck in their ways to change so they want to rest of the world to change instead, to be more like them. They act like a character in Len Deighton's novel *Charity* whose personality is described as such:

*'Bret was puritan. When he gave up smoking, the whole world had to get in line behind him. When he closed his eyes, it was night.'*

The problem gets worse when the biased critics are lecturers or contributors to the books/culture section of newspapers. Because the stakes are higher (income, relevance, prestige etc), they tear into their targets more aggressively. It's as if they are trying to convince their paymasters or media houses that what they know/teach is the correct/authoritative/legitimate version; everything else is strictly for the birds. The victims of the vitriol of course often strike back (or 'write back', as the case may be), sometimes using the same media as the know-it-all critics. Here's one example. It's an excerpt from an article entitled 'Sing Me Your Song Before Pointing Out My Mistakes' by George Marenja (*Nation* newspaper, 15/12/2012):

*'In apoplectic rage, Prof Kabaji claimed that Kenya has produced a class of writers "who wallow in trying to be celebs, like the confused lads in showbiz, but they hardly write anything engaging. They do more talking than writing. They operate within an ideological void filled with darkness. Some go by the insolent name Kwani?"*

*'He believes this name denotes impunity. That it is on the same plane with the "Uta-do?" brigade. That upcoming writers have built a cottage industry around disparaging their seniors...*

*'To say that a novel, magical realist, pastoral story should be written or read in a particular fashion is "to prescribe what even the prescriber herself cannot be able to attain."...*

'Let us criticise because we disagree, not because we dislike. To disagree is to critique. To dislike is to disparage, scorn, scare, intimidate, ala Kabaji.'

Old habits die hard and there will always be critics who will judge writers/works purely based on age of the author. But it won't stop the juggernaut. So if there are any critics out there who want to take our kidneys and give them to their king to eat, then – as Miguna Miguna (*Peeling Back the Mask*) might say – come, baby, come.

## LIBRARIES

*'If you keep doing research about literacy, you will find that by the third or fourth grade level, if they (school children) are not reading on track, jails are being built.'*

– Tragil Wade, Executive Director of Wade's World, a foundation that promotes literacy amongst youths in the US

The National Library Service facility in Nyeri is now charging a fee (either daily or annually) to access the books (not even to become a member). Why would a public library be charging entry fees? The main culprits, I am told, are colleges – colleges with no proper libraries of their own. Some public libraries have become overwhelmed – even with charging, students can't fit in the halls and have to set up chairs and desks outside. Very many colleges, and university branches, have blossomed in towns all across the country in recent times. This has increased the demand for services directed at college kids eg. hostels, cyber cafés, restaurants and libraries. Meru County, for example, is now being referred to as a 'college town'. Interestingly, some new colleges have not invested in libraries. How bizarre is that? Aren't books the cornerstones of formal learning? Or, as a KU student once asked during a Spoken Word Session, 'Would you be in the profession you are in if you had never read a book?' The National Library in Nairobi has 11,000 members. Many of the visitors are college students, judging by the heavy traffic when college examinations are in the offing.

At a literary event in 2013, an outspoken university lecturer (name withheld) complained bitterly that his institution was spending millions of shillings in construction and other projects but didn't seem to have a budget for improving the library or promoting his discipline (Humanities). Everyone understands the need for universities, especially private ones, to make money and seek prestige but how can this possibly be done at the expense of studies or something as vital to studies as a book repository<sup>182</sup>? Like a broken needle, a school without books is missing the point.

StoryMoja started an on-going initiative dubbed [Start-a-Library](#) after realising that only 2% of public schools in Kenya had libraries! [Start-a-Library](#) now collects books, used or new, from well-wishers and distributes them to schools across the country. In an interview with *The People* newspaper (22/09/2012), story by Wairimu Nyigi, Millie Dok of StoryMoja said that in most schools they researched, 'libraries' were carton boxes with books kept at the headmasters office. And 90% per cent of them were strictly school books – little supplementary/leisure reading. Says she: 'It feels bad when you come across a standard four or five pupil who can't even read an entire sentence leave alone comprehend its meaning. As parents and teachers, we need to encourage our children to read and read some more, until it becomes a part of who they are.'

To challenge the colleges that are not investing properly in libraries, let's examine the Maktaba Awards...

The Maktaba (Library) Award is an accolade that aims to recognize excellence in the provision of library and information services in the country. Maktaba Awards are sponsored by the Kenya Library Association (KLA), the Goethe-Institut and The Jomo Kenyatta

<sup>182</sup> I think I have been spending too much time with professors of late – my prose is turning purple



Foundation, among others. All libraries in Kenya (including those in schools) are eligible to participate. The winners of the 2013 contest were:

- **The Catholic University**<sup>183</sup> (overall winner)
- The Management University of East Africa
- Mount Kenya University
- Buru Buru's Kenya National Library Services (KNLS)
- Makini School

Notice the absence of certain 'major' universities? Speaking at award ceremony, Vision 2030 Director General, Mugo Kibati, **urged the youth to continue building a reading culture and enhance the information capacity of young children.**

In 2012, the winners of the 'Academic' (college level) category of Maktaba Awards were as follows:

- **Kenya Methodist University Library** (overall winner)
- Kenyatta University Post Modern Library
- KCA University Library

Winners of the 'School' (below tertiary level) category were:

- Aga Khan Academy Mombasa Library
- Makini School Nairobi Library
- Maryhill Girls High School Library

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<sup>183</sup> For its 'expansion and elaborate well equipped library that continues to enhance students success over the years'

## COMING TOGETHER

*'You are your own scriptwriter and the play is never finished, no matter what your age or position in life.'* - Denis Waitley

The phrase, 'Come let us reason together', is often used by leaders trying to create a consensus (I think the line comes from The Holy Bible). There is no better time to utilize that slogan in Kenyan literature than the present. We are in the throes of a literary renaissance. Unfortunately, as in love and politics, there's conflict in the pot. Writers (especially the old guard) are tearing into each other, the critics have become more critical and thereby become objects of criticism, the youths are looking for mentors but some would-be mentors are afraid of competition, ageism is still rife, and so on. But let us look at the bigger picture and not become like the blind men who bumped into an elephant and each one had a different interpretation of what it looked like because each touched a different body part.

We have libraries (including a national library services), writers, writing/journalism clubs in schools, literature departments in tertiary institutions, multiple media avenues, literary events/festivals/movements, book clubs, theatre groups/festivals/clubs and literary critics. There is a real opportunity here to take Kenyan lit to a higher plane – and leave a legacy for those who will come after us.

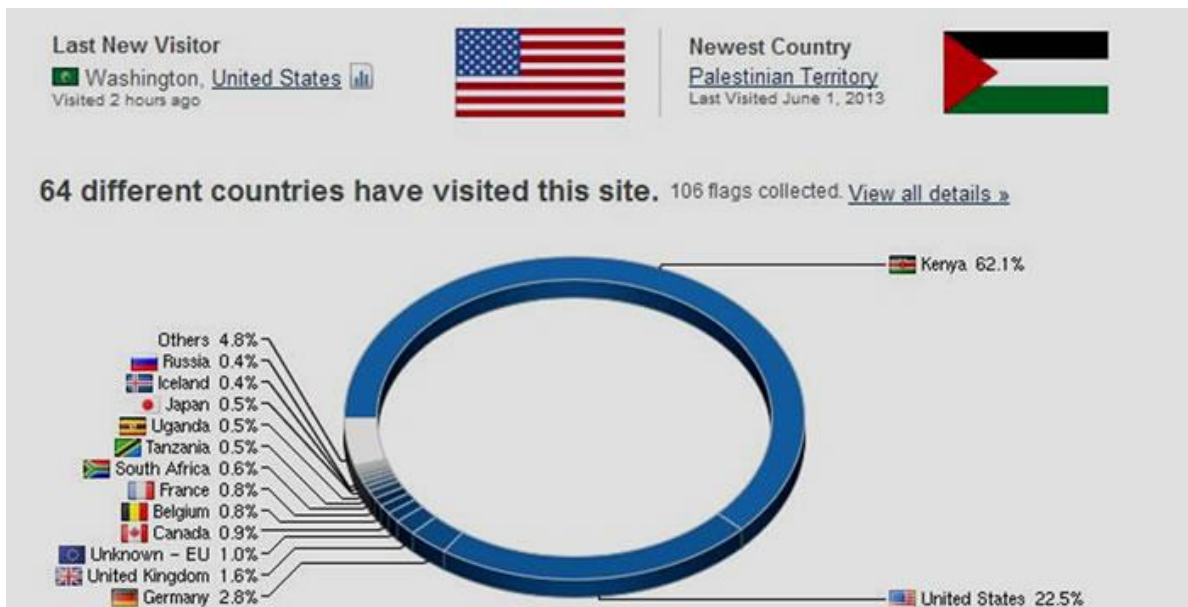
So what say ye, Senior Writers? Shall we (the New Generation and their Literary Elders) [break the kola-nut](#) and begin a new chapter in our relations?

Young or old, rich or poor, college-educated or not, as long as we are men and women of letters, there must be a point (a common ground) at which we can meet and interact. After all, members of an avian species of identical plumage do tend to congregate.

## Found in Translation

*'The immense role that translators play in connecting languages, literatures, people, regions and nations needs not only be acknowledged but also celebrated.'* – A speaker at the The Indian Tarjuma Festival (2013), celebrating 'the unseen art of literary translation'

The most-spoken language in the world is Chinese (Mandarin). This is not TV game show trivia, or the answer to three across on the Simple Crossword. This is market intelligence. Kenyan scribes write mostly in UK English, and since English is the official language of more countries than any other language, it is easy to assume that it is the world's most popular language. But *au contraire* (by contrast), there are more than two Chinese speakers for each English one. Even Spanish has more speakers than English (at 406 million), followed by English (312 - 380 million), all Hindi-related dialects combined (260 million), Arabic (223 million), Portuguese (202 million), Bengali (193 million), Russian (162 million), Japanese (122 million) and German (96 million). These figures are all approximate and were compiled from such sources as Ethnologue and CIA World Factbook. But whichever source you consult, Mandarin Chinese rules the roost with over 1 billion speakers.



**ABOVE: Geographical visitor statistics from Alexander Nderitu's website**

As far as marketing our literature is concerned, this brings up the issue of translation. A market as big as China is hard to ignore. And the Chinese do appear to have an appetite for literature from other parts of the world. When Chinua Achebe died, for example, there was an outpouring of grief from Chinese fans on their social network, Sina Weibo, referencing such classic as *Things Fall Apart* and *A Man of the People*. Had Achebe's works not been translated into Chinese, would all those fans have been familiar with (nay, influenced by) his works? Absolutely not. One celebrated Chinese translator named Zhou Kexi has so far translated 25 books from French to Chinese, including classics such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Mount Cristo*.

Translation helps penetrate foreign markets, especially now that we are increasingly dealing with a global marketplace. A case in point is the best-selling children's book *Owen and Mzee* (Scholastic Press) which tells the endearing true story of a baby hippopotamus that was adopted by a giant tortoise after he was orphaned by the 2004 Indian Ocean *tsunami*. The executive director of the Kenya Land Conservation Trust and WildlifeDirect, Paula Kahumbu, published this book that has now reportedly sold over 1 million copies and been translated into 27 languages, including Japanese, Spanish, French, German, Czech, Chinese and Kiswahili. Along those lines, the poetry of Somali's most famous living poet, Mahamed Ibrahim Warsame 'Hadraawi', has found a new audience, and new appreciation, now that it is available in English. The launch of *The Man and the Poet - Vol 1*. (translated from Somali to English by W. N. Herbert) was recently done in Somaliland. Among the admirers present for this historic event were Kenya's Stanley Gazemba (*The Stone Hills of Maragoli*). Remember that Somalia was once known as the Nation of Poets. How much good poetry are we missing out on (whether for academic or leisure purposes) because most of these Somali works are not available in a language we can understand?

*'You can't be hit by lightning if you're not standing out in the rain.'* - Larry Thompson, US talent agent

One reason why it is wise to translate your writings (books, blog posts, poetry) into other languages where possible is because, unlike East Africans who are quick to sacrifice their vernaculars on the altar of Westernization, most European and Asian countries are very protective of their native tongues and actively use and promote them while learning English as a 'second language'. And that's why we have cultural centres in Kenya and elsewhere teaching/promoting German, French, Japanese, Italian, Spanish and other languages. But I am yet to hear of cultural centres in Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Stockholm or any other such place offering courses, books and audio-visual material in Kiswahili, Kikuyu, Kikamba, Pokot or Kalenjin. According to the Goethe-Institut website, they have a collection of about 5,500 printed and audio-visual media which includes 'Translations of German authors into English' (no mention of the reverse). This is not to say that there are no Germanic translations of our lit. Kenyan books available in German include Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, *The Last Plague* and *Carcass for Hounds* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, *Matigari* and *Moving the Centre*. Incidentally, my Japanese translator once asked me if I knew of a Meja Mwangi and when I inquired why, she said that a friend of hers, a fellow translator, was working on his books; which is good news because Meja Mwangi is criminally underrated.

