

THE AFRICAN GRIOT

Issue no. 5 | October 2026

REVIEW

Mega Literary
Events

Steve Gold Wins
Alexander Nderitu
Prize

Lessons From
the London Book
Fair

AkooBooks at
Frankfurt and
Sharjah

Hallyu versus
Hollywood

Voices from
Malawi

Njabulo Ndebele
Feted at Time of
the Writer

African And European
Poets Bond at
Asian Lit Fest

Literary Festivals & Book Fairs

Koffi Olomide's
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The Polygamist miniseries
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EDITORIAL

If Jonasi from the hit Netflix series *The Polygamist* were to read this latest issue of Africa's five-star literary magazine, he would probably describe it as the equivalent of an '11-course meal!'

Speaking of *The Polygamist*, there's an insightful review of the Sue Nyathi novel adaptation, written by our South Sudanese correspondent, **Gai Manoah**. Other contributors to this issue, which is themed around literary festivals and book fairs, include: **Chifuniro E. Banda**, **Ciku Kimani-Mwaniki**, **Ama Dadson**, **Mildred Achoch**, and **Deborah Auko**. To top it all off, the cover model is none other than **Nahida Esmail**, from Tanzania – an award-winning children's and young adult fiction writer.

Literary festivals are like multicultural weddings – shot through with pomp and fanfare. Book fairs are the jet engines of the publishing industry – driving sales and connecting agents, publishers, and booksellers. But what is it like to attend these events around the world? You'll find the answer between these pages, from eyewitness accounts. One of the events covered is The Asian Literary Festival, which debuted in Africa this year.

Congratulations to **Steve Gold** for winning the second Alexander Nderitu Prize for Literature! His winning entry, *Bella Napoli*, appears on Pg. 28 in its entirety. Congratulations are also in order for South Africa's **Professor Njabulo Ndebele** and **Jamir Nazir**, as detailed in the News section.

In the Reviews section, we examine *GOAT Intemporel* album. Can the old lion still roar? We also analyze K-pop/dramas and learn a new term - 'noona romance'.

All the regular columns are intact – from Poetry to Quotes to in-depth articles from around Africa and her Diaspora.

Enjoy the multi-course meal!

As always, we're also open to receiving content from you, pertaining to arts and culture in Africa and her Diaspora. You may send in **articles, poems, artwork, photographs, short stories** or **press releases** addressed to The Editor.

- *Alexander Nderitu*,
Editor-in-Chief



Alexander Nderitu

ARTICLES

Mega Literary Events



Opening of the Frankfurt Book Fair at the Congress Centre in Germany. (Photo: Frankfurter Buchmesse / Marc Jacquemin)

Literary festivals and book fairs were imported into Africa from Europe. Most such events are relatively new and there is no fixed number of them. Some African festival founders got the concept after attending similar events abroad, while others were inspired by the successful literary extravaganzas (such as the Zimbabwe International Book Fair) or heard about them through the media. (Literary ‘salons’ and ‘book clubs’ are also gaining currency across the continent, chiefly in middle-class social setups.)

While both the Frankfurt (Germany) and the Jaipur (India) book fairs have been billed ‘the world’s biggest lit fest’, some statistics indicate that the Buenos Aires International Book Fair (Argentina) carries the candle, with over a million guests per year (mostly children) in attendance, as opposed to about a quarter million for the previous two.

'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)

It is also said that Buenos Aires has more bookshops per square mile than any other town in the world and is therefore, *de facto*, ‘The World’s Bookstore Capital.’ According to Wander-Argentina.com:

‘This annual celebration of the literary universe (the Buenos Aires International Book Fair) and its purveyors is the Spanish-speaking world’s largest book fair. Inside the 45,000 square meters of Palermo’s Argentine Rural Society unfolds a city of books with author signings, conferences, discussions and lectures. The book fair has flourished since its founding in 1975 – today it hosts over 1.2 million visitors and 1,500 expositors from 50 countries. Book readings and special presentations take place in La Rural’s ten different auditoriums.’

However, according to Hannah Johnson in an article titled ‘Apply Now for the Frankfurt Book Fair Fellowship Programme’, Frankfurter Buchmesse still reigns supreme:

‘The Frankfurt Book Fair is the biggest book and media fair in the world – with around 7,500 exhibitors from over 110 countries. It also organises the participation of German publishers at around 20 international book fairs. It maintains the most visited website worldwide for the publishing industry at www.book-fair.com and its directory of decision-makers in the book and media industries features around 31,000 contacts. Frankfurt SPARKS, the Frankfurt Book Fair’s digital initiative, unites the industry’s digital products and projects under one roof, with the aim of bringing together contents and technology. The Frankfurt Book Fair is a subsidiary of the German Publishers & Booksellers Association.’



*The Ebrengast Pavillion at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2025.
(Photo: Frankfurter Buchmesse / Ingo Hattendorf)*



*Outside the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2025.
(Photo: Frankfurter Buchmesse / Anett Weirauch)*

Closer home, the Cairo International Book Fair is the largest and oldest book fair in the Arab world, held every year in the last week of January in Egypt, in Madinat Nasr. It is organized by the General Egyptian Book Organisation.



'I am very lucky I travelled a lot for the book but I think in my mind I never saw a book fair as big as here. It's really impressive to see how people like books here. We have to come here. It seems to be a very particular experience, especially for European writers.'
- French author David Foenkonos, at the 2014 Hong Kong Book Fair

Black Books in Berlin

From April 26th to April 28th 2018, Berlin played host to a new African-inclined literature festival themed *Writing in Migration*. The event was curated by Nigerian-German writer [Olumide Popoola](#) and included no less than 37 different writers and artists from various African countries and backgrounds. Olumide Popoola (*When We Speak of Nothing*, Cassava Republic Press) has a PhD in Creative Writing and in addition to lecturing on the subject has published essays, poetry and fiction. Other [writers at the event](#) included **Chris Abani** (Nigeria), **Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi** (Uganda), **Musa Okwonga** (UK/Uganda), **Zukiswa Wanner** (SA), **Yvonne Owuor** (Kenya), **Helon Habila** (Nigeria), **Mukoma wa Ngũgi** (Kenya), **Bernadino Evaristo** (UK/Nigeria), **Niq Mhlongo** (SA), **Abdilatif Abdalla** (Kenya), **Chinelo Okparanta** (Nigeria), **Elnathan John** (Nigeria), **Ayòbámi Adébáyò** (Nigeria) and **Minna Salami** (Finland/Nigeria).

According to [a statement on the organizers' website](#):

'In April 2018, InterKontinental presents for the first time a literary festival with and by African writers in Berlin. Curated by the German-Nigerian author Olumide Popoola the festival looks at transnationalism and migration in a more literary sense of 'keeping in motion'.

For three days and with the help of fiction, poetry, lectures and panel discussions African reality of life will be focused on. How do writers from Africa or the diaspora negotiate the changes that come with displacement, forced or chosen? How do writers approach the constant flux of place, and identity? Are they still bound by tradition or being truthful to notions of an 'African Identity'?

***Writing in Migration* brings authors from three continents to Berlin whose books are literary visions and trendsetters all over the world. Together with curator Olumide Popoola they encourage their audience: Read Outside The Box.'**

The event was the brainchild of a German agency known as [InterKontinental](#). The agency's clients include **Clementine Burnley** (UK/Cameroon), **Jude Dibia**

(Nigeria), **Mouhamadou Falilou Dioum** (Senegal), **Linda Gabriel** (Zimbabwe), **Elnathan John** (Nigeria) and **Musa Okwonga** (Uganda).

In a [Deutsche Welle TV](#) interview preceding the event, the host asked Prof. Mukoma wa Ngũgi, 'You have lived in Kenya as well as the United States so what are you? Are you an American? Are you an African? Again, how does that play into your writing?' Mukoma's response:

'I would say I am many things. I have multiple identities. I claim both the US and Kenya as home and I believe that I have a duty to love both and to be critical and to try and grow both. Certainly, it has influenced my writing. *Nairobi Heat* has an African-American detective who goes to Kenya in search of his identity. In most of my writing, you will find that sort of, uh, I guess migrations, people in search of who they are...I am an African writer, but if you allow African writers to be many things, you know, then an African writer is somebody other African writers consider to be an African writer. It's a roundabout way of saying that let African writers be many things, have multiple identities, and the same thing with African literature.'

Berlin continues to host Afro-centric lit fests.

In 2026, [InterKontinental](#) curated the African Book Festival Berlin under the theme, "Welcome to the Club". The event took place from 29 – 31 May. The invited speakers included **A. Igoni Barrett**, **Amat Levin**, **Ana Lucão Mvangi**, **Bisi Alimi**, **Chiniy Udeani**, **Dudu Busani-Dube**, **Edna Bonhomme**, **Edwige-Renée Dro**, **Faheem Hemboum**, **Fatin Abbas**, **Fikri Anil Altıntaş**, **Hemley Boum**, **Ifeatu Nnaobi**, **Janne Bierwirth**, **JJ Bola**, **Karen Jennings**, **Meret Weber**, **Nadège Kusanika**, **Nick Makoha**, **Otis Mensah**, **Stella Gaitano**, **Tete Loeper**, **Troy Onyango**, and **Vamba Sherif**. Featured books over the weekend included: *Ghost Season* by Fatin Abbas, *Edo's Souls* by Stella Gaitano, *The New Carthaginians* by Nick Makoha, *Unter derselben Sonne* by Nadège Kusanika, *For What Are Butterflies Without Their Wings* by Troy Onyango, *The Blue House* by Dudu Busani Dube, *Black History* by Amat Levin and *The Selfless Act of Breathing* by JJ Bola.



Some scenes from the 2026 African Book Festival Berlin.
(Photo credits: abfberlin)

Elsewhere, [VisitBerlin](#) announced an “African Book Tour” series that would bring five authors to Berlin’s libraries for public readings. The summer programme is scheduled to last from June through October 2026.



The Tour is the brainchild of **Georgina Fakunmoju**; a journalist, presenter, and host of the “Readers Gonna Read” podcast. She said:

“The literary scene of the African continent is largely unknown to us. A love story from Mali? A thriller from Nigeria? Or a fantasy novel from Botswana? All of these exist, but they are books that are hard to find in bookstores or that catch our eye first in the library. A glaring omission! That has to change.”