<p align="center"><b>'THE NILE'</b> A poem by Alexander Nderitu (from the book, <i>The Moon is Made of Green Cheese</i>)</p>	
Original English version	Arabic version, translated by Hassan Hegazy (Egypt)
<p>From the womb of Lake Victoria, I burst forth, Embarking on an epic journey towards the north Where I will rendezvous with the Mediterranean. Many are the obstacles and by the time I reach my destination, I will be as crooked as a politician.</p> <p>In some parts, I plunge hundreds of feet over cliff walls, Sending off clouds of vapour as thick as tear gas. In others, my brisk pace is reduced to leisurely stroll. Enforced by tributaries, I soldier on to my distant goal, Snaking through fantastic valleys and conquering scorching deserts.</p> <p>'Why doesn't this river dry up?' mused the ancients. "And where, oh where, lies her secret source?" For millennia, I held my secrets fast – My age, my origin, my tributaries, my course. Before I revealed all, men had to die as if cursed. I am the Keeper of Genesis, Guardian of the Past. I enabled great civilizations to spring from bare dust. The pyramids, catacombs, the delta in the Mediterranean Sea, The Pharaohs, their subjects and mighty dynasty, All owe their existence to me.</p> <p>Without me, Osiris would not resurrect<sup>184</sup>, Pudding-soft paddies would be as hard as tins, Egyptians would go down like bowling pins, Hippos, crocodiles, sacred ibis and fish of every description Would lie lifeless, awaiting the Second Resurrection!</p> <p>I am the real Goddess of Fertility – no river touches me. The Mississippi falls short, the Thames only comes up to my knee. I am Anubis<sup>185</sup> among jackals, Sobek<sup>186</sup> among crocodiles. I am the Nile.</p>	<p>ال نيل شعر: نديري تو أ ك سندر شاعر ك يني معاصر ت رجمة : د سن حجازي /مصر من قلب بحيرة فكتوريا , اندفعت متجهاً للأمام , بقوة , في رحلة ملحمية متجهاً نحو الشمال فلدي موعد مع البحر المتوسط المناسب على بعد أميال وأميل . كثيرة هي الصعاب لكن في الوقت سأصل لوجهتي وأحقق الأمل , سأكون مثل رجل السياسة متقلب متلون .. أتحمّل من الصبر والجَلَد ألواناً والواناً في بعض .. الأجزاء ساهوي لمنات الأقدام عبر الصخور الحادة الملساء , مرسله سحبا من رذاذ الماء كثيفة تكاد تغطي وجه السماء . في تقدمي السريع يهدأ بصورة تشبه السير بمهل مواضع أخرى , على الأقدام . مدعوماً بروافد النيل أعدد وجهتي نحو هدي البعيد في تان واتزان , منعطفاً خلال الأودية الخلابة وهاماً الصحاري الحارقة متجهاً نحو الأمام . لماذا لا يجف هذا النهر ؟ تساءل ين , بالله من أين , مصدر ال قدماء من قديم الزمان . "ومن أ النيل الخفي على كل إنسان " . لملايين من السنين , حافظت على ق بل أن – عمري , أصلي , روافدي , ومساري – سيري أك شف كل أسراري , يموت ال بشر كما لو كانت ل ع تني تطاردهم في كل مكان . أنا واهب ال حياة , حارس ظيمة أن تنزع الماضي راعي ال نماء . سمحت ل حضارات ع من أرض قاحلة . الأهرامات , المقابر , مُدُننا عريقة كالأسكندرية الفراعنة , علومهم ومعتقداتهم الدينية وأسرارهم الخفية , الجميع , مدني لي بالفضل والوجود والهوية بدوني , لم يكن لأوزوريس أن يرجع ثأني ل حياة , تصبح جافة كعلب مزارع الأرز ال بضعة الخضراء كانت س الصفوح ... جرداء , فالمصريون كان سينتابهم الجفاف كالعيان الجوفاء , أفراس النهر , التماسيح , طيور ( أبو منجل المقدسة ) , وأسماء مختلفة الأشكال والألوان كل كان سيرقد بلا حياة , ينتظر ال بعث ال ثاني بعد الاموات ! أنا إلهة الخصوبة لم يلمسني أي نهر . نهر ( الميسيسيبي ) جاري – ال حقيقة يتضائل ويتناهي في الصغر , نهر ( التايمز ) فقط يصل لركبتي اذا حاول أن يرتقي ويرتفع . فأنا ( أنوبيس ) بين الذئاب وأنا ( سوبيك ) بين التماسيح وسط الماء . أنا النيل زينة الدنيا وهبة من رب الأرض و السماء</p>

<sup>184</sup> Osiris, in Egyptain mythology, was a major god who was killed by a kin but later resurrected. The Nile's annual flooding provides muchneeded silt that makes produce grow. The sprouting of the plants commemorates the rising of Osiris and marks the beginning of the Egyptian New Year.

<sup>185</sup> Jackal-headed ancient Egyptian god

<sup>186</sup> Crocodile-headed ancient Egyptian god

Before you rush to have your book or blog translated by any means necessary (there are free online services that will translate your website or blog text into other languages for free), let us examine the art of translation itself. Like Book Editing, this service is underlooked but very critical: it can make or destroy a work of literature. As exemplified by the seriously flawed online machine translations available, you can't just flip the sentences into a new language and hope that the narrative still flows. This may lead to some very embarrassing and often amusing results, as some languages have different structures (English and French are a perfect example) and some languages have a wider vocabulary than others (that is why your English dictionary is much "fatter" than your Kiswahili *kamusi*). A recent example of direct translation causing a stir in Kenya is the launch of Korean Air's direct flights between Nairobi and Seoul in 2012. Ahead of the launch, the world-class, award-winning, airline put out ad on its international website that contained the line, 'Fly to Nairobi with Korean Air and enjoy the grand African savanna, the safari tour, and the indigenous people full of primitive energy.' The expression 'indigenous people full of primitive energy' caused a storm of outrage amongst Kenyans. They used their energy, primitive or otherwise, to make the issue a trending topic on Twitter. A Kenyan PR liaison told the Associated Press that the airline had removed the offending promo from its website and explained that the word 'primitive' was a result of a mistake made in translating Korean to English. Korean Air also apologized via its official Twitter account, saying, 'Regarding our recent promotional notice of Nairobi...We sincerely apologize for this situation.' As in the movie title, the message got 'Lost in Translation.'

And that's not the first time that poor translation has led to international embarrassment:

- When the famous 'Got Milk?' advertisements (usually featuring celebrities with a dripping 'milk moustache') spread to Latin America, the slogan was directly translated into Spanish. It read: 'Are You Lactating?'

- One of the most famous goofs of direct translation came about when computer technology was in the process of transforming the workplace forever. At an American newspaper, the new technology was a boon – you could automatically 'find and replace' a word or phrase in a document before going to press, making editing so much easier! One day, the order went round the newsroom that henceforth, all instances of the word 'Black' should be replaced with 'African-American'. This was done by the computers. As short while later, the newspaper ran an article in which a major company that had been 'in the red' (in debt) was now 'in the black' (solvent). In the event, they published that the said company was, '...back in the African-American.'

- There has been quite a bit of online debate as to whether, in famous speech in Germany at height of the Cold War, American president J. F. Kennedy said he was supportive of the citizens of Berlin or whether he said he was a jelly doughnut. While most linguists argue that the carefully worded (and even rehearsed) speech was grammatically correct, others are saying that Kennedy should have said 'Ich bin Berliner' as opposed to 'Ich bin ein Berliner' because the way he said it made it sound like he was referring to a 'Berliner' which is a type of jelly doughnut made in Berlin, rather than 'Berliner' as a resident of that city.

*'Everyone enjoyed quoting the telegrams of semi-literate "babu" (Indian) stationmasters on the railway. One favourite was the message clacked out from Elementaita to Nairobi*

*when (Lord) Delamere<sup>187</sup> boarded a train with a bull terrier and litter: "The Lord is on the train with one bitch and four sons of bitches. No ticket. Please collect." ' – From Charles Miller's *The Lunatic Express**

Another obstacle to direct translation is the use of literary devices such as idioms, puns and figures of speech. For example, if a female character in a stage play is storming out of the living room and her husband yells, 'Hold your horses!', we would all understand that he is commanding her to stop. But the direct Kiswahili translation would be '*Simamisha farasi zako!*' which makes no sense unless there are actual horses running amok on stage. The translator, then, must be true not so much to the 'letter' of the work, but to its 'spirit.' For example, if the original work was funny, then the translation must also be funny. Excellent, Grade A, evidence for this can be found in two classic plays: *The Government Inspector* by Nikolai Gogol and *The Inspect Play* by the Brothers Čapek. Both translations (from Russian and Czech respectively) are *English* masterpieces, which makes one wonder how good the originals must have been, since most works lose something during translation. **Or could it be that their translators were the real heroes?**

One translator who would be hailed as a 'hero' by many readers is Gregory Rabassa. He famously translated García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. García Márquez (*Love in the Time of Cholera*) himself picked Rabassa for the task and, according to *Newsweek*, declared the translation better than the original! According to novelist William Kennedy, 'Rabassa has reigned for years as the heavyweight champion of translators.' Rabassa has published a memoir entitled *If This Be Treason: Translation and it's Dyscontents*. In it, he reveals how tricky translation is and says that an unfaithful translation – caused by the translator's bravado – would be considered 'treason'.

So *do* get a linguistic *expert* to handle your translation service. Kenyan entities that offer translation services to authors include Sanaa Yetu Creatives. This professional approach might help Kenyan writers access previously out-of-reach markets, a business strategy that has been so successfully utilized by novelist Wilbur Smith. The SA-born writer liaises with publishers in numerous countries in order to have his books published there in translation. 'If you are looking for copies of my novels, and can't find them at bookstores or on-line bookstores,' he advises fans on his official website, 'try the publisher in your country.' To illustrate how this model works, the biography of Kenyan marathoner Samuel Wanjiru – who died tragically at the age of only 24 – was first written in Dutch by journalist Frits Conijn and Tanzanian-born Dutch resident Simon Maziku. The book, entitled *Doodloper: Het tragische einde van Olympisch marathonkampioen Samuel Wanjiru* was later translated into English and published by Moran (E. A.) Publishers under the title, *Running on Empty: Life and Triumphs of Samuel Kamau Wanjiru*. Wilbur Smith has these types of deals with multiple publishers around the globe. So far, his riveting adventure novels have sold about 120 million copies worldwide – enough physical copies to fill up Wembley Stadium twice!

So, until next time, fellow scribe, I say *sayonara*, *hasta la vista*, *kwaheri*, *adios*, *au se lako mada*, *au revoir*, *cheerio*, *Auf wiedersehen*, *shalom*, *chao*, *adzzislytödz*, *nya'aamh*, *aloha*, *hāgoónee*, *farvel*, *adjö* and *sizobonana* (all of which, translated, mean 'Goodbye')!

<sup>187</sup> A pioneering Kenyan settler; originally from the UK



### **NOOKS, VOOKS & E-BOOKS: Demystifying Book Technologies**

*'People, hopefully, will always have a thirst for stories. Whether the delivery system is an electronic screen or good old-fashioned paper, as long as there are readers out there, I'm relatively happy. I say "relatively" because the rise of the e-book has meant that anyone who writes is now publishable: **traditional publishing can be ignored**, as new authors sell direct (through) Amazon.'* – Bestselling author Ian Rankin, creator of the Inspector Rebus crime novels.