Themed “5 Countries. 5 Voices. 5 Stories,” the series focuses on the five major regions of the continent - North Africa, East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, and South Africa - and dedicates a separate reading event to each. The guests are authors of African descent who live in Germany and have written a book available in German. In addition to the authors’ own books, the moderated readings will also explore the storytelling traditions of their respective African regions. 🐘

Lessons From the London Book Fair by Ciku Kimani-Mwaniki

The London Book Fair (LBF) is an annual event that takes place in the West End of London at the famous Olympia London venue. It is one of the main international market places for the publishing world that brings together all publishing stakeholders from every corner of the world. Being in the book world, I knew of the LBF, but it always felt like one of those out of reach things you do not spend time dreaming about.

However, earlier in the year I found myself more than dreaming about it. My publisher, Mvua Press, asked if I wanted to accompany the management to the event. I agreed although I was a little nervous about what my role there would be. I attempted to dig deeper into what exactly happens there, but even before I warmed up to my seat, I decided it would be better if I went in with all my innocence. I wanted to have no expectations. Rather, I would let it unravel itself to me.

Then I strutted in that first day, bearing my prepaid ticket that needed to be scanned. “Are you here for the event?” That question was asked by one security personnel as she checked my bag and gave my entry badge a keen look. I answered in the affirmative, for a moment wondering why she did not ask the same question to anyone else on the queue. Then again, perhaps they were just being chatty, with me? But I only needed to step into the hall to sort of understand why she picked me for the question.

When years ago, I lived in London. I was used to being in the minority race. The United Kingdom is white man’s land and it is only natural that white people outnumber other races. And yet, when I was swallowed by the mega structure that is the Olympia, I felt overwhelmed by the whiteness of it.

I can explain: The LBF is an international annual event targeting publishing stakeholders. All, except the consumer since there are no book sales. Publishers, printers, translators, agents, journalists and authors (not many) come together to know one another and possibly cut deals. Now, consider that Africa has over fifty countries. Also, assume that each of these countries has at least one publishing house - you would expect to find at least fifty Africans in the event. Or representatives.

On that first day, there were only two Africans. Me, and **Mercy Kirui** who worked for my publishing house. On Day Two, I joked with Mercy and told her that my mission would be to find black people. I toured the hall and found two black people, that made four because of Mercy and I. My curiosity got me introducing myself to the other two. One was Caribbean, and the other one was Black British. On day three, I met two Nigerians.

**'I joked with Mercy
and told her that my mission
would be to find black
people.'**

By day three, however, I had accepted that fate of numbers, and I focused more on soaking in the vibrant atmosphere. There were hundreds of stands, different countries, different publishing houses, displaying their works, giving talks, holding demonstrations. I admit that I spent more time at the China run stands because they gave the best talks and demonstrations.

My claim of less than ten people at the LBF is not a fact because with a venue that can hold as many as ten thousand people at a go, it is impossible to see everyone. With over thirty thousand tickets sold for the course of the event, I cannot claim to have seen everybody, considering that I only went in between ten in the morning and five in the evening, with a lunch break in between.

I also cannot claim that there were no people from other races representing African because indeed, our group had two Americans representing an African publishing house. What I was more bothered about was the absence of a significant number of black faces.

It felt like an illustration of how far behind Africa is in publishing. How little a share of this huge cake we are having. Granted, attending, which includes flight, accommodation, food and tickets is an expensive venture, but I refuse to believe that there is no publishing house that could afford that for at least one representative. The stakes are too high and Africa

cannot afford to be invisible. The power houses of publishing, the movers and the shakers, people you would otherwise never be able to casually meet or even make appointments to meet in their offices, mingle and talk business and make deals and promises. That Africa is missing such grand opportunities looks like self-sabotage.

'It felt like an illustration of how far behind Africa is in publishing.'

Our African stories hardly ever make it outside Africa to non-African audiences. Even those that have, like **Chimamanda**, have been enabled by foreign publishers. Being at the LBF, being in the presence of CEOs of the largest publishing farms, talking to them and answering questions, meeting agents and publishers and feeling their curiosity, I had no doubt that it is not because we are not writing good stories worthy of international audiences, it is because we are just not doing enough. We are not reaching out enough. We need them more than they need us, and sitting in our countries' cocoons does not count as reaching out to the international market.

Will Clurman, the CEO of Mvua Press (my publisher), likes saying that the next big African book needs to first become a best seller in Africa before it crosses oceans. It also needs to be spearheaded by an African publishing house. This can only be done by learning from experts, by listening to their success stories, by discussing collaborations, and that is why events like the LBF exist.

Africans, the LBF taught me, need to stand up higher to be counted. 🐘



Ciku Kimani-Mwaniki, also known as **The Cocktail Empress**, is a Kenyan author and journalist. Ciku has been writing for newspapers since 2004 when she lived in London. Only in 2014 did she venture into books and become one of the pioneers of self-publishing in Kenya, but has since signed a deal with Mvua Press, a publishing house based in Kenya. Ciku's first four books, *Nairobi Cocktail*, *Immigrant Cocktail*, *Cocktail From The Savannah* and *A Cocktail of Unlikely Tales* (a collection of eight novellas) are purely romance, but she is known to avoid the good-girl-good-boy next door type of romance and chooses to focus on the so-called pariahs of the society, especially those dealing with childhood traumas. Her latest book, *Nairobi Cocktail*, is a romance/crime novel that delves into love lives of hardcore criminals.

African And European Poets Bond at New Lit Fest



Kenyan actress and performance poet Viny Kabz (centre) flanked by musician and Café Europa Director. (Photo: ALF Media)

On the evening of 29th May 2026, over thirty African poets and musicians performed in a high-energy three-hour show alongside five performance poets from Poland at Eugenia Park, off the Thika Superhighway. The intercultural event was part of the inaugural Asian Literary Festival in Nairobi, which took place on 28th, 29th, and 30th May.

The African performers who took part in the live-music-backed show included **Griffins Ndhine**, **Caitline Shibo**, **Kevin ‘KNAMICS’ Lukachi**, **Alexander Nderitu**, **Raya Wambui**, **Onyango “Rixpoet” Otieno**, **Nahida Esmail**, **Carolyne ‘Afroetry’ Acen**, **Michel Ongaro**, **Vivy Kabz**, **Mae Kikete**, and **Collins Mosigisi**. The Polish delegation consisted of **Katarzyna Szweda**, **Julia Fiedorczuk**, **Jakub Pszoniak**, **Mikołaj Poncyljusz**, and **Weronika Czyżewska-Poncyljusz**.

At the National Theatre, Café Europa met and bonded with members of a long-running poetry forum dubbed Poetry After Lunch (PAL), which meets every Thursday. The European and African poets quickly bonded and, at one point, engaged in a ‘cultural exchange of names’. The visitors were assigned the names Nekesa, Otis, Shiku, and Kinuthia. They, in turn, gave Polish names to various audience members.

Ahead of their first-ever visit to Kenya, the Polish artistes, who are part of a travelling performing poets ensemble called Café Europa, had published the poems of twelve African poets who were to perform with them on stage. However, having arrived in the country a couple of days prior to the event, they discovered more artistes who were then incorporated into the program.



Café Europa interacting with writers and performers during their first African tour.

Speaking at the monthly AMKA Literature Forum on Saturday, 29th May, Weronika Czyżewska-Poncyłjusz, the Director of Café Europa said:

'I found poetry everywhere here (in Nairobi) and art. We had this amazing experience in a meeting in the National Theatre, with slammers. That's why the Café Europa evening (performance) grew so much! Because we just met amazing people there. And whomever we spoke to was somehow engaged in the field of words or music or performance. For me, this was an experience of huge richness.'

At the AMKA Forum, based at the Goethe-Institut in uptown Nairobi, co-host **Mũthoni wa Gichurũ** asked: 'So, how did you end up in Kenya?' Weronika (pronounced 'Veronika') replied:

'It started with a meeting...in Sri Lanka. We met with a Sri Lankan poet and writer, Pramudith Rupasinghe...and when he said he has this platform called the Asian Literary Festival, and for him Café Europa is something that should be part of it, we thought, "Why not? Of course." And since then, we have been trying to build a network of people who think like us. And here in Nairobi, Alexander Nderitu, who is the organizer of the Asian Literary Festival in Kenya, was open enough, courageous enough, to invite us. And we, of course, said, "Yes."'

'I found poetry everywhere here (in Nairobi) and art...And whomever we spoke to was somehow engaged in the field of words or music or performance. For me, this was an experience of huge richness.' – Weronika Czyżewska-Poncyłjusz, Director of Café Europa.

Weronika made no secret of the fact that they thoroughly enjoyed their visit and would like to return for even more cross-cultural collaborations:

'We had an amazing event here in Nairobi. So now, it's not only Café Europa, it's actually "Café Europa Africa". Which is in itself creating a new quality...My dream would be to, of course, come back here next year and have more poets involved in Café Europa with us. Maybe more events but also translations, co-operations (sic), other projects growing after it. Because, actually, that's the only way to make our encounter matter.'



*Pramudith D. Rupasinghe,
founder of The Asian Literary Festival*

The Asian Literary Festival is an international literary and cultural movement founded by Sri Lankan novelist **Pramudith D. Rupasinghe**. It is the flagship initiative of The Asian Group of Literature, a global social enterprise comprised of festivals, publishing, prizes, a literary agency, a literary magazine, and a house of literature. Previous editions have been held in Brussels, Bhubaneswar, and Gampaha. 🐘

Some scenes from the Café Europa Africa experience, courtesy of ALF Media:



Slam Africa Queen Raya Wambui



Weronika Czyżewska reading from the Café Europa Africa notebook



Famed Ugandan poet Caroline 'Afroetry' Acen



KNAMICS playing his hit song 'Ugali'.



Collins Mosigisi



Visually impaired artiste Michel Ongara brought Stevie Wonder vibes



Nabida Esmail from Tanzania



Caitline Shibo belts out a tune



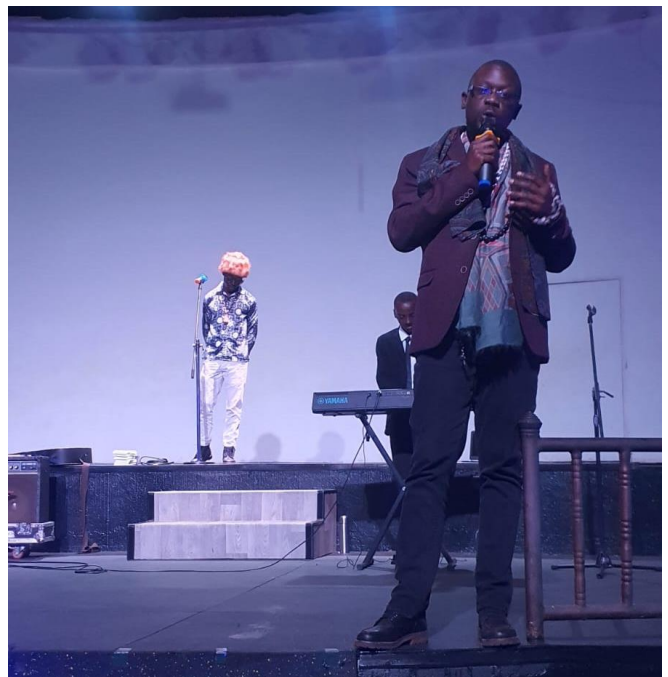
Katarzyna Szveda from Poland reading poetry on stage. She was assigned the name 'Nekesa' (which means 'born during the harvest time') by Kenyan poets.