*'Every time there is a lot of change, there is a lot of opportunity.'* - Brian Murray, President and CEO of HarperCollins Publishers, on 'Finding the Right Digital Ecosystem'



**A high school student shows author Alexander Nderitu his mastery of e-readers**

In a letter to her sister in 1917, author Virginia Woolf<sup>188</sup> gushed:

*'Our (printing) press arrived on Tuesday. We unpacked it with enormous excitement...carried it into the drawing room, set it on its stand...We get so absorbed we can't stop; I see that real printing will devour one's entire life.'*

Virginia Woolf was only of many now-revered authors who contributed to the manufacture of their own books, who took charge of their destiny. This author-in-charge model has in recent decades become a side-show, with mainstream publishers running the main show (ie. the book market), aided by agents, bookshops (and other booksellers) and libraries. As mainstream publishing gained unprecedented power of the book market, self-publishing came to be viewed as second-bananas and was even been dubbed 'vanity publishing'. Now, thanks to technological advances, the take-charge author is back with a vengeance! And this time, it looks like he's here to stay. Technology - in particular Digital Printing and the Internet – have made self-publishing so cool, easy, affordable and potentially lucrative that some digital authors are now turning down offers from mainstream publishers.

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<sup>188</sup> Author of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*

Australian Ollie Hollie (*Creating the Perfect Lifestyle*) is a best-selling, self-published writer with over 12 books on Amazon.com<sup>189</sup>. He weighs in on the subject:

'A lot of authors make the mistake of thinking that going the traditional route is the only one that has good kudos and it's the only one that you should focus on...From the beginning of book-writing **until 1850, there was no publishing industry at all**, so anyone who ever published a book prior to 1850 was always self-published. There's only been about a 150-year period in the history of literature that there has been a publishing industry. So authors shouldn't even get into that mind-set of "self-publishing is second-rate", or whatever. Self-publishing is actually, honourable and time-worn and traditional. And not only that, it is actually the best and easiest, most effective, and becoming the most lucrative way to publish.

One of the problems with the post-1850 'publishing industry' was that it was increasingly difficult for new writers to see their work in print. Over time, it developed its own little culture and economic model. Very broadly speaking, the book industry consisted of the publisher, the bookseller, the agent and the writer. The book agent was not strictly required (and is still absent in most countries) but the setup made it so difficult for new work to be seen and new talent to be discovered that this new professional (the agent) found his niche. Agents (common in UK and the US) are like unofficial screening services for publishers. The aspiring writer (artist) finds an agent (businessman/talent scout) who will then sell him to the best publisher (company). The agent can provide useful information to the writer on matters such as how to brand himself. Once the manuscript is accepted by the publisher, the company then manufactures, markets and distributes the book: a process that is generally very expensive. That is why a writer typically gets only about 10% - 12% of a book's revenue as a royalty (a payment for each copy sold). Some publishers do give an 'advance' to established authors but the author then has to wait until his book has recouped its cost of manufacture before receiving royalties. Book stores are key components in the 'book chain'. They typically take 30% of the book price. This is called a 'trade discount'. Some bookshops, especially large book chains like, are marketing powerhouses and can negotiate preferential discount rates with publishers.

Traditional practices were not always helpful to the scribes or literature itself. For example, publishers have always preferred to work with 'known names', especially people who have been published before. The problem with this paradigm is that it creates a chicken-and-egg problem: the publisher wants a published name but the aspiring writer needs the publisher to take a chance on him so that he will *be* a published writer and therefore more valuable to the marketplace. Also, due to the high cost of the publishing process, among other challenges, there are usually not many publishing houses in any given country. This makes it impossible for the industry to absorb most wannabe writers. Rejection slips are the rule, not the exception. There is scarcely a single book writer in the world that has never been rejected at least once. Even those who eventually went on to become industry legends often initially suffered rejection. A few quotes to drive the point home:

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<sup>189</sup> Ollie Hollie has also managed to hold the No.1 bestselling spot on Amazon

'I discovered that rejections are not altogether a bad thing. They teach a writer to rely on his own judgment and to say in his heart of hearts, "To hell with you." ' – Saul Bellow, author of *The Dangling Man*

'Rejections slips, or form letters, however tactfully phrased, are lacerations of the soul, if not quite inventions of the devil – but there is no way around them.' – Isaac Asimov

'Changing sex is easier than getting published.' – Hugh C Rae, author of *The Wind From The Hills*

'Every rejection is incremental payment on your dues that in some way will be translated back into your work.' – James Lee Burke

Interestingly, some authors who were rejected by mainstream publishers went the self-publishing route and still became successful. For example, when Bishop T. D. Jakes penned the book *Woman, Thou Art Loosed*, no publisher was willing to take a chance on the manuscript (They couldn't see how a man could be an expert on women's issues). The televangelist committed his own money and produced a winner. The book went on to sell 3 million copies and was turned into a highly successful film. He claims that no less than four Hollywood companies vied for the DVD rights to the movie.

*'The landscape of publishing has changed dramatically over the past ten years.'*  
- Sonny Mehta, Chairman of Knopf Doubleday

Today, thanks to advanced technologies – especially the Internet – it is much easier and cheaper to get published by **sidestepping the traditional paradigm** and being your own publisher. Book expert Marcia Meier for *The Writer* magazine (May 2012):

'Technology remains the dominant force for change in the industry; the big publishing houses continue to reduce the number of traditionally published titles; smaller publishers are thriving as the big houses diminish; and because it's harder for unknown authors to get their work published, more will turn to self-publishing to achieve their goals.'

US President Barack Obama released his third book, entitled *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters*, in electronic format, underscoring how deep technology has cut into the book world. *Of Thee I Sing* contains illustrations by artist Loren Long and is available at Amazon.

E-books have been gaining currency since the early 2000s and came of age when Amazon.com launched the Amazon Kindle. By mid-July 2011, e-book sales on Amazon had eclipsed hardcover sales. Despite most readers' preference for a good, old-fashioned book, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos predicted that (given the trends) e-book sales would overtake paperbacks by end of 2012 and thereafter would surpass hardcover and paperback sales combined.

Stacy Johnson of MoneyTalksNews.com:

'Pre-Internet, the only way you could succeed as an author was to get signed by a major publishing house because they controlled all the distribution. But now, you can write a book yourself, publish it yourself, market it yourself and keep all the money.'

*'We always view the author as the brand...The publishers's name does help ...if you wanna get on major media, if you want to get reviewed in the newspaper, who's publishing it really does matter...But for now, we put the author out as the brand.'* - Brian Murray, President and CEO of HarperCollins Publishers, on 'Content Creators as the Brand'

In an article entitled 'Libraries and Publishers go Digital to Increase Efficiency' (*E. A. Standard*, 25/11/2011), James Anyanzwa wrote that 'local' book publishers and libraries are 'going digital to keep pace with technology.' Some institutions and government departments are digitising library documents and files, making them electronically accessible. Ms Amolo Ng'weno, MD of Digital Divide Data which is digitizing Kenya National Library Services, was quoted as saying that government departments are moving towards digitisation but for publishers, the greatest concern is piracy.

In 2012, Sanday Wandera wrote an article for the *E. A. Standard* (31/01/2012) entitled 'Kenyans Now Shift From Bookshops to Blogospheres'. In it, she says:

'Attention seems to be shifting more to the cyberscapce and away from print media. Every day, all around the world, thousands of new pages on Wordpress, Blogpost, iblog, etc are coming up.

Fictional (sic) writers too have taken to the trend and are opting to put up collections of their short stories and poetry up for free.'

According to an article in the *Daily Nation* (29/04/2014) entitled 'Work Begins to Digitise, Spread Library Services', the Kenyan government has initiated a programme to create digital resource centres in every county by 2015. The Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) currently has 60 physical libraries in only 21 counties. KNLS director, Richard Atuti:

'Because we cannot provide enough hard books due to limited resources, converting them into soft copies will ease the burden of the learners struggling to access information.'

Authors who have found success with e-books include John Locke, J.A.Konrath and James Patterson. *Forbes'* 2012 Richest Author, James Patterson, has so far moved over 1 million e-books (including 160,000 for *I Alex Cross* alone). The late Steig Larsson's *The Girl With The Dargon Tatoo* sold over 500,000 units digitally. The paperback version was also a super seller and the book was eventually turned into a movie starring Daniel Craig (of James Bond fame).

The best known type of e-book reader is the much-hyped Amazon Kindle which is owned by [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) – the world's biggest e-book dealer. The glowing of the screen makes it possible to read at night (eg. In rural areas with no electricity) and you can also enjoy all the features of a word processors – like enlarging the font size or searching for a particular word (For example, if you want to read a passage from the Bible but can't remember the chapter, you can just type in the fragment you *can* recall and command the software to search.) Exactly

how many books an e-book reader can hold depends on the size of the e-books and the exact make and generation of your gadget. The 3rd Generation Amazon Kindle, for example, can hold about 1,400 e-books. Its screen measures 6 inches at its widest point and the device itself is 6.5 inches long and weighs just 5.98 ounces.

Other types of e-book readers include the Nook (owned by Barnes & Noble booksellers), the Sony Reader and the Palm Pilot. It is noteworthy that a lot of smartphones and virtually all micro computers (laptops, desktops etc) are capable of displaying e-book content, as long as they are equipped with the necessary software. Where the e-book readers depart is in that they are dedicated to the management of digital literature.

A '[Vook](#)' is an e-reader that combines text and video ie. a 'video book'. For example, if you were reading about the Spanish cultural bullfights using a Vook, the page could contain a video of one such event. The Vook was invented by Bradley Inman (*The Right Way to Do Wrong*) and seeks to combine text, video and even social networking<sup>190</sup>.

It is important to note that the best e-book readers for schools are those that have no multimedia circuitry (ie. can't play movies, music or games). Competition in the 'tablet' market has made [Amazon](#) start releasing e-readers with too many advanced features such as e-mail, Internet capability and multimedia players, as exemplified by the snazzy new touch-screen Kindle Fire HD. Still, Amazon Kindles are still the most recommended e-readers and older, less flashy, models are available from the Amazon store. An NGO called Worldreader has already been distributing Kindles to rural Kenyan schools for a couple of years now, in an effort to 'put digital reading into the hands of needy children in the developing world, by giving them access to international and local digital books on e-readers, like the Kindle, or mobile phones.' Worldreader has partnered with schools in Ghana, Uganda and Kenya to distribute Kindles, e-books and apps for mobile phones so people can read international books, as well as African books that have been digitized.

Worldreader has recently partnered with Bharti Airtel, a leading telecommunications service provider in South Asia and Africa, in order to boost literacy in Africa through e-books on e-readers and mobile phones. The partnership, covering Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana, and Kenya will provide easy and free access to e-books over mobile phones.

While most e-book readers utilize patented, proprietary, software, it is possible to convert your e-book into from one format to another. For example, Amazon Kindles read books that are saved in Amazon's proprietary AZW format. But it is possible to convert a document from Microsoft Word format or Adobe PDF format. There are even online services that will allow you to do this for free. This is important information to the local publishers like East African Educational Publishers and Longhorn that have been developing e-content for schools. If libraries or government schools stocking Kindles or Sony Readers, you can still convert your content to suit the device. A smart option for publishers would be to save their textual e-content in EPUB format which can be done using Calibre E-Book Management software.

The EPUB format, which can be parsed by smartphones, is fast gaining currency as punters try to rise above the restrictions of proprietary software and Digital Rights Management.

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<sup>190</sup> *The New York Times*, 19/04/2014

EPUB documents are easily converted for use with the Nook, Sony Reader, Amazon Kindle, the Firefox Internet browser and various free programs including Adobe Digital Editions.

According to the NYT News Service<sup>191</sup>, Microsoft has agreed to invest up to \$605 million in Barnes & Nobles Nook division and college bookstores. Barnes & Noble is America's biggest bookstore chain. Nook sales stood at \$192 million, same as the previous year. The company has, however, been investing in its Nook division in order to compete effectively with the like of Amazon and Apple.

**'Think of a book and start reading it in 60 seconds,'** says one full-page ad for the Amazon Kindle<sup>192</sup>. It goes on to explain that you can choose from over 900,000 books (theoretically, an online bookstore can 'stock' every book ever written). It goes on: Carry your library (up to 3,500 books) on a device that weighs in at 8.7 ounces (less than a single paperback) and has a battery life of one month (a cellphone battery can barely last through the day without being re-charged).

Bestselling crime-fiction author, Patricia Cornwell:

'I am a fan of e-reading. I am a fan of e-books and this electronic communication. When I first started hearing about e-reading, I was like "Oh, no, you've got to have paper books". And of course I love paper books and there will always be a place for them but the convenience of the e-books is hard to beat.'

According to an article on the BBC website, entitled 'Will E-publishing Help Africa Switch on to Reading?', Jeremy Weate of Nigerian-based publisher, Cassava Republic<sup>193</sup>, had this to say about the onset of digital publishing in Africa:

'The proliferation of smartphones across Africa, combined with the inevitable burst into e-commerce, means that we would be foolish to ignore what is about to happen with publishing in Africa... Moving to e-books addresses some of our most significant challenges with print books.'