Jakub Pszoniak performing in Polish and English.



Eric "Rixpoet" Otieno, co-founder of Fatuma's Voice poetry showcase



Kenyan Poetry Slam Champion Kikete F.M.



*Griffins 'The Beast'
Ndhine*



Kenyan novelist and poet Wanjiru Thuku



*Maestro Mikolaj Poncylnus adds a jazz-rock element to the
proceedings.*



Polish writer and poet Julia Fiedorczuk

4

**The number of languages utilized during the Café Europa
Africa session: Polish, English, Kiswahili, and Gikuyu.**

‘Mawu a ku Malawi’ - Voices from Malawi by Chifuniro E. Banda



A cross-section of attendees at the MAWU Indaba. (Photo: C.E. Banda)

Malawi's literary journey is one of resilience, creativity, and the persistent pursuit of a reading culture against formidable odds. From the mid-1990s, when literacy levels were so low, to the present, the country has steadily built a network of writers, publishers, and readers determined to make literature an accessible, living part of Malawian society. In the early 1990s, the Book Publishers Association of Malawi (BPAM) coordinated the fragmented publishing sector, promoting literacy and bringing books closer to schools. These school-based book fairs provided learners with reading materials, encouraged poetry recitation and performances, and fostered the limited reading culture that existed in urban centres.

From School Fairs to National Festivals

Yet these early efforts often bypassed some section of learners and readers. Large portions of the population

remained excluded from robust reading habits. Economic fragility in the publishing sector further limited growth: low book sales, minimal returns for authors, and high costs for reaching rural communities constrained literature beyond urban elites.

“Mawu” is a Chewa word meaning words or voice. In this context, “Mawu a ku Malawi” translates to Voices from Malawi. The term has been deliberately retained in its local form—Chewa, which is both an official and widely spoken language in Malawi—because it also serves as an acronym for the Malawi Writers Union (MAWU), the organization that hosted this year’s National Book Fair in Blantyre, Malawi.

That's when public literary festivals began to change this narrative. The Feminart Arts and Book Festival in Lilongwe in November 2019, brought together readers, writers, and cultural enthusiasts, highlighting literature's role as both a mirror of society and a conduit for ideas. These festivals offered glimpses of what a national reading culture could look like, emphasizing participation, creativity, and inclusivity.

There have been few other similar book festivals, like the Zomba Book Festival early October 2025. But worth highlighting is the recently dubbed MAWU@30 Festival which took place in Blantyre on 31 October and 1 November 2025. The festival coincided with the Malawi Writers' Union (MAWU) celebration of 30 years of existence.

The book fair at Chichiri Museum, Blantyre, reflected a remarkable transformation. The message was clear - literature is no longer a corner hobby or elite pastime; it has become a social force bridging print and digital media, urban and rural audiences, youth and elders. The fair became a nexus for writers, readers, publishers, and book influencers, demonstrating that literature thrives when tradition and innovation converge.

MAWU: Three Decades of Literary Leadership

MAWU, formed in June 1995, has long championed literacy, author visibility, and publishing professionalism. Its first steps were modest: 23 founding writers gathered at the Old Mutual Auditorium in Blantyre. Through decades, the union has cultivated writers, nurtured talent, and fought for creative freedom. MAWU members have produced more works spanning poetry, research, social critique, and reflective prose, shaping Malawi's national literary discourse.

MAWU@30: A Celebration in Blantyre

The two-day event began on October 31 with a vibrant book fair. Authors, readers, students, and enthusiasts mingled amid a display of literary works: textbooks, short story collections, academic monographs, Malawian poetry, children's literature and hybrid memoirs. Stalls offered books at modest prices, with student discounts and publisher promotions deliberately structured to broaden access.

The fair also accorded chance to students from schools and universities from Blantyre and surrounding districts to interact with the authors who they read in the academics. The fair was more than a spectacle—it was an introduction to the full chain of publishing. The students engaged with authors, asked questions about storytelling, and learned how books reach readers from manuscript to print.

For many, seeing authors whose works had inspired them years earlier, was both a personal and collective affirmation of Malawi's growing literary identity. The notable universities which were represented were from Malawi University of Science and Technology, University of Malawi, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences, Blantyre International University, among others.

Book Publishers, Sellers, and Collaborative Bodies

The MAWU@30 Book Fair, as was expected, featured a vibrant mix of book publishers, sellers, and literary institutions. Participants included CLAIM Mabuku, Book Publishers Association of Malawi, ACIN Publishers, Mlembe Press & Media, Maneno Bookshop, GrandPen Publication, Bible Society of Malawi, and many others.



Book Fair

Alongside these, key literary associations and professional literary bodies were present, underscoring the importance of collaboration in strengthening Malawi's literary ecosystem. These included the Malawi Union of Academic and Nonfiction Authors, PEN

Malawi, and the Poetry Association of Malawi. Their participation highlighted a critical point: the growth of literacy and the culture of book fairs depend on collaboration.

Seven Books, Seven Stories

The celebrations were punctuated by seven book launches, demonstrating the vibrancy and diversity of Malawian writing. Sylvester Chabuka unveiled *The Married Spinster*, *Innocent Prisoner*, and *Why Marriages Fail: 17 Reasons*, exploring morality, relationships, and social dynamics. Gertrude Nsini introduced her debut *Selina Mtsikana Wolimbikira*, celebrating the resilience of Malawian girls.

Ron Muphuwa launched *Mousetraps and Other Poems*, *Dying Flames: Songs from the Village*, and *Storm of Arrows*, reflecting village life, politics, environmental concerns, and love. The launch signaled not only creative achievement but also an evolving partnership between authors and publishers, demonstrating that Malawi's literary market is increasingly willing to invest beyond textbooks.

The Pan-African Dialogue

The MAWU Indaba on 1st November 2025, at the Golden Peacock Hotel (Blantyre) offered a reflective, scholarly counterpoint to the fair. Facilitated by Dr. Wesley Macheso of the University of Malawi, the forum combined keynotes, panel discussions, and cultural performances. MAWU President Shadreck Chikoti opened with a welcome emphasizing the union's mission to make literature accessible nationwide, followed by Steve Sharra's official opening remarks.

The guest of honour, the Nigerian born, Dr. Wale Okediran who is the Secretary General of the Pan African Writers Association (PAWA), delivered a keynote situating Malawi's literary trajectory within a continental framework, emphasizing literature's role in reflecting society and driving social transformation.

Adding a transnational and diasporic perspective, Associate Professor Stephanie Bosch Santana who is Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Comparative Literature at UCLA presented a paper that captivated participants. Her work focused on African literature in southern Africa—including Malawi, Zambia,

Zimbabwe, and South Africa—exploring how novels, short fiction, digital literature, and popular media traverse genre, language, and space boundaries.

Panel discussions explored the genealogy of Malawian writers, iconic texts, historical milestones, postcolonial migration in literature, and literature's intersection with democracy, censorship, and orature. Founding members, past presidents, publishers, Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA) representatives, and academics reflected on MAWU's impact—from nurturing talent to promoting copyright awareness and international connections.

MAWU@30, although physical, was ardently followed through virtual platforms such as Facebook as well as Google Meet. One thing that came out was that there is a growing role of digital platforms. Young and remote audiences engage with books in ways that extended the fair's reach beyond its physical location.



Attendees listening to paper presentations

Partners in the Literary Journey

Partnerships with institutions such as FDH Bank, COSOMA, and Sycamore Consult Limited were crucial throughout the event. Their financial support affirmed that literature carries both cultural and commercial value, bridging finance, creative expression, and regulation to strengthen Malawi's literary ecosystem. And this is what literary bodies in Africa such as MAWU are looking forward to – for the corporate world to invest in book fairs in countries such as Malawi which is faced by low book reading culture. Such investment rewards authors and publishers as they display their books. They also prepare and inspire the students and visitors – who are the next generations of writers.

Sustaining Malawi's Literary Renaissance

Beyond this year's book fair, MAWU envisions a sustainable literary culture. Within the year, the body had workshops in neighboring Zambia, short story competitions targeting secondary school students and emerging writers, and efforts to integrate digital platforms with traditional publishing. Future plans include local language publishing grants, rural outreach tours, and mentorship programs linking new writers with established authors. These strategies aim to transform book fairs from isolated annual events into catalysts for sustained engagement and national literacy.

Malawi Writing Back into Africa

The MAWU@30 celebrations, and book fair in particular, were more than a commemoration—they were a statement of Malawi's place in Africa's literary landscape. The bringing in together of the past presidents reinforced continuity, legacy, and mentorship. MAWU has nurtured talent, advocated for creative freedom, and positioned Malawi within the continental literary conversation.

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

The journey is far from complete. Literacy gaps, distribution challenges, and underrepresentation of local languages remain obstacles. Yet MAWU's 30-year trajectory offers hope: with strategic partnerships, inclusive outreach, digital integration, and a sustained commitment to nurturing talent, Malawi's literary ecosystem can flourish, contributing to cultural, social, and economic transformation across the continent. So, the MAWU@30 book fair was not merely a retrospective; it was a forward-looking affirmation of Malawi's literary renaissance. It celebrated past achievements, showcased present talent, and ignited imagination for future generations. As African writers, readers, and cultural enthusiasts, the Pan-African community can look to Malawi's experience as a model of how resilience, collaboration, and vision can turn book fairs from occasional gatherings into engines of creativity, literacy, and continental dialogue.

At Chichiri Museum, we did not only see and leave artifacts. The MAWU@30 book fair, was a nudge to the society struggling with book reading culture to wake up, read, reflect, and participate in shaping the future of African letters.



Chifuniro E. Banda is a Malawian writer, poet, musician, and public speaker whose works explore spirituality, love, social justice, and human resilience. He is the author of *DISTORTED – What They Did Not Say About Marriage* (Montfort Media, 2023) and *Violet – The Flower That Faded When I Needed It* (Montfort Media, 2025). Banda has been featured in *The Nation* and *The Daily Times* since 2010. Through his *Maloto Anga Education Initiative*, he promotes rural education in Salima (Malawi). His 2021 album *Maloto Anga* and his writings affirm his belief in art as a tool for healing and social change.

AkooBooks Audio at Frankfurt and Sharjah by Ama Dadson



The Sharjah International Publishers Conference

Last year, I had the extraordinary opportunity to represent AkooBooks Audio at two of the world's most influential book fairs: the Frankfurt Book Fair (Oct 14–19) and the Sharjah International Publishers Conference. Both experiences offered a chance to share African audiobooks with international audiences, connect with inspiring authors and publishers, and explore partnerships that will help bring African voices to the world.

Frankfurt Book Fair 2025

Arriving in Frankfurt, I felt a mix of excitement and anticipation. Seeing our stand (Hall 3.1, K17) as the 2025 FBM Audio Ambassador, with the AkooBooks branding and platform demos was a rewarding start. Seeing the first visitors engage with our displays reminded me of why we do this work—showcasing stories that celebrate African cultures and languages. Two of the highlights were participating in a panel discussion on 'Women Publishing the Future: Voices from Emerging Markets', organized by PublisHer and it was an honour to deliver the keynote, "Beyond the Page: How African Innovators Are Reimagining Publishing" at the International Digital Publishing Awards.

It was exhilarating to discuss the potential of African literature on a global stage and to hear firsthand the interest in indigenous-language content. Over the following days, I met with authors for upcoming audiobook projects and explored opportunities to adapt works. Each conversation reinforced the value of connecting storytelling with innovative distribution methods. I also dedicated time to demonstrate the AkooBooks platform and gather insights about audiobook consumption trends in Europe. The interest in African-language audiobooks was palpable, confirming our commitment to multilingual and culturally relevant content. As the fair closed, I left with a robust list of leads, promising partnerships, and new ideas for growing AkooBooks globally.

Sharjah International Book Fair 2025

Sharjah offered a different but equally rewarding experience. Our goal was to reach African publishers and showcase AkooBooks' digital-first approach to publishing. During panels and one-on-one meetings, I shared AkooBooks' approach to creating community-supported content. Publishers and tech partners were particularly interested in our multilingual capabilities, which they saw as a bridge for cross-cultural

collaborations. The conversations here emphasized the universality of storytelling and the appetite for African literature beyond our continent.

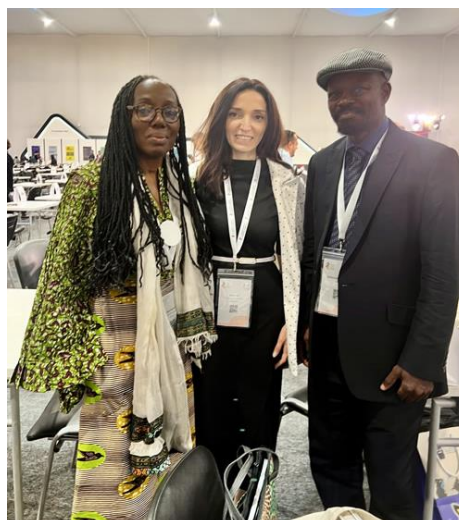
Reflections

Participating in both fairs reminded me of the immense appetite for African stories. Global audiences are increasingly eager to explore content in local languages and culturally authentic narratives, and AkooBooks is uniquely positioned to meet that demand.

These experiences not only expanded our network of potential partners but also provided invaluable insights into audience behavior, digital content trends, and the kinds of stories that resonate internationally. As we move forward, I am excited to build on these experiences, expanding our multilingual audiobook offerings, nurturing partnerships for content licensing and co-productions, and continuing to champion African voices in every corner of the globe.



Some scenes from the two events:



***Ama Dadson** is the Founder & Chief Executive Officer of AkooBooks Audio, a leading Ghanaian digital publishing company producing and distributing Black/ African audiobooks and eBooks globally. She served as Audio Ambassador for the 2025 Frankfurt Book Fair and works to advance access to African literature through digital innovation and international collaboration.*

Publish with AkooBooks: Your Voice, Wider Reach

Unlock New Revenue Streams and Connect with Readers Across Africa.

New Revenue Streams: Earn from audiobook and eBook sales through our app, website, & partner platforms.

Marketing Support: Benefit from our curated promotions, podcast features, and social media campaigns.

Wider Reach: Connect your titles to new audiences in Ghana and across Africa, including schools, libraries, and mobile readers.



Data & Transparency: Access detailed sales reports and performance analytics through our upcoming Publishers Portal.

Secure Distribution: All content is protected with enterprise-level DRM, ensuring copyright and royalty security.

Flexible Terms: Agreements can be **exclusive** or **non-exclusive**, allowing you to continue using existing platforms.

Favorable Revenue Share: We operate on a 50/50 - 70/30 split in favour of the rights holder (based on net receipts).

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The Sharjah Publishers Conference by Mercy Kirui



Mercy (far left) with International Publishers Association President, Gvantsa Jobava.

Held every November in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, the Sharjah Publishers Conference is one of the most influential gatherings in the global publishing calendar. Organised by the Sharjah Book Authority, it coincides with the Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF), a 12-day cultural festival that attracts industry leaders, authors, and readers from around the world.

Having attended the conference for the last two years, I have found it to be a dynamic space where knowledge exchange and rights trading seamlessly converge. The programme blends rights meetings with high-quality training sessions delivered by partners such as New York University (NYU), offering insights into global

publishing trends.

One of the most impactful aspects of the conference is its growing engagement with African publishers. In 2025 alone, more than 80 publishers from across the continent participated, reflecting Sharjah's commitment to strengthening global south collaboration.

The Sharjah Book Authority's invitation programme - offering tiered packages, including a full hospitality option covering flights, accommodation and transfers—has played a significant role in enabling wider participation.



Some scenes from the 2025 Sharjah Publishers Conference:



*Kenya Publishers Association (KPA), African Publishers Network) and publishing professionals from Africa with Her Highness Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi (middle).
(Photo credit: Sharjah Book Authority)*



Mercy Kirui (extreme right), with publishers from Rwanda and Nigeria.



A rights meeting with an international publisher.



NYU training session led by CEO Emeritus Penguin Random House, Markus Dohle.

Mercy Kirui is the CEO and Co-Founder of Tai AfroPress Ltd, a hybrid publishing and rights agency based in Nairobi, Kenya. Tai AfroPress champions outstanding stories from independent authors and represents them in global markets. Mercy also serves as a Children's and Young Adult Rights Agent at the African Literary Agency in Amsterdam, advancing African narratives internationally. A recognised voice in the international publishing ecosystem, Mercy was shortlisted for the 2025 PubliHer Excellence Award for her leadership and commitment to inclusive publishing. She has participated in several prestigious global fellowships, including the Frankfurt Publishing Fellowship, the Istanbul Publishers Fellowship Program, the Bologna Book Plus Invitation Program and the Beijing International Book Fair Global South Fellowship.

African Literary Festivals and Book Fairs

Major African-based or Afrocentric lit festivals and book fairs include:

- Pa Gya! Festival (Ghana)
- Festival International de Littérature de Dakar (Sénégal)
- Black British Book Festival (UK)
- [Macondo Literary Festival](#) (Kenya)
- Quramo Festival of Words (Nigeria)
- Time of the Writer Festival (South Africa)
- Open Book Festival (South Africa)
- Hargeysa International Book Fair (Somalia/Somaliland)
- Salon du Livre Africain de Paris (France)
- Asian Literary Festival – Nairobi (Kenya)
- Soma Nami African Book Fair (Kenya)
- Africa Writes festival (UK)
- [Port Harcourt Literary Festival](#) (Nigeria)
- International Book Fair of Ouagadougou (Nigeria)
- [Ake Arts & Books Festival](#) (Nigeria)
- Lagos Arts and Book Festival (Nigeria)
- Enugu Regional Book Fair (Nigeria)
- [Abuja Literary Festival](#) (Nigeria)
- Kaduna Book & Arts Festival (Nigeria)
- [Nigeria International Book Fair](#) (Nigeria)
- Numbi Arts/Sable Literary Festival (Gambia)
- Ba re e ne re literary Festival (Lesotho)
- [Zimbabwe International Book Fair](#) (Zimbabwe)
- LitFest Harare (Zimbabwe)
- Bulawayo Book Fair (Zimbabwe)
- [Franschhoek Literary Festival](#)
- [Mogadishu International Book Fair](#) (Somalia)
- [Abantu Book Festival](#) (SA)
- [South African Book Fair](#) (SA)
- [Open Book Festival](#) (SA)
- [Abantu Book Festival](#) (SA)
- [Knysna Literary Festival](#) (SA)
- [Umthatha Word Festival](#) (SA)
- Jozi Book Fair (SA)
- [Jozi's Books & Blogs Festival](#) (SA)
- Rutanang Book Fair (SA)
- South African Book Fair (SA)
- [The Writivism Festival](#) (Uganda)
- BN Poetry Festival (Uganda)
- [Cairo Literature Festival](#) (Egypt)
- Alexandrina International Book Fair (Egypt)
- Casablanca International Book Fair (Morocco)
- Tunis International Book Fair (Tunisia)
- The International Confluences Book Fair Mauritius
- [Ghana International Book Fair](#) (Ghana)
- [Storymoja Festival](#) (Kenya)
- Nairobi International Book Fair (Kenya)
- [Kampala Writers' Festival](#) (Uganda)
- International Book Fair of Algiers (Algeria)
- Khartoum International Book Fair (Sudan)
- [Tilembe Literary Festival](#) (Zambia)
- Kampala Poetry Festival (Uganda)
- Kampala Writes LitFest (Uganda)
- Quramo Festival of Words (Nigeria)