More than a quarter of Nigeria's 170 million people are now online, opening new frontiers for all forms of online interaction.

And, talking of the 'Beeb', a BBC radio promo states: 'You don't need a radio to listen to BBC World Service. You can listen (live) online at (website address)...' Along the same lines, you no longer need a TV set in order to watch TV shows. You can get the shows online, live or otherwise.

[Worldreader.org](http://Worldreader.org), a nonprofit based in Barcelona, Spain and Seattle, Washington, seeks to put digital reading into the hands of needy children in the developing world, by giving them access to international and local digital books on e-readers, like the Kindle, or mobile phones. They conducted the first Kindle pilot in the developing world, starting with Ghana.

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<sup>191</sup> See *The East African*, August 25 – 31, 2012, Magazine Pg. II

<sup>192</sup> *Rolling Stone* magazine, June 9, 2011

<sup>193</sup> A publisher of fiction, non-fiction and children's books.



David Risher, founder and CEO of Worldreader, is a former general manager at Microsoft and former senior vice-president for retailing and marketing for Amazon.com. He holds a comparative literature degree from Princeton University and an MBA from Harvard Business School. In May 2009, during a trip around the world with his family, Risher saw a library, whose door had been padlocked. He was struck with the discovery that e-reader technology was able to work in the most remote areas of the world, where people have become almost uninterested in reading. Late in 2009, McElwee and Risher founded Worldreader and conducted a small trial in a 12th grade English class at Barcelona's Benjamin Franklin International School.

Worldreader has since partnered with schools in Ghana, Uganda and Kenya to distribute Kindles, e-books and apps for mobile phones so people can read international books, as well as African books that have been digitized. Students can read books from African authors like Meshack Asare and Chika Unigwe, Roald Dahl and the Magic Tree House stories, and learn from local Ghanaian and Kenyan textbooks. By giving students access to a range of books by both local and international authors, Worldreader wants to empower students and communities to improve their education and lives. It is estimated that thus far, 1269 students in Kenya have access to e-books, thanks to Worldreader. Worldreader's app traffic is at half a million readers per month reading 24 pages and is growing on average at 20% per month.



**Students of St. Aloysius Gonzales high school celebrate receiving free e-readers and training from Worldreader. In the middle is Hon. Rose R. Mitaru, Member of the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Research and Technology**

In the January 2013 issue of Mount Kenya University's newsletter, the private institution brags that 'ALL MKU LIBRARIES NOW HAVE KINDLES'. Let's peek into the contents (Pg. 22):

'Mount Kenya University Library has acquired Kindle Fire in support of access to relevant and up-to-date information. A Kindle is a portable e-book reader that enables wireless downloads using Sprint's 3G cellular service. Its combination of low key



technology and monochrome screen makes it possible to read books and online articles for prolonged periods. It is also convenient and one has access to more books electronically than is practical in print.'



*A novel about the human side of technology*

**In future, the physical book will just be a part of the 'book package'**

There are plenty of online resources for e-book writers. One of the best is the website of Jane Friedman ([JaneFriedman.com](http://JaneFriedman.com)) which keeps pace with the fast-changing digital publishing landscape and has numerous links to useful information. Says she:

'About the only thing that remains constant in e-book publishing is that it changes—everything from the services to marketing strategies. Here, I've attempted to round-up all the good resources I know of related to (1) how to publish an e-book, (2) finding the right e-publishing services, and (3) staying on top of changes in the industry.'

Some online resources like The Gutenberg Project, BooksShouldBeFree.com and Bokhylla.no give away e-books for free. Of these, The Gutenberg Project is the most famous. Bokhylla.no ("bookshelf" in Norwegian) currently features 135,000 works and will eventually reach 250,000, including Norwegian translations of foreign books.

Bear in mind that technology is just a tool to help you research, write, market and sell your books. It's not a fairy grandmother that will make your dreams come true in an instant (which seems to be the opinion of dreamers trying to get in on the 'e-book craze'). The old rules still apply. Technology just makes things faster and often easier eg. Instead of going to the Post Office to send a press release to a book reviewer, you can e-mail it from the comfort of your home, **but the rules of writing a press release still apply**. Marketing expert Ryan Holiday, author of *Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator*, weighs in on the subject:

'That's the big myth. The big myth is that Internet, or the entire media culture, is somehow a "merit-ocracy": that if you do good stuff, that's enough. All you have to do is finish your book and hand it to a publisher and it's gonna sell a million copies. You make a funny viral video and post it and then it's gonna get passed around and then thousands of people are gonna see it and you're gonna be on TV and it's gonna be on the Internet...And in my experience, that is NOT how it works.'

*'A plan is important. A plan. Not just a dream. The church preaches a lot about a dream, and a vision...Get a plan to line up with your dream.'*

- Bishop T.D. Jakes on 'Positioning Yourself For Prosperity' (sermon)

So just as in the physical world, if you self-publish via the Internet, you will still have to do all the requisite marketing:

'The fact is if there wasn't marketing, the world wouldn't go around. You wouldn't be able to get a girlfriend because essentially, you market yourself to this girl to get her. You wouldn't have friends because you essentially market yourself to friends to get them to be friends of you. That's the basic truth of life.' - Marshall Wayne, 'Garth Brooks and James Patterson Used Marketing to Become Famous' (YouTube video)

Dr. Clotaire Rapaille, global marketing genius and author of the book, *The Culture Code*, does not believe that the physical book can be replaced entirely by e-books:

'A book is something that you can touch and feel and carry, has weight, has a sound when you go round; there's a sensuous relation with a book. You don't have that with an e-book, you don't have that with an ipod...When I am in my library and I have all my books over there, I know where they are, I know *exactly* where they are. And I like to touch this one, and I open this one, and I go back to this one...There's a stimulation of the mind, with depth. The reality of the electronic world is that it's very superficial. It's quick but superficial...The *Encyclopedia Britannica* is now on the Internet. I read recently that some people have the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on the Internet and they still want to have the book! You see, one doesn't replace the other...It's more than the content...When I want to do some research for writing my next book, it's good to have access to the Internet, to have access to all the reference systems. It's good, of course. But it doesn't change the fact that I know where my books are – it's like friends in my life, you see. There's a saying in the French culture, and I think it works in English, too: **A house without books is a man without a soul**...So I don't think the electronic soul will replace it.'

*'I love everything that's old: Old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine.'*

- Oliver Goldsmith, Irish dramatist and novelist

The 'age factor' need not be a stumbling block to embracing and harnessing book technologies. A lot of these technologies are actually easier to deal with than their traditional counterparts. For instance, if you have poor eye-sight, you can increase the font size on an e-reader. Some software, like the Microsoft E-book Reader, can even read out the text for you, converting text into audio. At a seminar shortly before his death, marketing legend Jay Conrad Levinson ('Father of Guerrilla Marketing') had this to say about technology:

'The reality is that these days, you've got to be techno-cozy and if you're technophobic, - you better hurry up and make an appointment with your techno-shrink because techno-phobia is fatal these days.'

**TRIBUTE TO J. CONRAD LEVINSON, Father of 'Guerrilla Marketing'**

Jay was the author of the "Guerrilla Marketing" series of books. *Guerrilla Marketing* is the best known marketing brand in history, and has been named one of the 100 best business books ever written, with over 21 million copies sold. His guerrilla concepts have influenced marketing so much that his books appear in 62 languages, and are required reading in MBA programs worldwide.

Jay was born in Detroit on February 10th 1933 and raised in Chicago. He served two years in the US Army Counter Intelligence Corp. His genius level IQ earned him membership into the Mensa Society. Graduating from the University of Colorado, his studies in Psychology led him to advertising agencies, including a Directorship at Leo Burnett in London, where he served as Creative Director. Returning to the US, he joined J. Walter Thompson as Senior Vice President.

A winner of first prizes in all the media, including the both the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals, Jay has been part of the creative teams that made household names of The Marlboro Man, The Pillsbury Doughboy, Allstate's good hands, United's friendly skies, the Sears Diehard battery, Morris the Cat, Mr. Clean, Charlie the Tuna, Snap Crackle Pop, Tony the Tiger, the Jolly Green Giant, and *Rolling Stone* Magazine to name a few. In the 60's he had the most ads running on TV at any one time.

Jay also worked closely with Hugh Hefner to help the marketing launch of *Playboy* Magazine and the first Playboy Mansion in Chicago.

In the early 1980's, seeing the need for small business and entrepreneurs to be able to compete in the marketplace against huge Fortune 500 companies, Jay created Guerrilla Marketing and taught it for ten years at the extension division of the University of California in Berkeley.

Young students in his class included the likes of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Michael Dell and Larry Ellison among others who went on with the marketing skills they learned from Jay to become legends in the upcoming computer and tech industries.

*Entrepreneur* magazine called him one of the foremost business marketing experts in the world. Jay has written over 100 business books. He and his wife, Jeannie co-authored several books and traveled the globe together speaking to students, entrepreneurs, and business large and small.

Jay Conrad Levinson passed away on October 10th 2013, having lived a life that changed the world and touched profoundly the lives of everyone that knew him.

*Source: The estate of J Conrad Levinson*

Only time will tell where technology's rocky marriage with literature will lead. Personally, I owe a great debt of gratitude to e-book technology for allowing me to achieve my dream of becoming an author, to communicate with readers. I penned Kenya's first e-novel, [\*When the Whirlwind Passes\*](#), more than ten years ago, when e-books were vitually unheard of in this

part of the world. But things have changed since then and e-books are probably the hottest topic in literary circles right now. I am proud to be one of the game-changers.

My revolution will not be televised – it will be downloaded.

## **PEN International**

*'PEN is the home of world intellectuals and celebrated writers.'*

– Khainga O'Okwemba,  
President, International PEN - Kenya Centre

*'PEN International is a community of people with faith in the word.'*

– Prof. Chris Wanjala, Chairman of Linguistics and Translation Committee,  
International PEN - Kenya Centre

International PEN, which has global network of centres, is believed to be the world's oldest literary movement. The acronym 'PEN' initially stands for 'Poets, Essayists & Novelists' but has since expanded to include print journalists, visual artistes etc.

PEN International ('International PEN' is now more commonly used but both are correct) celebrates literature and promotes freedom of expression. Founded in 1921, this global community of writers now spans more than 100 countries. Their campaigns, events, publications and programmes aim to connect writers and readers wherever they are in the world.

According to Wikipedia, 'notable' PEN members include:

- [Homero Aridjis](#), President [Emeritus](#)
- [Margaret Atwood](#)
- [Heinrich Böll](#)
- [Jorge Luis Borges](#)
- [J.M. Coetzee](#)
- [Joseph Conrad](#)
- [Elizabeth Craig](#)
- [Hermann Friedmann](#)
- [Nadine Gordimer](#)
- [Gloria Guardia](#)
- [Mario Vargas Llosa](#)
- [Robie Macauley](#)
- [Predrag Matvejević](#)
- [Arthur Miller](#)
- [Charles Langbridge Morgan](#)
- [Toni Morrison](#)
- [Octavio Paz](#)
- [Harold Pinter](#)
- [J. K. Rowling](#)
- [Michael Scammell](#)
- [George Bernard Shaw](#)
- [Luisa Valenzuela](#)
- [H. G. Wells](#)

To join this literary community, one must sign the PEN Charter, which reads as follows:

## The PEN Charter

- 1. Literature knows no frontiers, and should remain a common currency between nations in spite of political or international upheavals.*
  - 2. In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.*
  - 3. Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.*
  - 4. PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations; and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong as well as throughout the world whenever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organized political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortions of fact for political and personal ends.*
- Membership (or Friendship) of PEN is open to all qualified writers on the planet and literary professionals who subscribe to these aims, without regard to nationality, race, colour or religion.*

### **PEN Committees and Activities Worldwide**

PEN administers a wide range of literary awards. The most recent accolade is the New Voices Award which is designed to encourage new writing in the countries in which PEN operates and to provide a much needed space for young and unpublished writers to submit their work. The award is open to unpublished writers aged 18-30 and actively encourage entries from diverse linguistic regions and communities.

Before PEN International was established in 1921, its founder (Catharine Amy Dawson Scott) set up the Tomorrow Club as a space for aspiring writers to network with more established writers. In 1928, Herman Ould, the International Secretary, felt strongly that it was important for PEN to maintain focus on helping emerging writers, and thereby established a 'Young PEN' chapter. The PEN International/New Voices Award builds on these ideas, connecting PEN's past with its future.