International Literary Festivals and Book Fairs

- Bocas Lit Fest (Trinidad & Tobago)
- Kingston Book Festival (Jamaica)
- Sharjah International Book Fair (UAE)
- Emirates Airline Festival of Literature
- The Beirut International Arab Book Fair (Lebanon)
- [Jaipur Literature Festival](#) (India)
- India World Poetree Festival (India)
- [Brahmaputra Literary Festival](#)
- New Delhi World Book Fair (India)
- International Kolkata Book Fair (India)
- Hong Kong Book Fair (China)
- Shanghai International Book Fair (China)
- Beijing International Book Fair (China)
- [Shanghai International Children's Book Fair](#) (China)
- [Oxford Literary Festival](#) (UK)
- Africa Writes festival (UK)
- Hay Festival (UK)
- London Book Fair (UK)
- [Dinefwr Literature Festival](#) (UK)
- Ilminster Literary Festival (UK)
- Todmorden Book Festival (UK)
- Dublin Book Festival (Ireland)
- [Sydney Writers' Festival](#) (Australia)
- [World Writers' Festival](#) aka Festival des Écrivains du Monde (France)
- [Pen World Voices Festival](#) (USA)
- [Puterbaugh Festival of International Literature & Culture](#) (USA)
- Amherst Lit Festival (USA)
- Brooklyn Book Festival (USA)
- BookExpo America (USA)
- New York Rights Fair (USA)
- [Atlantide Literature Festival](#) (France)
- Göteborg Book Fair (Sweden)
- Poetry International Festival (Netherlands)
- [Beyond Words French Literature Festival](#)
- [Helsinki Lit Fest](#) (Finland)
- [World Festival of Poetry](#)
- The Sharjah Children's Reading Festival (UAE)
- Gweru International Book Festival
- Frankfurt Book Fair (Germany)
- [Bigsas Festival of African and African-Diasporic Literatures](#) (Germany)
- [Kingston Book Festival](#) (Jamaica)
- International Festival of Authors (Canada)
- The Bookworm Literary Festival (China)
- EU-China International Literary Festival (China)
- Singapore Writers Festival (Singapore)
- Buenos Aires Book Fair (Argentina)
- Arab Voices Festival (Abu Dhabi)
- [European Literature Days Festival](#)
- Pula Book Fair (Croatia)
- Buenos Aires International Book Fair (Argentina)
- Sofia International Book Fair (Bulgaria)
- Jeddah International Book Fair (Saudi Arabia)
- Festival International de la Bande Dessinée (France)
- Lahore International Book Fair (Pakistan)
- Casablanca Book Fair (Morocco)
- Feria Internacional del Libro de La Habana (Cuba)
- Taipei International Book Exhibition (Taiwan)
- Perth International Arts Festival (Australia)
- Brussels Book Fair (Belgium)
- Vilnius International Book Fair (Lithuania)
- Riga Book Fair (Latvia)
- Emirates Airline Festival of Literature (UAE)
- Tempo di Libri, Milan (Italy)
- Bologna Children's Book Fair (Italy)
- Più Libri Più Liberi / Rome Book Fair (Italy)
- Turin International Book Fair (Italy)
- [SugarCON Festival](#) (Italy)
- [Chronicae Festival Internazionale del Romanzo Storico](#) (Italy)
- Paris Book Fair (France)
- Leipzig Book Fair (Germany)
- Bangkok International Book Fair (Thailand)
- Quebec International Book Fair (Canada)
- International Festival of Authors (Canada)
- Bogota International Book Fair (Colombia)
- Budapest International Book Festival (Hungary)

- Geneva Book and Press Fair (Switzerland)
- Buenos Aires Book Fair (Argentina)
- Eurasian International Book Fair (Kazakhstan)
- Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (UAE)
- Thessaloniki Book Fair (Greece)
- Strokestown International Poetry Festival (Ireland)
- Teheran International Book Fair (Iran)
- Istanbul Tanpınar Literature Festival (Turkey)
- Prague International Book Fair (Czech Republic)
- Jerusalem International Book Fair (Israel)
- Warsaw International Book Fair (Poland)
- Hay Festival (Wales)
- Madrid Book Fair (Spain)
- Lisbon Book Fair (Portugal)
- Bookfest, Bucharest (Romania)
- Tbilisi International Book Fair (Georgia)
- Seoul International Book Fair (Korea)
- Venezuela International Book Fair (Venezuela)
- Lit Link Festival (Croatia)
- Paraty International Literary Festival (Brazil)
- International Book Fair of Lima (Peru)
- Beijing International Book Fair (China)
- Melbourne Writers Festival (Australia)
- Moscow International Book Fair (Russia)
- Krasnoyarsk Book Culture Fair (Russia)
- Indonesia International Book Fair (Indonesia)
- Lviv International Book and Literature Festival (Ukraine)
- Amman International Book Fair (Jordan)
- Göteborg Book Fair (Sweden)
- Baku Book Fair (Azerbaijan)
- LIBER International Book Fair (Spain)
- International Belgrade Book Fair (Serbia)
- Krakow International Book Fair (Poland)
- Antwerp Book Fair (Belgium)
- Biblotéka Bratislava (Slovakia)
- Vienna International Book Fair (Austria)
- Malta Book Festival, Valletta (Malta)
- International Children and Young Adults Book Fair (Mexico)
- Istanbul Book Fair (Turkey)
- Interliber (Croatia)
- Salon du livre de Montréal (Canada)
- Santiago Book Fair (Chile)
- Sant Jordi Festival (Spain)
- Gaudeamus Book Fair (Bucharest)
- Slovenian Book Fair (Slovenia)
- FIL de Guadalajara (Mexico)
- Moscow Non-Fiction Book Fair (Russia)
- Pula Festival of Books and Authors (Croatia)
- [Tokyo International Literary Festival](#) (Japan)
- [Tokyo International Book Fair](#) (Japan)
- Riga Book Fair
- Thessaloniki Book Fair
- Vilnius Book Fair
- Ubud Writers Fest
- Rutanang Book Fair

POETRY

Fare for the Fair by Chifuniro E. Banda

October. Blantyre.
Voices rising. Pages turning.
Eyes wide. Minds burning.

Schoolyards to the museum,
Students swarm. Books in hand.
Stories in form.

Textbooks. Tales. Poems.
Side by side.
Adventure. Wisdom.
Curiosity amplified.

Chichiri. Njamba.
Young minds explore,
Stories awaken,
Ideas roar.

The fare? Not a ticket.
Not a number.
It is investment.
From government halls,
From corporate hearts,
From schools that guide.

They pay the way.
They fuel the flame.
So books are sold,
Authors are rewarded,
Stories reach hands, hearts, and minds.

Schools open doors.
Students step in.
They read, they learn, they dream.
Tomorrow's writers are born.

Book fairs
Authors meet eyes that once only read.
Poets speak,
Hearts heed.
Stories live twice—
Screen and tangible.
Books launched.
Voices celebrated.
Old and new entwined,
Past and future aligned.

The fare for the fair is the seed.
Investment in imagination.
Inspiration paid forward.
Authors rewarded, students ignited.

Chifuniro Eliazar Banda is the author of the acclaimed books *DISTORTED – What They Did Not Say About Marriage* (2024) and *VIOLET; A Flower That Faded When I Needed It* (2025), both published by Montfort Media. His literary repertoire also includes compelling short stories and poems published in leading Malawian newspapers such as *The Nation* and *The Daily Times*.

FICTION

***Bella Napoli* by Steve Gold**

Characters:

Dr. Ernest Just..... A Scientist
Hedwig..... A Guide

Setting:

The play is set at a railroad station in Naples, Italy. The time is 1934.

(LIGHTS UP ON A SMALL WOODEN BENCH PLACED SLIGHTLY OFF-CENTER STAGE, TOWARD STAGE RIGHT. IT IS JANUARY, 1934, A WEEKDAY MORNING, AT THE NAPLES TRAIN STATION. ERNEST JUST, A THIRTYISH BLACK MAN, IS SEATED AT THE BENCH, DRESSED IN CLOTHES MORE APPROPRIATE FOR A COOLER CLIMATE THAN THE ONE OFFERED BY SOUTHERN ITALY: GRAY SUIT, WHITE SHIRT AND BLACK TIE UNDER A FULLY BUTTONED HEAVY BLACK OVERCOAT. HIS SINGLE PIECE OF LUGGAGE, A LIGHT BROWN SUITCASE, RESTS BESIDES HIM ON THE BENCH. HE IS FIRST SEEN READING A HARD-COVER BOOK, THOUGH HE IS TOO RESTLESS TO PAY ATTENTION. JUST IS A SCIENTIST WHO HAS RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM AMERICA TO DO RESEARCH.

A FEW MOMENTS FOLLOW; HE PLACES THE STILL-OPEN BOOK ON TOP OF THE SUITCASE. HE THEN LOOKS AROUND THE AREA, TRYING TO PICK OUT THE PERSON WHO IS TO MEET HIM AT THE STATION. HIS ATTEMPT UNSUCCESSFUL, HE PICKS UP THE BOOK AND CONTINUES READING.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER, HEDWIG SCHLONDORF APPEARS STAGE RIGHT. IN HER LATE TWENTIES, SHE IS GANGLY AND HAS SHORT BLOND HAIR AND AN OPEN, EAGER EXPRESSION. SHE IS FLUENT IN ENGLISH, WITH A SLIGHT GERMAN ACCENT THAT ADDS TO HER APPEAL. HER CLOTHING IS FUNCTIONAL AND ATTRACTIVE: DARK BLUE DRESS, WHITE KNEE SOCKS AND BLACK WALKING SHOES. UPON ENTERING, SHE STOPS BRIEFLY, GLANCES AT ERNEST, SMILES EXPECTANTLY, THEN APPROACHES HIM AS HE READS HIS BOOK)

Hedwig: Are you Dr. Just?

Ernest (looks up): Yes.

Hedwig: Hedwig Schlondorf...from the Institute.

(ERNEST CLOSES THE BOOK AND PUTS IT ON THE SUITCASE, THEN STANDS)

Ernest (reticent and rigidly proper): I've been waiting.

(SHE OFFERS HER HAND; HE HESITATES)

Hedwig: Not long, I trust.

(HE THEN TAKES HER HAND)

Ernest: No...I, I was taking in the sites.

Hedwig: There's much to take in. How is your Italian?

Ernest: I did some practicing during the voyage.

Hedwig: Most of us speak English at the Institute. (sweet smile) If you need an interpreter, however, my rates are remarkably cheap.

Ernest (humorless): I'll bear that in mind. Shall we go?

Hedwig (embarrassed giggle): I'm afraid we must wait here a bit longer.

Ernest: Is something wrong?

Hedwig: Our driver, Mario, is not available at the present time.

Ernest: Where is he?

Hedwig: He's running a few errands for his wife.

Ernest: He simply left you here?

Hedwig: He asked me if he could go and I said he could. I thought he'd be back by now.

Ernest: **Is** he coming back?

Hedwig: Goodness, yes...at least, I think so...yes, he's definitely coming back...I hope.

Ernest (beat; dubious): Me too.

Hedwig: Please don't hold it against me—or Mario.

Ernest: I'm sure he's a fine fellow...and I'm sure you're a fine...woman.

Hedwig: Mario has a sterling reputation.

Ernest: Does he have a watch?

Hedwig: I never noticed, but he'll be here—rest assured.

Ernest: Very well. I shall rest assured...I have no choice.