Currently, there are over 145 [International PEN centres](#) around the world. Some of the more notable ones are:

- English PEN – The original centre
- [PEN American Centre](#) - Largest of the PEN centre, located in New York City, New York
- [PEN Center USA](#) - Second largest of the PEN centres, located in Los Angeles, California
- [PEN Canada](#) - Located in Toronto, Canada
- [Sydney PEN](#) - One of the three PEN centres of Australia, located in Sydney

**English PEN** is the founding centre of the global PEN network. It works to defend and promote free expression, and to remove barriers to literature. Each year, English PEN presents several major awards to outstanding writers. These include:

**The Hessel-Tiltman Prize:** Created in 2012 courtesy of English PEN member Marjorie Hessel-Tiltman. The prize is awarded to a historical work of high literary merit covering any historical period until the end of the second world war.

**The PEN Pinter Prize:** Awarded to a British writer of a writer resident in Britain of outstanding literary merit who, in the words of Harold Pinter's Nobel speech, casts an unflinching, unswerving, gaze upon the world, and shows a 'fierce intellectual determination...to define the real truth of our lives and our societies.'

**The PEN Ackerley Award:** Presented to to a literary autobiography of outstanding merit. It is the only such award for life writing.

**The Golden PEN Award** for a Lifetime's Distinguished Service to Literature: Presented annually to a British Writer. The winner is chosen by the Board of English PEN. Jamaican-born reggae poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson, who now resides in the UK, was a recent recipient of the Golden PEN Award (2012). Better known as LKJ, Johnson joined such previous winners as Harold Pinter, JG Ballard and Doris Lessing.

A comprehensive list of PEN literary awards can be viewed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_PEN\\_literary\\_awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_PEN_literary_awards)



**LKJ: Father of Dub Poetry**

Linton Kwesi Johnson was born in 1952 in Chapelton, Jamaica. He moved to London in 1963 to be with his mother and went on to read Sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London.



He joined the Black Panther movement in 1970, organising a poetry workshop and working with 'Rasta Love' - a group of poets and percussionists. His first book of poems, *Voices of the Living and the Dead*, was published by the *Race Today* imprint in 1974. His second book, *Dread, Beat, an' Blood* (1975) includes poems written in Jamaican dialect, and was released as a record in 1978. He is widely regarded as the father of 'dub poetry', a term he coined to describe the way a number of reggae DJs blended music and verse. He recorded several albums on the Island label, including *Forces of Vict'ry* (1979), *Bass Culture* (1980), *LKJ in Dub* (1980) and *Making History* (1984) and founded his own record label - LKJ - in the mid-1980s. He has reportedly sold over 3 million records worldwide.

He worked primarily as a journalist in the 1980s and was a reporter for Channel 4 television's *The Bandung File*. *Tidings An' Times: Selected Poems* was published in 1991 as both a book and musical recording. He now lives in Brixton, South London. A selection of his poetry, entitled *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, was published in 2002 by Penguin Classic. In 2005 he was awarded a Musgrave Medal by the Insitiute of Jamaica, for eminence in the field of poetry.

*'And you can see it everywhere  
The famine and the fear  
The doubt and the drought  
Desperation and despair  
And you can see it all around  
The massacres abound  
Dead bodies all around  
The atrocities abound  
Missing persons can't be found  
Dictators get dethroned  
New clowns are quickly found.'*

- Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Di Eagle and Di Bear* (poem),  
*Living History*

Source: Wikipedia , et al

**PEN Kenya Centre**



**PEN Kenya President, poet Khainga O'Okwemba**

In an article for *The Star* newspaper, PEN Kenya president, Khainga O'Okwemba wrote:

'PEN International is a global family of writers. It is home to celebrated writers and public intellectuals. It is a non-political organisation with consultative status at the UN and UNESCO.'

Some of the activities the Kenyan Centre has been involved in include:

- Book launches
- Human rights training
- Participation in literary festivals and other events
- Organizing home visits to ageing writers
- Contributing to public discourse on literary matters (in newspapers, radio, online and offline public fora)
- Championing Freedom of Speech
- Organizing writing workshops and author retreats

## **How to Start a Book Club**

*'Reading maketh a full man; writing, an exact man; talking, a ready man.'*

– Lord Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626)

*'The amount I earn is well known. My riches, my most prized possessions, are my books.'*

– Late Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi<sup>194</sup>

Kenyan literature is definitely on the rise. Not only have I been invited to an unusually high number book launches over the last couple of years, but I have also received numerous queries about the writing business, publishers and even about book clubs. Curiously, all the people who have asked me if I was aware of any good book clubs they could join were women, and all based in Nairobi.

There are a few book clubs I am aware of, but part of the appeal of a book club is usually its coziness. Most of these groups are small and often made up of people who live reasonably close to each other. It's more like a circle of friends. One of the groups I am aware of is composed of adult women and they only read African literature (one book per month). Another book club is enshrined in a university and is mainly composed of arts students and their teachers (outsiders are also welcome to join but students form the 'critical mass'). They usually communicate via e-mail, deciding on which books to study, where to buy the books, possibilities of inviting the authors to attend some sessions etc.

In Kenya, and elsewhere where social media is strong, there are several online groups and networks that could pass for 'book/writers clubs' in the loose sense of the word. For example, there is a group called POWO (Poets and Writers Online) that not only communicates electronically but also occasionally meets personally. Other online groups include PoetryCatalyst (a poetry Yahoo! group) and KenyanWriters (a Google group).

Book Clubs don't *have* to be cozy. In the US, for example, there are book clubs that are so large and networked (almost like franchise businesses) that they have gained enormous power in the book world. They can influence sales (especially the much sought-after bestseller list appearances), negotiate discounts with book sellers and lend prestige to a book title. I am sure you have occasionally seen a book jacket bragging of being a 'DoubleDay Book Club Selection', 'An Oprah Book Club Selection' or similar.

Still, when most people think of a 'book club', they think of the traditional 'circle of friends' paradigm, a setup that is also something of a social club. This way, they are better able to discuss the kind of books that they enjoy in a 'safe' and informal manner eg. A women's group can choose to only read and discuss Romance Fiction; a teenage group can indulge in Vampire/Gothic Fiction and even dress up during their sessions; a men's group can indulge only in Espionage Fiction etc.

When people ask me if I know of any book clubs they can join, I usually ask them where they live (which city estate) and encourage them to start their own little book club there. Now that Kenya has 47 counties (in the new constitutional dispensation), there should be book clubs

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<sup>194</sup> *The Horn Times*, July 31, 2013

in each county. These book clubs will not only be good for the communities but also markets for booksellers and publishers. A book club inquiring the price of a certain novel at a bookshop is much more attractive than an individual walking in for the same. Book clubs are so much better at sparking sales. Bookshops and publishers should actively encourage their formation.

To start your own book club in your community, here are some fantastic tips from *New York Times* bestselling author Lori Gottlieb<sup>195</sup>:

1. Before you start, set your goals; decide what you want eg. Are you only interested in one genre?, Do you want to use physical books or e-readers?
2. Invite people to join. Make sure that you care about what the members have to say. Aim for a membership of 8 -12 people. If you can't get the requisite number of people, then consider hosting your book club online instead. Online groups can be private (invitation only) or open to the public.
3. Once you have gathered your core group and decided on your theme (or 'genre'), get together and set up a framework. Decide on a regular meeting time, including how often you want to meet. Decide who hosts each meeting (if you're meeting in each other's homes).
4. Choose what (books) to read. Some choose at the beginning of the year, some let the host decide and some use the bestseller lists as a guide.
5. Make sure there are enough copies of each book. Explore purchase options (eg. discounts), checking the books out from your local library, or even accessing them on an e-reader.
6. Before a meeting, encourage everyone to come prepared eg. They will have read more than the Wikipedia summary of the book. If you're hosting, make sure that you take notes on the text so that you will be able to ask some provocative questions that will get the conversation going. Some e-readers allow you to make electronic notes on any page, for future reference.
7. Have fun as you watch your book club grow!

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<sup>195</sup> [Sony.com/howdini](http://Sony.com/howdini)

## **Harvest of Blood**

### **An example of 'faction'<sup>196</sup> writing**

by Alexander Nderitu (From the book [\*Kiss, Commander, Promise\*](#))

*Author's Introduction: I first decided to write a piece on the Rwandan genocide after I had a chat with a Rwandan representative I met at the Grand Regency Hotel<sup>197</sup> in Nairobi back in 2001. The envoy was an official in the Assemblée Nationale of the République Rwandaise, in charge of youth affairs. He was among the delegates from around the continent who had converged in Nairobi for an International Leadership Seminar convened by Dr. Chung Hwan Kwak, a disciple of Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. I had arrived at the seminar as a member of the press.*

*In the gilded lobby of the Regency, the envoy told me about the problems facing the youth in Rwanda. Listening to him, I could only imagine the trauma ordinary folks went through, and the fear resident in them, seven years earlier, when the Hutu army and Interahamwe militia perpetrated the worst act of genocide to ever pollute the soil of Africa<sup>198</sup>. What surprised the world was that ordinary people, both men and women, rapidly joined in the ethnic cleansing, hunting down and killing their own neighbours, or betraying them to the militia.*

*And then in 2008, my own home country erupted into ethnic war and once again, it was neighbour against neighbour. So, with Carbon/Silicon's hit song 'Why Do Men Fight?' playing in the background, let me dust off my research material and write the story I have been putting off for so long. Perhaps if I bring back the horrors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Africans will think twice before they go down that road again...*

The infant had unwittingly saved their lives. Pierre and Keziah had taken their two-month old baby boy, Baraka, to the clinic when the marauders swept through their village, demanding to see everyone's identity card, and if, like Pierre and Keziah, you belonged to the Tutsi tribe, you were done for. One Hutu man who was married to Tutsi woman was ordered to murder his wife on the spot. When he defied the order, they cut off his head in the presence of his children and then murdered his wife before setting their house ablaze.

Meanwhile, Keziah – a light-skinned Catholic in her early twenties - was at the clinic, just five miles away. Little Baraka had recently developed a rash on his skin and his temperature had risen to an alarming level. He was Keziah's first and only child, coming just over a year after she and Pierre got married. The clinic was crowded, mostly by mothers with infants, and service was slow. Unlike any other time, the facility seemed to be operating under a skeleton crew. One nurse, a youthful nun, seemed to be doing the work of three people. Among the waiting patients, there were whispers that the staff had fled after receiving information at night that the militia were on their way here. Everyone was fidgety. Nobody was sure whether it was safer to run or stay put. One patient, a skinny old man with a festering sore on his knee, said that staying put was the safer choice. Word was that the militia were setting up roadblocks and checkpoints along the highways.

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<sup>196</sup> A mixture of Fact and Fiction: essentially a true story that has been fictionalised in order to give the author more leeway. In this particular tale, only the central characters are fake.

<sup>197</sup> Now 'Laico Regency'

<sup>198</sup> It wasn't Africa's first genocide, mind. The Germans are said to have perpetrated genocide on Herero people of Namibia circa 1908.

There was no radio in the clinic, hence no updates on the madness that had gripped the nation. By the time, Pierre (round-eyed and built on a slender scale) and Keziah embarked on the journey home, the tension in the air was palpable.

There were no public service vehicles in operation, so Keziah and her husband had to walk all the way back, strolling parallel to the impressively smooth tarmac road and carrying the baby in turns. They were only two kilometres away from the clinic when they discovered their first corpse. It was a bulky woman lying on her back on the edge of the road with her arms flung out. She hadn't been dead long – a red crescent on her neck was still oozing blood.

'Quick, into the bushes!' Pierre ordered, yanking his wife to the side. 'Give me the baby.'

They veered off the road, heading for dense cover.

'Oh, my God... Oh, my God... Oh, my God...' Pierre murmured as they stopped to catch their breath. Keziah began to sob quietly. She felt so *helpless*.

They decided to rush back to the village where they would find comfort in numbers. They would still walk parallel to the road, but to avoid checkpoints and gunpoints, they would keep to the bushes; watching and moving, watching and moving. It was a supreme irony that it was such a crisp, beautiful day. Pale-yellow sun rays were filtering through the rustling leaves of the tall trees and there was colour everywhere around them. Compared to most animals, human beings have a pitiable sense of smell, but in those lush bushes, the scent of the flora was clearly discernible. It was sweet, like a commercial fragrance, but had a pungent underlying aroma: it must have been a natural blend of flower, leaf and bark scents. At one point during their trek, the Tutsi family were distracted by a sudden cacophony coming from above them but, thankfully, the authors of the din turned out to be hornbills perched high up in the trees - big black specimens with white oversize beaks. The surrounding beauty was best summed up by the Alan Paton title, 'Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful.' Many that have come to Africa and seen the problems facing the continent have echoed those sentiments.