Hedwig: The strange thing is, Mario does nothing all day except read the newspaper and eat spaghetti. But everyone likes him.

Ernest: He doesn't seem to be very efficient.

Hedwig (easy laugh): You expect efficiency in Italy?

Ernest: I don't know what to expect.

Hedwig: If you want efficiency, you're in the wrong country.

Ernest: That possibility just occurred to me.

Hedwig: May I sit?

(BEFORE HE CAN RESPOND, SHE PUSHES HIS SUITCASE TO THE FAR RIGHT END OF THE BENCH AND SITS; THEN SHE MOTIONS HIM TO JOIN HER)

Ernest: I'd rather not.

Hedwig: You were sitting when I came.

Ernest: It's not proper.

Hedwig: What is not proper?

Ernest: Our sitting together...in public.

Hedwig: Two people relaxing, enjoying the morning sun? That's not proper?

Ernest: Not where I come from.

Hedwig: Where do you come from?

Ernest: Washington.

Hedwig: In Washington, men and women do not sit together in public?

Ernest: Not when the man is a Negro and the woman is...not a Negro.

Hedwig: But you've overlooked something.

Ernest: What's that?

Hedwig: This is Naples, not Washington. Please sit down and keep me company.

(LONG PAUSE; HE CAUTIOUSLY, WORRIEDLY SITS, THOUGH FAR FROM HER)

Hedwig: Closer.

(HE MOVES A FEW INCHES CLOSER)

Ernest: Satisfactory?

Hedwig (suppressing a smile): For now. (beat) I can't help but wonder: You seem to be dressed for a snowstorm.

Ernest (stilted): It **is** January.

Hedwig: It does not snow in Naples...(brightly) But I can try to arrange it, if you wish.

Ernest (mildly miffed): Yes, do that—see if you can get Mario to help you.

Hedwig: Are you not perspiring under all those clothes?

Ernest: It's somewhat warm, I admit.

(SHE REACHES OVER TO UNBUTTON HIS OVERCOAT; HE IS MORTIFIED)

Hedwig: There, now, that should improve matters.

Ernest (priggish): In the future, please notify me before you decide to unbutton my clothes.

Hedwig: It was bold of me, was it not?

Ernest: Indeed, it was.

Hedwig: Please accept my apology.

Ernest: It's quite alright.... luckily, I'm familiar with overly aggressive women.

Hedwig: I'll remember that the next time I am overly aggressive.

Ernest: I'll remind you myself.

Hedwig: Are there many aggressive women in America?

Ernest: They make up the majority.

Hedwig (self-mocking): I would feel right at home--

Ernest (glum): You certainly would.

Hedwig: You know, I've read many books about America.

Ernest: Good for you.

Hedwig: Do you know Zane Grey?

(EXTENDED PAUSE)

Ernest: He writes westerns.

Hedwig: That's him. He's very popular in Austria. As a child, I devoured all his books.

Ernest: Must've gotten quite a stomachache.

Hedwig: No, I meant that in a symbolic way.

Ernest: I see.

Hedwig: Have you read Zane Grey?

Ernest (loftily): I don't read westerns...I don't know anyone who does.

Hedwig: I learned everything about your country from Mr. Grey. Tell me, do cowboys and Indians still fight in Oklahoma?

Ernest: I strongly doubt it.

Hedwig (girlish enthusiasm): How exciting that period must have been to live in!

Ernest: If you want to learn about America, then you might choose something more up-to-date.

Hedwig: Can you recommend something?

Ernest (off-handedly biting): Any book about hatred and bigotry will do.

Hedwig: Oh, dear, that sounds depressing.

Ernest (serious): If you're looking for a specific author, there's F. Scott Fitzgerald—I find his writing lyrical and eloquent—though he's not currently in vogue...and there's Sinclair Lewis—he's not as poetic as Fitzgerald, but he's more realistic.

Hedwig: I'll give them a try.

Ernest: You'll be most impressed.

Hedwig (beat; a sly, ever-so-inviting smile): Dr. Just, I already **am** impressed.

(HE STARES BLANKLY AT HER, THEN LOOKS STRAIGHT AHEAD)

Ernest (schoolmasterish): According to the travel guide, the population of Naples approaches one million.

Hedwig: That number seems awfully large.

Ernest: That's what the book says.

Hedwig: You should have read the chapter on local climate—you would have dressed more appropriately. (she laughs freely and easily; he offers a momentary side look of disapproval)

Ernest (mildly disdainful): What exactly do you do at the Institute?

Hedwig: What is my function?

Ernest: Are you the official greeter?

Hedwig: I work in the laboratories.

Ernest: Which one?

Hedwig: I alternate: I spend a few weeks in one laboratory, then switch to another.

Ernest: Why don't you have your own?

Hedwig: You don't understand: I am what you might call an interested amateur. I have no official connection with the Institute. My family thinks I'm completely mad.

Ernest: They may have a point.

Hedwig (laugh): They may indeed.

Ernest: So, you haunt the various laboratories like...Hamlet's ghost.

Hedwig: I would rather do this than go back to Vienna and marry Count Wiener Schnitzel. My mother prefers I do that. Then again, she does not think science is for "proper" ladies. I suspect you feel the same way.

Ernest: I do **not**.

Hedwig (affably chiding him): I notice a subtle condescension in your tone.

Ernest (straightforward): They used to tell me that Negroes don't belong in science. But I proved them wrong. For me to say the same of women...that would be the mark of an imbecile.

(LONG PAUSE)

Hedwig: Dr. Just, I have high hopes for you. (he smiles diffidently; she looks to her right) I wonder where Mario is.

Ernest (breezily sure of himself): I don't mind waiting. I'm sure he has important business to attend to...Lovely day.

Hedwig: After you are settled in Naples, I would be honored to show you the sights.

Ernest: I'd like that very much.

Hedwig: I wish also to discuss your work. It's fascinating.

Ernest (surprised): You're aware of it?

(SHE STANDS, MOVES STAGE RIGHT)

Hedwig (incisive, probing): Of course. Now, in your last article, you mentioned the difficulty of keeping alive the sea urchin eggs you work with.

Ernest: It's my main problem. If I could keep them alive longer, I could do so much more with them. I've tried various salt concentrations—without success.

Hedwig: Have you thought of testing different pH levels?

Ernest: Not only have I thought of it, that's the first thing I plan to do once I'm set up here—

Hedwig: I have already done it.

(LONG PAUSE)

Ernest: You?

Hedwig: A pH of 9.5 does the trick. It lowers the eggs' metabolism. They live at least three times longer than before. I'll show you the data.

(LONG PAUSE)

Ernest (low-keyed amazement): I'll be damned.

Hedwig: I thought you would want to know immediately—that is why I came to greet you.

Ernest (clearly pleased): You've saved me weeks of work.

Hedwig: Excellent.

(LONG PAUSE)

Ernest (highly intrigued): Who **are** you?

Hedwig: I told you: I'm an amateur.

Ernest: You picked this up all on your own?

Hedwig: I learned by watching...reading...asking questions...and thinking.

Ernest (becomingly modest): ...Should do more of that myself.

Hedwig: You write rather well, by the way.

Ernest: Thank you.

Hedwig (warmly direct): You are not a show-off. Many scientists write as if they are God almighty. But you are not like that. You write like a real person...like a human being.

Ernest (two beats; his formality beginning to melt away): Again...thank you.

(LONG PAUSE)

Hedwig: We will begin your sightseeing tour tomorrow.

Ernest (beat; captivated): My time here is limited.

Hedwig: But I just bought you several free weeks, Dr. Just.

Ernest (beat; utterly charmed): That you have.

Hedwig: Do you like castles?

Ernest: I'm crazy about castles.

Hedwig: You are in for a treat. This city is filled with them. There is the Castle of the Egg—I'll take you there first. It is right off Santa Lucia. It was built seven hundred years ago.

Ernest (shaking his head in wonder): ...Hard to imagine a building that old—not in America, that's for sure.

Hedwig: The University of Naples is seven hundred years old. Everything around here is seven hundred years old...(devilish grin) including the professors at the University of Naples.

Ernest: That wouldn't surprise me.

Hedwig (bouyant): There's a marvelous avenue that runs along the waterfront. It has lots of shops—and it offers a dazzling view of Mount Vesuvius.

Ernest: I read about it on the boat. Its volcano is still active.

Hedwig: I told it not to erupt during your visit.

Ernest (enjoying himself): You have much influence around here.

Hedwig: I am also open to bribery.

Ernest: What kind?

Hedwig: How about working beside you...in your laboratory?

(LONG PAUSE)

Ernest (warily): I don't want trouble.

Hedwig: I will not give you any—

Ernest: Not from you...from them...it's always them.

Hedwig: Because you are a “wild” American Negro and I am a virginal European female?

Ernest: Something like that.

Hedwig: I find it rather exciting.

Ernest: You have that privilege. I don't.

Hedwig: You are no longer in Washington...it is Bella Napoli. (sensual) Repeat after me...Bella Napoli.

Ernest (beat): Bella Napoli.

Hedwig: Magnifico!

(LONG PAUSE)

Ernest (forcing out his words): It might work out...it might.

Hedwig: I must warn you: I'm very demanding.

Ernest: I can see that already.

Hedwig (captivating laugh): We should get along fine.

(LONG PAUSE; SHE STARES INTENTLY AT HIM)

(LIGHTS DOWN)

Steve Gold is an award-winning playwright based in New York, USA. His previous stage plays include 'Outlive the Bastards', 'Women and Guns', and 'Cadillac High'. 'Bella Napoli' won the 2025 Alexander Nderitu Prize for World Literature.

NEWS

Njabulo Ndebele Feted at Time of the Writer Fest



*Prof Ndebele (centre) with his Lifetime Achievement Award plaque. On the right is the festival curator, Ms Shafinaaz Hassim.
(Photo/ Dopamine Studios)*

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Creative Arts has conferred a prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award on **Professor Njabulo Ndebele**, in recognition of his extraordinary and enduring contribution to South African literature and intellectual life. The ceremony took place during the 29th edition of the renowned Time of the Writer festival, which took place from March 23 to March 28, 2026, in South Africa.

According to **Shafinaaz Hassim**, the curator of this year's festival:

'Professor Ndebele stands as one of the country's most influential literary figures—an author, scholar, and public intellectual whose work has shaped not only how South African stories are told, but how they are understood. From his seminal collection of essays, which called for a turn toward “the ordinary” in South African narrative, to his acclaimed novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, his

writing has consistently challenged dominant modes of representation while opening new imaginative and ethical possibilities.'

Professor Ndebele is an influential academic leader and cultural thinker. He has played a pivotal role in nurturing generations of writers, scholars, and readers, helping to build a literary culture grounded in critical reflection, historical awareness, and creative courage. In the words of **Ismail Mahomed**, the Director of the Centre for Creative Arts:

'The Lifetime Achievement Award acknowledges both the depth of his literary achievements and the breadth of his impact on South Africa's cultural and intellectual landscape. It honours a body of work marked by intellectual clarity, narrative innovation, and a sustained commitment to exploring the complexities of human experience in a society shaped by profound change.'



New York Playwright Wins African-Based International Prize



Afroetry reads out the winner at ALF Nairobi

The short play *Bella Napoli* by **Steve Gold** (USA) is the winner of the second annual Alexander Nderitu Prize for World Literature. The 2025 prize accepted scripts for ten-to-fifteen-minute stage plays. In total, 266 entries were received from 23 countries. The winner was announced by Ugandan poet **Carolynne 'Afroetry' Acen**, on 30 May 2026, at the Asian Literary Festival in Kenya. Ms Acen will be the Chief Judge of the 2026 Alexander Nderitu Prize for World Literature, which will focus on poetry.

New York-based playwright Steve Gold is the author of several full-length stage plays, including *Outlive the Bastards*, *Cadillac High*, and *Women and Guns*. The latter won the Fratti-Newman Political Play contest in 2011. Gold's winning entry is an amusing yet thought-provoking ten-minute play set in 1930's Italy. In it, an uptight African-American scientist arrives in Naples to take up a position at a research facility and is welcomed by a disarming Austrian woman. One juror described the entry as:

'Charming! I like the way it tackles two serious issues (racism, gender discrimination) in an entertaining and creative way.'

Alexander Nderitu, the Chief Judge, commented:

'It's like the opening chapter of a great saga. You don't know what will happen next, but you can expect humour, drama, and probably romance. Also, I like how the city itself is like a character in the story.'



Playwright Steve Gold

The entire text of the winning entry appears on Page 28 of this magazine.



The 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize Winner



Jamir Nazir (Trinidad & Tobago) has been declared the overall winner of the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. ‘The Serpent in the Grove’, beat out 7,805 other entries from around the world. It tells the story of Vishnu Mohammed, an impoverished Trinidadian farmer struggling to support his young wife Sita and their child, Puttie. He becomes obsessed with a young woman, Zoongie, who works in the village rum shack. Vishnu resolves to murder his young wife, Sita, by tricking her into falling into a well in a hidden grove. But his plan is foiled unexpectedly, with surprising consequences.

The announcement came at the premiere of a film featuring the regional winners of the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. Jamir was joined by: **Lisa-Anne Julien** (South Africa, Africa region), **Sharon Aruparayil** (India, Asia region), **John-Edward DeMicoli** (Malta, Canada and Europe region), and **Holly Ann Miller** (New Zealand, Pacific region). All the writers shared insights behind their stories and creative processes. Chair of the Judging Panel, Louise Doughty, and Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation, Razmi Farook, also discussed this year’s Prize and the judging process.

There was a storm of controversy following the announcement of the Regional Winners, with accusations that Jamir’s story was AI-generated. In his defence, the 62-year-old scribe argued that his polished, rhythmic style came from using speech-to-text software on a mobile phone screen while drafting material inspired by his upbringing in rural Trinidad. He denied using generative AI to write the story. The Commonwealth Foundation launched a formal review, examining drafts, outlines, and time-stamped notes from the author. On 22 June 2026, **Razmi Farook**, Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation, released a statement that said in part:

‘Last month, there were serious concerns raised regarding the alleged use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. In response to these allegations, we have initiated a review of the winning stories and begun a thorough review of our processes in response to AI.

We take immense pride in the Commonwealth Short Story Prize and truly appreciate the thousands of hours that writers dedicate to crafting their stories each year. This year, more than 7,800 writers entered stories, and we recognise our responsibility to ensure equality, fairness and integrity throughout the competition. Each winning story has been read by at least seven people, through multiple rounds of rigorous judging.

We have spent the past month thoroughly investigating allegations of AI use. We have not used AI tools due to concerns regarding artistic ownership and consent surrounding unpublished work from across the Commonwealth. Whilst these tools can serve as useful indicators of potential AI involvement, we also recognise the widely accepted view that they cannot provide conclusive evidence on their own. Therefore, we sought to gather further information to make an informed and fair decision.

We held detailed discussions with all regional winners about their creative process, and they collaborated fully in our review. We also examined evidence related to the development of their stories, including working drafts, time-stamped documents and notes. After a thorough consultation with our judges and careful consideration of all available information, we are satisfied that AI was not used to write the winning stories. Therefore, we will proceed with the regional winners selected by the independent judging process.’

Following the AI controversy, prestigious literary magazine *Granta* ended its long-running publishing partnership with the prize.

The 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize shortlistees were:

Africa region

Lois Akoma Antwi (Ghana)
Ken Odak Odumbe (Kenya)
Dawn Immanuel (Nigeria)
Hussani Abdulrahim (Nigeria)
Ola W. Halim (Nigeria)
Oluwatoke Adejoye (Nigeria)
Lisa-Anne Julien (South Africa)

Asia region

Anmana Manishita (Bangladesh)
Shazed Ul Hoq Abir (Bangladesh)
Rafaa Dalvi (India)
Rupsa Dey (India)
Sharon Aruparayil (India)
Mohamed Nasser Mohamed (Malaysia)
Jacqueline Chang (Singapore)

Canada and Europe region

John Edward DeMicoli (Malta)
Alison Armstrong (UK)
Jennifer Harvey (UK)

Caribbean region

Cosmata Lindie (Guyana)
Celeste Mohammed (Trinidad and Tobago)
Jamir Nazir (Trinidad and Tobago)
Jason Dookeran (Trinidad and Tobago)
Jochelle Greaves Siew (Trinidad and Tobago)
Roger-Mark De Souza (Trinidad and Tobago)

Pacific region

M.S. Bhatia (Australia)
Holly Ann Miller (New Zealand)



REVIEWS

Hallyu Versus Hollywood? by Mildred Achoch

Just as Bob Dylan, who sang of peace, became the first popular musician to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 2016, BTS also fully has the qualifications to win a Nobel Prize. – Yim Hun-young, Director of the National Museum of Korean Literature



*Modern-day Beatles? The phenomenally popular **BTS** boy band from South Korea*

In the session before mine, at the 2026 Asian Literary Festival in Nairobi, an audience member complained to playwright **John Sibi-Okumu** about the lack of female villains in local productions. In my session, I pointed out that K-dramas are full of female villains. I mentioned *The Glory* (2026), which has received glowing reviews. A strapline on IMDB describes the plot as:

“A woman lives for absolute revenge against her childhood bullies who destroyed her life.”



Still on female villains, I didn't mention *Melancholia* (2021) which I thoroughly enjoyed watching.

The very first K-drama I watched (recommended to me in 2019 by a member of the Kenya Scriptwriters Guild) was the 2013-2014 *My Love From Another Star*. IMDB describes it thus: “An alien that came to our planet 400 years ago, will be able to return to his planet in 3 months, but when he meets a famous actress, all the centuries he spent distancing himself from humans comes to an end.”



The next K-drama I watched was *I Hear Your Voice* (2013) starring Lee Jong-suk. I love the theme song of this series! “A sharp female lawyer with no filter teams up with a public defender and a high-school student with special gifts to bring down a killer with a personal vendetta” is how IMDB describes it.

I Hear Your Voice is a Noona Romance. As I compile this, I have just come across an article published on koreajoongangdaily.joins.com titled “‘Noona’ Relationships Gain Popularity Both On Small Screens And In Real Life”. The article begins: “For generations, Korean romance revolved around the *oppa* – a term women use for an older brother, but also a common nickname for an older boyfriend.



More recently, however, *noona*, or older women, are increasingly becoming the ideal in both Korean dramas and real-life relationships.

Another *noona* romance featuring Lee Jong-suk is *Romance Is a Bonus Book* (2019) which is set in the literary world: “A gifted writer who’s the youngest editor-in-chief ever at his publishing company gets enmeshed in the life of a former copywriter desperate for a job.” (IMDB)



K-dramas and the BTS connection

I also enjoyed *Fight For My Way* (2017) which stars Park Seo-Joon (who went on to act in *Parasite*). “‘Fire’ is currently the most popular BTS music choice for K-Dramas,” according to a Koreaboo.com article titled, ‘10+ BTS songs you never realized were in K-dramas’. “This powerful, high-energy song helps Park Seo-joon’s character get hyped up for his fight in the ring. Thematically, “Fire” is also perfect for this drama since *Fight For My Way* is about underdogs who are struggling to achieve their success, just like BTS did.”

As life happened and I got busier in 2022/2023, my consumption of K-dramas reduced. Two of the last K-dramas I watched starred Song Joong-Ki. They were *Vincenzo* (2021) and *Reborn Rich*. (2022). Short synopses:

Vincenzo: “During a visit to his motherland, a Korean-Italian Mafia lawyer gives an unrivaled conglomerate a taste of its own medicine with a side of justice.” (IMDG)

Reborn Rich: “A loyal higher-up employee working for a Chaebol, was betrayed and murdered by a member of the Chaebol family to cover up a tax evasion scheme. He later wakes up in 1987 discovering that he has been reincarnated into the body of the youngest grandson of the Chaebol family. The background of the story is the power of the chaebols and the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.”

I began my talk by mentioning that I am in the BTS Army. It is through BTS and joining the Kenyan BTS Army Whatsapp group in 2019 that I was introduced to K-dramas. I mentioned in the talk that at first, I was hesitant to take on K-dramas because being an Army member was already consuming so much of my time! However, after watching the first K-drama, I was hooked. I mentioned in my talk that, being a professional screenwriter, I can tell within the first few minutes whether I want to invest my time watching something. However, with K-dramas, I always forget that I am a screenwriter because the stories are so engaging and well-written.

Regarding the issue of ‘too many coincidences in K-dramas’ (which another speaker before me complained about), I mentioned that K-dramas have to be approached with some suspension of disbelief. It is a standalone genre with its own rules and its own motifs, as outlined above. The writers of an article posted on [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com) about the similarities of K-dramas and Bollywood point out that: “Like Bollywood, K-dramas create an immersive world of their own. The laws of the universe don’t always apply here, and plot lines can ricochet between starkly realistic and mind-bogglingly over-the-top... (Bollywood is) comfortable with genre mixing and high-low tones: we can take slapstick, action, romance, magical realism and poetic interiority in the same narrative...And Korean shows offer the same storytelling agility...”