After a couple of hours of maneuvering carefully through bush and farmland, Keziah and Pierre neared their village. Even from a distance they could see that the village had been hit. It looked deserted. Some houses were smoldering, and just outside the doorway of one of their neighbours' houses, they could make out a supine corpse. There was no way they would approach any further! They had to run for the hills where they would hide in the dense foliage while they figured out their next step. So run they did!

The ethnic cleansing was many decades in the making. Most people believe that the seeds of discord were sown during the colonial period but – just between us - the Hutus and Tutsis have a history of confrontation that predates the colonial era.

Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi were colonized by Germany and later ceded to Belgium in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. The Belgian colonialists favoured the minority Tutsis over the Hutus and introduced national cards that indicated one's ethnicity. This turned out to be a big mistake and is no longer done.

In 1959, goons led by the Hutu nationalist party Parmehutu killed 20,000 Tutsis, triggering a civil war.

Acts of genocide were sporadically perpetrated over the next three decades. Between 1963 and 1964, for instance, about 14,000<sup>199</sup> Tutsis were sent to their graves. In 1973, Hutus

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<sup>199</sup> Unlike The Holocaust or Pol Pot's Cambodia, the Rwandan wars were not properly documented and exact figures are hard to come by.

fleeing a political meltdown in Burundi flooded Rwanda. The resulting chaos led to several hundred more Tutsi deaths and the exodus of thousands of Tutsis into other countries. In other words, it was a case of "Hutus in, Tutsis out."

In the '80s Tutsi refugees in Uganda formed a political and military organization latter known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Some of these Tutsis got their baptism of fire during the Ugandan Bush War, as part of the rebel National Resistance Movement which won the war.

As the curtains opened on the '90's, the RPF spearheaded a Tutsi return to Rwanda, sparking a fresh civil war. Also around this time, the Rwandan government controversially began purchasing arms. The *Forces Armees Rwandaises* (the Rwandan Army) is alleged to have acquired machine guns, artillery, armoured vehicles and Gazelle helicopters from France.

In 1993, the Rwandan government and rebels both signed the Arusha Accords, bringing an end to the civil war. But behind the scenes, mischief was afoot. Government officials, soldiers and some rich/powerful Hutus formed, financed and armed the *Impuzamugambi* and *Interahamwe* militia groups. Like the Nazi supremacists, what they had in mind was a final solution – to wipe out the 'cockroaches' (read Tutsis) from the face of the Earth. In January 1994, rumours of weapons distribution and genocide plans began to float around.

The genocide proper began after a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana (a Hutu) and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down in Congo on April 6, 1994, as it prepared to land at Kigali Airport. Who between the RPF and Hutu extremists opposed to the Arusha Peace Accords was responsible for the attack we may never know.<sup>200</sup>

The next day - April 7, 1994 - the Rwandan Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, and ten Belgian soldiers charged with protecting her were murdered by the presidential guard. Rwandan soldiers and *Interahamwe* militia (numbering about 30,000) then implemented the genocide plan, systematically killing Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a well co-ordinated nationwide operation...

There is a reason why Rwanda is known as the "land of a thousand hills." Numerous chains of hills composed of mounds standing shoulder to shoulder like singers in a church choir are a common feature. Some of them were formed by volcanoes that are active to this day. Many of the hills contain fertile soils, good for agriculture, and play host to teeming forests. Apart from being a bird-watcher's paradise, Rwanda's forests are favoured with such rare wildlife as elephants, leopards and the nearly-extinct great silver-back gorilla.

At the foot of one of these fabled hills, Pierre identified a dense bush and motioned for Keziah, who was holding the baby against her bosom, to follow him. Overcome by a strong sense of foreboding, he crouched behind the vegetation and pulled Keziah down to his level as soon as she reached his side. He placed finger on his lips to urge total silence.

Keziah rocked the baby to and fro to keep it asleep. All along, she had been careful not to wake him up because getting him to sleep again wouldn't be as easy as flipping off a switch. She had stopped severally to breastfeed him, which he did with his eyes blissfully closed. But now he was becoming restless. Soon he would be wide awake and difficult to handle.

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<sup>200</sup> Conspiracy theories abound, with fingers being pointed at everyone from the French to the Belgians to duelling Rwandan factions. Quite frankly, the entire issue is as clear as mud.



Meanwhile, Pierre was peering over the bush, his eyes going from left to right. He looked like a gazelle watching out for prowling leopards. He wondered if there were other villagers embedded in the foliage around them but also too scared to call out.

And then he saw the hunters...One, two, three...Three armed militia. The one closest to him was dressed in what appeared to be a home-made military-style outfit. He had a naked gun secured to his waist by a leather belt but in his hand he held a long machete<sup>201</sup> – bloodstained from an earlier harvest of blood, probably the massacre at the village. He was tall, very dark, and moved methodically; looking and listening. A hunter on the prowl, he stepped quietly and kept his ears pricked. Occasionally, he'd glance over at his comrades, as if to make sure they were still there.

Four. There was a fourth killer in the group, obscured by foliage, wielding no less than an AK-47 rifle. The dark militiaman moved closer to Pierre's hiding place. Pierre dared not move a muscle and his mouth had gone completely dry. His heart was thumping so loudly he was afraid it would betray him, although in reality he was the only one who could hear it. The militiaman moved further away, occasionally using his machete to clear the way. His comrades were by now out of sight and he himself soon disappeared round the trunk of a giant tree.

After a few moments, Keziah joined her husband in peering over the bush, both of them shaking with fear. They nearly got a collective heart attack when the baby started crying!

Too scared to utter a single word, Pierre urgently motioned for silence. Keziah quickly cupped her hand over the baby's mouth as she and Pierre dipped their heads so low that they could smell the soil.

Just as they had anticipated, the cry of the baby had been heard. The dark-skinned militiaman returned to the scene, his long blade thirsty for more blood. He scanned the area, peered into foliage, used his machete to part some leaves but still drew a blank.

A few minutes elapsed. Pierre could taste the soil in his mouth. When he could no longer hear any movement in the distance, he raised his head ever so slowly. Keziah followed suit and together, their eyes darted left and right as if they were watching a tennis match in fast-forward. The killer hadn't disappeared entirely. Keziah caught a partial glimpse of him, leaning against a tree in the distance, smoking a cigarette. Her baby now jerking this way and that, Keziah uncovered its mouth.

It was a grave error.

Baraka *immediately* began wailing. Keziah tried rocking the baby into a lull but she was so panicked that she shook the baby too hard, prompting more crying. In the meantime, Pierre was going bananas, he urgently motioned for silence as he watched to see if the militiaman had heard the crying. He had. He expertly flicked the cigarette butt away from his body and inched towards Pierre's position. The baby's cries had now reached a crescendo. Keziah swiftly covered its mouth and nose with her hand and did not dare let go this time. Pierre motioned for Keziah to take a deep breath as they once again ducked into the undergrowth.

The militiaman drew nearer, machete at the ready. In some parts of the country, the militia had received organized resistance and he wanted to start swinging before his victim had a chance to launch a counter-attack.

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<sup>201</sup> A long, heavy knife, common in Africa, normally used for farming and slashing grass but often also used as a weapon.

Nearer. Had he fired his handgun into the bush, his bullets would have hit home, but he apparently didn't want to waste bullets on invisible quarry.

NEARER. He was so close now, Pierre and Keziah could smell the cigarette smoke that was still clinging to his clothes. He must have been a very heavy smoker. Pierre could feel the dryness in his mouth again and wondered if Keziah had the same sensation. The militiaman's boots were so close to Pierre's head that he even resisted the urge to lick his lips! In the stillness, the slightest movement could have been a giveaway; a sneeze might as well have been a grenade explosion.

The hunter's boots shuffled. They moved further away, swishing in the long grass, and then they sped up as the militiaman gave up the hunt and hurried to rejoin his colleagues in the woods ahead.

When all was quiet again, Pierre and Keziah came up for air as if they had been underwater. As they took short, quick, breaths to compensate for holding out, Keziah took her hand off the baby's face. He appeared to have gone back to sleep so she shook him and, getting no response, pinched him on one thigh. When she clasped him to her breast and starting crying hysterically, Pierre knew that the baby was dead. He comfortingly put his arms round mother and child and held on as Keziah heaved and wept as she had never wept before.

For one hundred days, blood and tears flowed throughout the tiny, land-locked, central African nation. Government-sponsored media openly instigated civilians to violence. Valerie Bemeriki<sup>202</sup>, a female journalist working for Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines, brazenly broadcast the names of target Tutsis and disclosed their hiding places. When she was finally captured by a Tutsi commando unit and arraigned at the subsequent Arusha Tribunal on the Rwandan holocaust, she admitted to having used the air waves to incite genocide. A senior administrator at the same Hutu propaganda station (and also a foreign ministry official at the time) is also alleged to have planned and financed killings. At the Arusha Tribunal, where the propagandist was arraigned after being arrested in Cameroon in 1996, he was accused of genocide, complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide and crimes against humanity.

Ninety-three per cent of Rwandans are Christians (mostly Catholic) and the role of the church leaders during the killings is shocking. Not only did the church *not* openly condemn the atrocities but some clerics have been accused of being 'genocidaires' themselves! Thirty Tutsi girls who sought sanctuary from a Bishop in the southwestern Gikingoro diocese disappeared without a trace. The vicar of a church in the capital Kigali was also later charged<sup>203</sup> with genocide, complicity in genocide, torture and inflicting inhuman and degrading treatment to the hundreds of refugees seeking refuge at his church. Meanwhile, thousands of Tutsis seeking protection in Nyarubuye Church were slaughtered in one of the more notorious attacks. Elsewhere, a Belgian nun watched in shock as militiamen attacked a Catholic complex where hundreds of people were seeking refuge and massacred them before her very eyes (They spared her for being a foreigner.)

It was more than just war, more than just a tribal conflict. It was a grisly reminder of what can happen when good men do nothing and a testament to how dark man's heart can

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<sup>202</sup> Currently serving a life sentence for her role in the genocide

<sup>203</sup> He was arrested in France after the fact

be. So deep was the Hutus killers' hatred for the Tutsis that some would even dismember the corpses of long-dead victims they came across.

At the outbreak of the atrocities, the UN alarmingly reduced the scale of its Rwandan force by ninety per cent! In April 1994, at the Don Bosco School, Tutsi refugees' pleas to the UN peacekeepers not to abandon them, lest they be hacked with machetes, fell on deaf ears. The UN Security Council, as safe as houses in far-off America, took their sweet time debating the issue and 'condemned the killings' from their New York skyscraper (And when they finally intervened, it was the archetype of 'too little, too late'.)

Meanwhile, foreign countries evacuated their nationals on the double. French soldiers helped in the evacuation of French nationals, French embassy staff and even the embassy dog but left behind their Tutsi staff and other protection-seekers. The abandoned staff were swiftly massacred.

In yet another chilling example of man's inhumanity to man, foreign commandos on a humanitarian mission in a place called Bisesero ignored pleas for protection by Tutsis in a hillside hamlet. Despite being armed to the teeth and equipped with modern communication gadgets, the 'humanitarian' force moved on, leaving the hamlet's one thousand villagers to be murdered wholesale. In total, nearly fifty thousand people were massacred on the hills of Bisesero which are populated by Tutsis, Hutus, pygmoid Twa and the native Abasesero. For years afterwards, the skulls and bones of the victims lay strewn over the hillsides.

By the time the Ugandan-raised Rwandan Patriotic Front, led by Major-General Paul Kagame, toppled the murderous regime and declared the war over, the remains of 800,000 to 1,000,000<sup>204</sup> Tutsis and moderate Hutus lay rotting or skeletal in classrooms, churches, houses, hospitals, government buildings, open fields and hillsides. The murder weapons ranged from grenades and self-loading rifles to clubs and stones.