'K-dramas have to be approached with some suspension of disbelief. It is a standalone genre with its own rules and its own motifs.'

Nollywood and Bollywood were mentioned by an audience member. They asked whether this Hallyu phenomenon is likely to last. I replied that already, K-dramas and K-pop have carved out a niche for themselves on the world stage. I cannot speak for K-dramas but when it comes to BTS, I feel that their impact will be felt for decades to come. I pointed out that their lyrics, just like some of my favourite K-dramas, touch on social justice issues and the things that impact young people in society.

I did not check social media or watch YouTube on the day of my talk. It was only much later, at night, that I learned of a school fire tragedy that happened in the wee hours of that day in Gilgil. My sincere condolences to the parents, families and friends of the victims. I am reminded of ‘Spring Day’ by BTS, a song that was composed after a school tragedy in Korea - the Sewol Ferry Tragedy. A phrase from the song is among the first Korean phrases I learned: *bogo sipda* (pronounced *bogoshipda*) – ‘I Miss You’. The song has several movie references:

Lyric: *Even in August, winter comes*

Korean movie reference: *Christmas in August* (1998)

Lyric: *My mind leaps through time*

Movie reference: *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* (2006)

Lyric: *Snowpiercer that is left alone*

Movie reference: *Snowpiercer* (2013)

One of the members of BTS who was part of the songwriters was “inspired by the Bong Joon Ho movie *Snowpiercer* as well as the book *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* by Ursula K. Le Guin.”



Mildred Achoch is a poet, screenwriter, playwright, and founder of ROFFEKE (Rock ‘n’ Roll Film Festival, Kenya). She co-authored the Kenya Scriptwriters Guild Scriptwriting workbook. She’s a big fan of both Bollywood and K-pop.

Koffi Olomide' GOAT Album a Waste of Time by Deborah Auko



When it comes to Rumba, every original no matter how basic will always be better than any cover edition or remix. Even if the song was done as an Acapella it will be better than with a full studio ensemble. That's why *Faya Tess* and by extension Madilu's "Sansa ya Papier" rank low among most Rumba purists. These are albums for new fans. That's just Rumba.

Now, when Koffi Olomide's *GOAT Intemporel* came out, I realized Koffi has basically redone all our favorite classics. From *Loi* to *Phaseur* to even a song like *Sens Inverse*. First, none of these songs will ever sound like the originals because this is Rumba. But what's worse is that no effort at all has been made to inject any new creativity to the songs if at all. It's basically the same songs all over again, most of the time you can't even tell the difference between the original and the remix.

"Diba, I am a willing Slave, why are you taking my shackles away...Why are you freeing me"

"Diba, you made me a sea fish...Why are you returning me to a river?"

"Diba, why is the sun shining only on my face and not my heart"

"Misfortune, why are you holding onto me like a thread follows the hole of a needle"

"Nobody knows how love looks like. What we know is the evidence of it"

"Your favourite movie is happening right before your eyes – It's her."

"Why have you left the taste of honey in my lips"

"Love has turned me into cassava leaves to be pounded"

"You will think of me one day Diba, old pots make good soup"

It's not possible for a man to send you these words and for you not to consider their plea. We were all begging Diba to go back to him (*weche iloso*). That was Koffi Olomide at work.

I am disappointed in Mopao. (I know people who have been waiting for the day I slam Mopao.) It gets worst when he now redoes the song *Fouta Djallon*. It's a song from the album *V12* which anyone who understands music agrees is the best album not only to come out of DRC but the entire continent in 1996. Every song in *V12* was a masterpiece. A song like *Aspirine* won song of the year and was nominated for a Grammy way before Nigerians discovered the Grammys aka 'P. Diddy and his lube.'

Fouta Djallon is one of the most prolific heartbreak songs. The artistry, the wizardry, the grief, the poetry in the song not only put Koffi on the world map, for a lot of us, no matter what he does it's hard to dethrone him and this is an album he did 30 years ago. Koffi was not only an artist but a poet, and that is what made the difference. It also helps that he is an artist who has gone to school. You always want to deal with deep artists. For context, let's translate some of the most memorable lines in the song *Fouta Djallon*:

Morning Flower.

Diba the Queen of Fouta Djallon

"Diba, you taught me how to fly...Why are you clipping my wings"

The new version of this song *Fouta Drome* has been shot with some vixens he picked at Matonge, with a trailer, with Mamaci. It's absurdly shallow and unthoughtful and should have not been done at all. How do you have vixens twerking in such a deep song?

'Koffi was not only an artist but a poet, and that is what made the difference.'

And maybe this is where we say our legends should not live long because time tends to either reveal that they aren't all that after all or it fades their legend. I would have encouraged you to listen to the album but really there is nothing much you will get in that album, and especially if you have been a Tcha Tcho fan from the beginning, you will only get angry. And sometimes when I see people being asked who are some of the people that died that you wish were still alive and people say, 'Franco', 'Bob Marley', 'Lucky Dube', 'Frank Sinatra'... I say, 'No, it's good they died when they did. Lest they would have still been roaming these streets doing a lot of Nonsense and washing away their legacy.'



Deborah Auko Tendo is the author of the bestselling non-fiction book, Rough Silk. She is a logistician, public/private security consultant and dangerous goods specialist. She holds ten years' experience as an election observer in Africa. A cancer advocate, she is multilingual and can speak six languages. She is the Patron of SheLogistics, an association for Kenyan women in logistics and transport, and is the CEO of the Kenya Fibroids Foundation. An award-winning social justice entrepreneur, Deborah's work for Rough Silk has earned her several honours, including an Ashoka Global Change Makers award and featuring in the American Embassy's "60 stories of Impact". She was voted among the 50 Most Influential Kenyan Women in 2024/25.

The Polygamist and Polygamy by Gai Manoah James



Ironically, had Jonasi actually been a polygamist in the traditional sense, much of the destruction in the story would probably never have happened. There would still have been jealousy, favoritism, and conflict—as there often are in real polygamous homes—but not this level of chaos.

This distinction matters because it sets up an appropriate platform on which to lay out everything else that we make of the show. A lot of viewers will leave the series believing this is what polygamy looks like, but as we have established, we're looking at something entirely different.

Now, can anything be learned from *The Polygamist*? If yes, what?

The dominant takeaway on social media seems to be that many men are like Jonasi and that women everywhere are suffering like Joyce. In other words, the lesson is that women are victims of selfish men. But are all the women in *The Polygamist* really victims? Joyce certainly is. She is the innocent victim in every sense of the word. Matipa? Hell, no. Lindani? Absolutely not. Essie? Maybe, but only to a point. Jonasi wronged Essie when he abandoned her after she became pregnant. On that point, there can be no argument. But once she learned that he was married, she should have walked away. Everything that followed was the result of her choosing to remain in a situation that had already revealed itself to be hopeless.

Matipa is manipulative and thoroughly materialistic. Jonasi didn't lure her into his life. She pursued him because of what he had. Nor was she trapped by poverty or desperation. She was young, beautiful, confident, and relatively comfortable. She had options. Plenty of them. Her choices were her own, and so were their consequences.

Lindani isn't much different. Imagine becoming friends with a man's daughter and then deciding to pursue the forty-five-year-old father because he has money. We all know the viral phrase from the show: "eleven-course meal." It speaks to her materialistic nature. Moreover, the way she

First, let me say, damn! What a show! Second of all, *The Polygamist* is a classic example of art misrepresenting reality. The irony is that the show isn't really about polygamy.

Polygamy, at least in the African understanding, is not about keeping a string of women hidden from one another while pretending each one is your only love. It is about officially marrying more than one wife so that everyone knows that you are a man with more than one wife. Whether one agrees with the practice or not, it is a recognized institution with expectations, responsibilities, and consequences.

Jonasi isn't practicing polygamy. He is, in modern terms, a serial cheater. He builds many separate lives with many lies and each of the relationships survive only because someone is being kept in the dark. The women therefore do not have the opportunity to make an informed decision about whether they want to remain in the relationship or not until they have children and it becomes too late.

disrespected Joyce, and eventually Jonasi himself when he fell ill, revealed exactly what kind of person she was. She wasn't driven by love. She was driven by material comfort. Calling her a victim stretches the meaning of the word beyond recognition.

Now, lest anyone think, by detailing what the women did wrong, I am defending Jonasi. Let me be clear. Jonasi is a piece of sh*t. His treatment of his wives, his children, and even his own brother—the very man who sacrificed everything to protect his lies—is contemptible. In the end, he earns every bit of the fate that catches up with him.

Joyce, however, is different. What a woman! She remains loyal through humiliation after humiliation. She loves her family when everyone else seems to love only themselves. She is, quite frankly, a unicorn. From a technical standpoint, though, the series is outstanding. The writer knew exactly what she was doing. The backstories arrive at precisely the right moments. The pacing never drags. In short, every episode leaves you wanting the next one.

It is some of the best television storytelling I have seen in a while. Still, we should resist the temptation to confuse compelling drama with social reality. Art exaggerates, compresses, and invents extraordinary situations because ordinary life rarely makes for great television.

Could there be a Jonasi somewhere in the real world? Of course. But he would be an outlier among the average men, and therefore cannot be used as the matrix to measure and view men in general. The world of *The Polygamist* is built around deception because deception makes for compelling drama. It should not be mistaken for an accurate portrait of what polygamy generally looks like in African societies. That, to me, is the only real flaw in an otherwise exceptional show. That said, I recommend it wholeheartedly.



Gai Manoah James is a South Sudanese writer and critic.

Some of his works have appeared in African Writer Magazine, Sisi Afrika Magazine, The Kalahari Review, and Munyori Literary Journal, among others. He enjoys reading, writing, watching Netflix, and experiencing the finer things in life.

QUOTES

‘We want Abantu Book Festival to have a Pan-African outlook. In fact, we don’t recognize these (national) borders because these borders were not created for us and they were not created by us. So, if we’re going to create a book festival for Black people, it has to be inclusive of everybody...We are not even close to the ideal because most of the authors that we have here are from Anglophone Africa. We don’t have anyone from Lusophone and Francophone Africa, so there’s still a lot to be done. But we want to make it as Pan-African as possible...In my experience as a published writer for nearly a decade now, we have been participating in other book festivals which are mostly organized in White communities (inside South Africa), which are White-dominated in terms of audience, in terms of cultural production, and we’ve always been feeling like additions to these things when we should be central. So, we had to create a platform that would put Black people at the centre, right? And this was about loving ourselves enough to do something about what we see as our continued oppression and our continued marginalization...Culture is not innocent.’ - South African novelist Thando