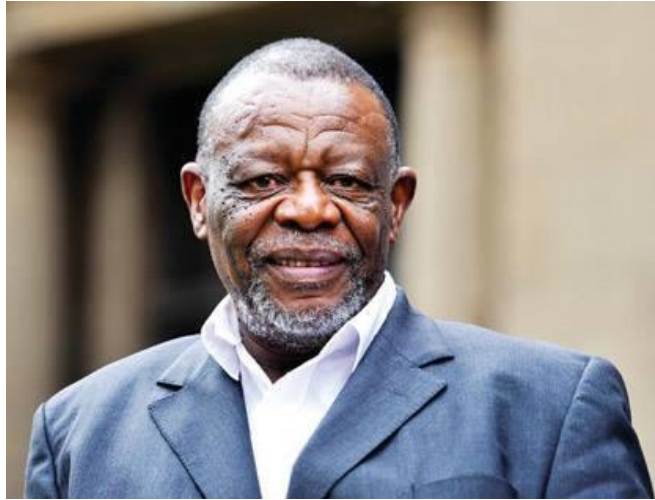
Ah, but the land is beautiful.

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<sup>204</sup> Exact figure unknown

**Militant Poet - A Life in the Day of Wally Serote: Notes**

*'The hand that signed the paper felled a city;  
Five sovereign fingers taxed the breath,  
Doubled the globe of the dead and halved a country.  
These five kings did a king to death.'*  
- Dylan Thomas, *The Hand That Signed the Paper*



**Mongane Wally Serote**

*The following are random notes taken from a public lecture given at Nairobi University, Kenya, by Mongane Wally Serote in September 2013. Serote is a South African freedom fighter, poet and writer.*

- Serote traces the origins of his Black consciousness to a single childhood incident. He and his father were driving home one night and for some reason, the dad was uncharacteristically absent-minded. In that state, he ran a red light and was waved down by a policeman. He stopped the car and went to talk to the policeman. As the young Serote watched through the windscreen, the cop violently slapped his father before reprimanding him for his traffic offence. After a few minutes, the father came back into the car, crying and bleeding from the nose. For the young boy, it was the death of a hero. He had always looked up to his father and to see him humiliated like this, for so small an offence, was devastating.
- Serote's politicism also began with his father. Serote started going to school at a normal age but his father, like many Black South African adults at the time, was illiterate. Every morning, Serote's dad would send him to buy the daily newspaper and read the cover stories to him before he left for school. Serote gradually became very well versed in the politics of the day.
- In his youth, Mongane Wally Serote was arrested by South Africa's apartheid government and spent 9 months in solitary confinement. 'Due to our political consciousness, we (the youth) joined the underground movement (in support of the ANC). And we paid for it.'
- 'I was detained and kept in solitary confinement for 9 months. Some others suffered worse fates.'

- 'My friend Steve Biko, myself and others spent a lot of time agonizing on how to structure a true Black Movement...Biko was killed, a brutal death. That would not have happened if there was a high (Black) consciousness.'
- 'I went to the US on a Fulbright scholarship for my writing. It was in 1974, in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movements. I met many of those leaders...I learnt about Cuba, Che Guevara, Africa...I eventually left Columbia (University) with a Masters (degree) in Fine Arts.'
- 'I received training in guerrilla warfare (back in Africa) and re-joined the ANC.'
- 'In 1978, I was a guerrilla in the underground movement.' The slogans included 'Freedom or Death', they had 'a spirit of no surrender'
- 'Our position was that South Africa belonged to those who live in it, Black or White, and we are ready to die for it.'
- They intensified the struggle, 'including armed struggle'...That's why when Mandela was released (1994), he immediately thanked those Africans who stuck with him throughout the struggle.
- Cuba stood against an embargo for many years and it (Cuba) is still there.
- On Zimbabwe: 'I have utmost respect for Mugabe. I am educated from the West. I am not educated by Western media. As (Thabo) Mbeki said, "the people of Zimbabwe must be given the power to decide their future". I may disagree with Mugabe in the he has been President after President after President. I may disagree...Zimbabwe paid for defying the West.'
- 'When Obama visited SA, we lacked consciousness to ask him serious questions.'
- 'What is our role as Africans? When do we sit and ask why AU (African Union) should be formed?'
- 'The American President is not President of Presidents and can never be...He has no right to sentence other world leaders to death.'
- The schism between African and US political thinking (in the context of Pan-Africanism) was clearly demonstrated when US-fronted 'humanitarian assistance' deposed and killed Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi. Although a polarizing figure on the world stage, [Gaddafi was a Pan-Africanist who had done a lot for his small country](#), including housing the entire population, providing free medical care, welfare assistance (for the jobless) and no taxes (for all citizens). The Western media had branded Gaddafi a violent dictator but [many Africans idolized the man](#) and took exception to the manner in which he was disposed of. 'He was dragged through the streets and murdered.'
- 'Patrice Lumumba was not just killed but chopped into pieces. Where were the people of Congo when this happened?'

- Samora Michel, others killed
- 'I am very agitated. I have reason to be agitated. When I see what is happening in Libya, Mali, Kenya...**I am an activist and I will be an activist for life.**'
- 'I am inspired by leaders who are envisioning an African renaissance.'
- The majority of Africa's 1.5 billion people live in poverty whereas the continent is mineral-rich.
- 'When will our political consciousness arise? Higher continental patriotism needs to be installed in the youth.
- African universities need to produce 'highly conscious students'. If universities fail, where else?
- Julius Nyerere: 'The problem with Africans is that we read the wrong books.' This is believed to be a reference to the education system.
- Africa is the only continent that teaches in foreign languages – Portuguese, English, French etc
- Africa's solutions must be indigineous.
- SA learnt freedom agitation from South American and Asian countries that had gone before. South Africans were conscious of the people in Kenya and everywhere else in the world who joined in the anti-apartheid push eg. boycotting the apartheid regime, joining in the chorus of democracy calls.
- A new culture is emerging in SA but for it to be sustained, it must be backed by the country's economy. Most of the land is still in White hands. Many Blacks are still living in abject poverty.
- 'What is the consciousness we must give to our soldiers, our police force? What is their responsibility? I don't want to be emotional.'
- 'We need find a consciousness about our continent...I wish more Africans can put their country first instead of selling their countries lock, stock and barrel to the US, UK or even China.'

## **The Fire Next Time: Kenya/Uganda Literary Wars**

*'Many years before Uganda became British soil, English explorers tended to picture the country as something like an orchid in a field of poison ivy.'* – Charles Miller, *The Lunatic Express*

I don't know where the rain started beating us, but it does seem that for a number of years now, our brothers and sisters across the border have been doing better than us in the lit world. Even the recent (2012 – 2013) Kwani Manuscript Project<sup>205</sup> winner was a Ugandan: Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, for her cross-generational novel *The Kintu Saga*. Kenya's Timothy Kiproo Kimutai placed 3<sup>rd</sup> with *The Water Spirits*. Other nominees were:

- Ayobami Adebayo for *Stay with Me* (Nigeria)
- Ayesha Harruna Attah for *Saturday's People* (Ghana/US)
- Stanley Gazemba for *Ghettoboy* (Kenya)
- Toni Kan for *The Carnivorous City* (Nigeria)

The winner received Kshs 300,000 (USD\$ 3,500); 1st runner-up, Kshs 150,000; and 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up, Kshs 75,000.

Our 'scribbling rivalry' has been brought up severally by Kenyan literary commentators, especially in the light of Ugandan wordsmiths picking up more international accolades than us.

Let's dig deeper...

Uganda has been fertile ground for writers for a long time. One of their internationally known authors is Okot p'Bitek (*Song of Lawino*) who was born in Northern Uganda. He was educated at Oxford University and later taught at Makerere University. His other works include: *White Teeth*, *Horn of My Love*, *Artist the Ruler* and *Acholi Proverbs*.

FEMRITE is a Uganda Women Writers' Association was founded by Hon. Mary Karoro Okurut in 1995-1996. It promotes women writing in Uganda has nurtured award winning authors and poets. There have been some attempts to form a Kenyan equivalent of FEMRITE, but so far we don't have a formidable equivalent. In fact, there are Kenyan women that are members of FEMRITE.

Before FEMRITE, Uganda's literary landscape was dominated by male writers. FEMRITE brings together women writers from across the continent – not just Uganda – in order to create a sense of belonging for African Women writers' groups and inspire women to write and support each other. FEMRITE also conducts literary contests and 'writing clinics' (for secondary schools).

In 2006, Uganda's Doreen Baingana won the Commonwealth Prize for First Book (Africa Region) for *Tropical Fish*, a collection of short stories. She teaches writing and her work, which is widely published in journals, has been twice nominated for the Caine Prize for African Writing. In 2013, she won a lucrative [Miles Morland Scholarship](#) and is currently one

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<sup>205</sup> A literary prize for unpublished fiction by African writers



of the judges for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. Doreen lived in the US for sixteen years and in Kenya for two. She was nominated for the Caine Prize in 2004 and 2005. Her fellow Ugandan Beatrice Lamwaka (*Butterfly Dream*) was nominated for the Caine Prize in 2011.

Not to be outdone, the Kenyans have had their fair share of Caine Prize winners and nominees. These include Binyavanga Wainaina (*Discovering Home*, 2002 winner), Yvonne Owour (*Weight of Whispers*, 2004 winner), Parsalelo Kantai (*Comrade Lemma and the Black Jerusalem Boy Band*) and Billy Kahora (*Urban Zoning*).

Other prominent contemporary Ugandan scribes include (but are by no means limited to) Goretti Kyomuhendo (*Waiting*), Mary Okurut (*The Invisible Weevil*), Glaydah Namukusa (*Voice of a Dream*, McMillan Writers Prize for Africa winner) and Sophie Bamwoyeraki.

Kenya also has a wide array of formidable writers from whom we can fashion a Team Kenya that will help us beat Team Uganda, and later train our guns on an even bigger target: [The Nigerians](#). Top Kenyan writers include Binyavanga Wainaina, Yvonne Owour<sup>206</sup>, Ken Walibora, Muthoni Garland, Moraa Gitaa, Stanley Gazemba, Temo Buliro, Ng'ang'a Mbugua, Kinyanjui Kombani, Rayhab 'Potentash' Getango, James Wamathai, Clifton Gachagua<sup>207</sup>, Ann Moraa, Kingwa Kamencu, Mildred Achoch and many more.

There is no excuse for us being second-bested by our Ugandan (or Tanzanian) counterparts in the field of literature. We boast of having 'the biggest economy in East and Central Africa' and yet in the arts and some sports like soccer, we fall short of the glory. According to a report entitled, 'Are Our Children Learning? Literacy and Numeracy Across East Africa'<sup>208</sup>, Kenya has the highest literacy level amongst East African schoolchildren, followed by Tanzania and then Uganda. Speaking at the launch of the report, Dr. Mary Goretti Nakabugu (UG) pointed out that in the last three Uwezo annual reports, learning outcomes in Uganda had remained consistently low.

We can be No.1 in Literature, I am convinced. If necessary, we will fire everything we have in our canon. If we run out of ammunition, we will throw stones from *The Stone Hills of Maragoli*. It doesn't matter if that makes us *The Last Villians of Molo*. The point is that we know *How to Write About Africa*.

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<sup>206</sup> 'Yvonne Owour is among the beautiful ones who are born.' – UoN's Prof. Kabira, making a reference to Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

<sup>207</sup> Winner of the Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets

<sup>208</sup> Report by Uwezo NGO, quoted in *The Guardian* (Tanzania), May 11 – 17, 2014, Pg.6

## Goodbye, Mr. Chips

*'One should call it quits when one is still reasonably successfully, so I think it's time to stop. I have written ten thrillers. And I have been a writer for 25 years.'*

– Bestselling author Frederick Forsyth

*'There's a saying that "You destroy what you love". It's the other way around: What you love destroys you.'* – George Plimpton, writer<sup>209</sup>

But if a 'Team Kenya' is to be assembled in order to put Kenya in an enviable position on the African literary map (preferably side-by-side with Nigeria and South Africa), then the one person they *cannot* count on is me. That's because after over 10 years in the writing world, I have decided to take a hiatus.

I am not leaving literature (I wouldn't do that for all the tea in China), but I am taking an indefinite break from the world of letters so that I can be able to do other things as well. Writing books (fiction or non-fiction) can absorb a lot of hours, especially because of the research necessary. You can reel off some light poems or a slim romance novel in a short period (some people write an entire novel or stage play in about two weeks). But if, like me, you do thrillers and non-fiction, the entire process (ie. pre-writing, writing and post-writing) can take months if not years to produce a single work. For example, the [\*Kiss, Commander, Promise\*](#)<sup>TM</sup> sequels deal with many situations that I have never been personally involved in (espionage, war etc). To make such tales realistic, I have to render so much detail that the bemused reader is convinced that I am 'some kind of expert' on the subject<sup>210</sup>. I have spent so much time reading publications and watching documentaries about the Cold War, submarines and underwater guns that I can now do a Len Deighton and write non-fiction on the subject! (Incidentally, you would be amazed by how advanced underwater espionage and warfare are). And while the scribe is burning the midnight oil, 'life' is just passing him by.

This is why many artists (musicians, actors, writers etc) sometimes go on hiatus: In order to focus more on 'normal' things like marriage, children, business/entrepreneurship, travel, further education, spiritual quests or just have a change of scene. Going into 'retirement'<sup>211</sup> in 1997, Frederick Forsyth explained it thus:

*'When you write books, you don't have time for anything else. I plan on making time. I can afford to be a journalist again and pursue things I find important.'*

<sup>209</sup> *When We Were Kings* (1996), documentary film

<sup>210</sup> When Tom Clancy rose to fame with such thrillers as *The Hunt for Red October* and *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, many readers assumed he was a former CIA agent. Actually, all the information was in the public domain – he just compiled it.

<sup>211</sup> Didn't last long! He has since written more books eg. *Icon* and *The Veteran*



**WORKING HARD:** (Clockwise) Bonnie Kim, Kinyanjui Kombani, Muthoni Garland, Moraa Gitaa, Stanley Gazemba, James Murua



**HARDLY WORKING:** Alexander Nderitu removing jiggers in rural Kenya (left) and playing with a nephew who is named after him

In [one of my last interviews as a full-time writer](#), a journalist asked me how I manage to be so prolific. I gave her the plain truth:

‘Through sacrifice. I found no other way. I sacrificed other things that I did not deem crucial to my existence. I have given up many good job opportunities and postponed many things because I have always had a dream to be an artist (particularly a

successful writer) and I would rather try and fail than to be 'ordinary' and later regret that I never took chances.'

But now I am ready to 'slow down' and do other things. So, from me to other Kenyan literati, it's 'Goodbye and good luck'. See you on the bestseller lists.

**Recommended websites:**

[www.storymojahayfestival.com](http://www.storymojahayfestival.com)  
[www.swahilihub.com](http://www.swahilihub.com)  
[www.kwani.org](http://www.kwani.org)  
[www.africanwriter.com](http://www.africanwriter.com)  
[www.africanvoices.com](http://www.africanvoices.com)  
[www.african-writing.com](http://www.african-writing.com)  
[www.brittlepaper.com](http://www.brittlepaper.com)  
[www.chimurenga.co.za](http://www.chimurenga.co.za)  
[www.wasafiri.org](http://www.wasafiri.org)  
[www.munyori.com](http://www.munyori.com)  
<http://lagoswriters.blogspot.com>  
[www.startalibrary.org](http://www.startalibrary.org)  
<http://jalada.org>  
[www.literarychronicles.com](http://www.literarychronicles.com)  
[www.worldreader.org](http://www.worldreader.org)  
<http://africacreatives.net>  
[www.jamesmurua.com](http://www.jamesmurua.com)  
[www.joekhamisi.com](http://www.joekhamisi.com)  
<http://joekhamisi.blogspot.com>  
[www.carolinenderitu.com](http://www.carolinenderitu.com)  
[www.ombui.net](http://www.ombui.net)  
[www.wamathai.com](http://www.wamathai.com)  
[www.moraagitaa.com](http://www.moraagitaa.com)  
<http://www.mejamwangi.com>  
[www.alexandernderitu.com](http://www.alexandernderitu.com)  
<http://alexandernderitu.blogspot.com>  
[www.transculturalwriting.com](http://www.transculturalwriting.com)  
[www.wasafiri.org](http://www.wasafiri.org)  
[www.sablelitmag.org](http://www.sablelitmag.org)  
[www.africanwriterstrust.org](http://www.africanwriterstrust.org)  
[www.africanwritersabroad.org.uk](http://www.africanwritersabroad.org.uk)  
<http://www.kenyaliteraturebureau.com>  
<http://www.longhornpublishers.com>  
<http://www.kenyapublishers.org>  
<http://www.nationalbookcouncilkenya.org>  
<http://masterpublishing.wordpress.com>  
<http://www.masterpublishing.co.ke>  
<http://www.africanbookscollective.com>  
<http://www.getfreebooks.com>  
<http://www.africanwriterstrust.org>  
<http://www.africafocus.org>  
<http://kenyanbooks.wordpress.com>  
<http://kenyanpoet.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/books/>  
[www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/other/links/index.html](http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/other/links/index.html)

## WHEN THE WHIRLWIND PASSES

Alexander Nderitu

OH, WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE!

Maggie's encounter with Michael Othaya, the young heir to a multi-billion-shilling fashion empire, marked the beginning of a cataclysmic cycle of events that would involve sex, manipulation, conspiracy...and first-degree murder.

To be sure, the Sultans of Fashion had had their fair share of scandals and intrigues in the past. Overly ambitious and genetically predisposed towards greed, the rich and famous Othayas were no strangers to controversy. But it wasn't until Michael and Maggie - a laundry woman's daughter - started romancing that the feuding family's civil war reached its climax...

Easily digested and written with a handle on humour, *When the Whirlwind Passes* is doubtless one of the best crime novels to ever come out of Africa.

*'Brilliantly written...The story is fast-paced and the characters are built well. This is a book that is guaranteed to keep you seated ...If you can access the book, please do. It will be worth the energy.'* - SATURDAY magazine/Daily Nation

*'Set around a filthy-rich African family, Nderitu weaves a wicked narrative of romance, greed and murder in high society.'* – The Highland Tribune

*'Nderitu certainly harbours a lot of talent.'* - Gitura Mwaura, author of *Portraits of the Heart*

*'A Kenyan novelist in a class of his own.'* – [mmnjug \(arts blogger\)](#)

Available in E-PUB and other e-book versions at [www.alexandernderitu.com](http://www.alexandernderitu.com)

Amazon Kindle version available at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

Now available in paperback at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

## **THE MOON IS MADE OF GREEN CHEESE (and other poems)**

Alexander Nderitu

From a writer who was born on William Shakespeare's birthday comes this delightful collection of poems crafted over several years.

*The Moon is Made of Green Cheese* is a literary safari that will take you from the world's beaches to the depths of the cosmos, from human relationships to the feeding habits of crocodiles, from philosophical thoughts to love in the time of malaria...

Like a great pot of *jambalaya*, there's something here for everyone, and if this anthology doesn't become an instant hit with readers, then the world is upside down and the moon is made of green cheese!

*'Master of prose and poetry'* – The Highland Tribune

Available in E-PUB and other e-book versions at [www.alexandernderitu.com](http://www.alexandernderitu.com)

Available both as a paperback and e-book at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

Amazon Kindle version available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)



**KISS, COMMANDER, PROMISE™  
(And other short stories)**

Alexander Nderitu

In Kenya, an Egyptian defector becomes the focal point of an African Cold War - but is he a player or a pawn in the international game of political chess?

In North Korea, a disillusioned spy plays a cat-and-mouse game against his own secret service...

In Canada, a successful businesswoman must outwit a stalker who has come a little too close for comfort...

In Israel, a secret plan to bioengineer an army of cloned soldiers creates 'the perfect storm' of controversy...

Back in Nairobi, an investigator is called in after an Indian family's wedding plans turn into funeral arrangements...

Elsewhere in Kenya, ripples of alarm begin to spread when a soon-to-be-crowned Nobel laureate goes missing, believed kidnapped...

Meanwhile, a love triangle between a high-strung cop, a naïve writer and a beautiful girl spirals dangerously out of control...

And finally, the Rwandan Genocide is revisited in a heart-rending tale of courage, sacrifice, hatred and fear...

*'Alexander Nderitu's writing flows effortlessly from genre to genre.'* – Mwikali Lati, Business Daily newspaper

Available in E-PUB and other e-book versions at [www.alexandernderitu.com](http://www.alexandernderitu.com)

Available both as a paperback and e-book at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

Amazon Kindle version available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

[Click here for a free preview](#)

## **AFRICA ON MY MIND**

**(Children's fiction)**

Alexander Nderitu

When Lizzie Matu was eight years old, her mother moved to the United States, taking Lizzie and her six-year-old brother, Caleb, with her.

Now, ten years later, Lizzie is back in Kenya! And she can't wait to re-connect with her childhood friends (especially her old classmate, Timothy)! But just like Lizzie, her small home town has changed a lot, flooding her with mixed emotions.

As our Lizzie struggles to achieve her dream of becoming a singer, Africa itself struggles against freak weather and an outbreak of disease.

With vivid descriptions, unflagging sense of humour and every stylistic device in the literary canon, *Africa on My Mind* is a tender story of love brewed in the African pot.

*'A bit of a slow start but it soon turns into a wonderful comedy. Lizzie's driving lessons were the best part!'* – Stan Kiprop, journalist

*'Alexander Nderitu is the face of digital publishing in the country.'* – The Nairobiian

Only available on [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)

## **THE STACY WALKER INTERVIEW (Stage play)**

Written by: Alexander Nderitu

Genre: Romance

Running time: Approx. 1 hr

At the age of only 35, Mike Muriuki is a multi-millionaire with a beautiful wife, two adorable kids, a suburban mansion, a fleet of luxury cars and a private plane.

Stacy Walker (half Kenyan/half English) is a beautiful magazine writer with a secret crush on Mike. Aged 29, she lives with her parents and has a German boyfriend who 'can't even commit to a toothpaste.'

Mike and Stacy's worlds collide one unforgettable evening when Stacy is sent to interview the youthful tycoon. Sparks of attraction start to fly immediately and the line between business and pleasure becomes thinner and thinner as the two are drawn into an illicit affair that could derail both their lives...

*Script available on [www.AlexanderNderitu.com](http://www.AlexanderNderitu.com)*

**YUPPIES! (Stage play) <sup>212</sup>**

Written by: Alexander Nderitu

Genre: Comedy

Running time: Approx. 1 hr

*'A secretary once shredded important documents instead of photocopying them. I swear that girl had a million-dollar body and a ten-cent brain!...I hope she went to work for one of my competitors.'* – Chris

In the world of finance and investments, Chris - young Kenyan businessman - is 'a giant among insects'. But when it comes to matters of the heart, he's a dunderhead. The surprise engagement of two of his employees precipitates an encounter with his diva-licious ex-wife, Yolanda, and sets the stage for scenes that are by turns comic and tender!

Written by a guy who was born on William Shakespeare's birthday, the smart money is on this play becoming a hit!

Script available on [www.AlexanderNderitu.com](http://www.AlexanderNderitu.com)

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<sup>212</sup> Formerly 'The Smartest Guy in the Boardroom'

## **WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE? (Stage play)**

Written by: Alexander Nderitu

Genre: Comedy

Running time: Approx. 1 hr

Meet Jack Lloyd, a British-born film director teetering on the brink of a personal crisis. His flashy wife is dating a younger man, his teenage daughter has puberty issues and his latter films are as unpopular as second-hand underwear. At all events, Lloyd's life is 'flying apart at the seams'.

But this is a comedy and we're at the movies so put on your happy face and get ready to meet Lloyd's wild bunch of workmates as well: philandering French film producer Jean-Pierre Paquito, heart-throb Ronnie Hunk, weepy Production Assistant Anne and a cast of cranky actors.

Written in the best tradition of humourist S. J. Perelman, *What's Wrong With This Picture?* Shows why there is no business like show business and no writer like Alexander Nderitu!

Script available on [www.AlexanderNderitu.com](http://www.AlexanderNderitu.com)

## HANNAH AND THE ANGEL (Stage play)

Written by: Alexander Nderitu

Genre: Comedy

Running time: Approx. 1 hr 30 mins

*'Because you have made the Lord your refuge...He will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'* - Psalms 91: 9 – 12

When Hannah, an adorable teenage girl, is visited by an angel, she thinks that her hip-hop-obsessed friend, Jack, is playing a trick on her. But the winged visitor turns out to be “the real deal... an angel from Heaven.”

It turns out that these ‘winged messengers of God’ are just as flawed - and humorous! – as mortal humans, and through her encounter, Hannah learns the virtue of tolerance and importance of forgiveness (and I almost said “The Importance of Being Earnest!”<sup>213</sup>)

*Hannah and the Angel* is a play for people of all religions. It's a morality tale about the complexity of human relations, the struggle between the young and the old and the duel between good and evil. It's a sunbeam for a world made chaotic by human imperfections. It's like being touched by an angel.

*'Nderitu is his own competition...Nobody even comes close.'* – A.C.T Theatre Group

Script available on [www.AlexanderNderitu.com](http://www.AlexanderNderitu.com)

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<sup>213</sup> Title of a stage play by Oscar Wilde

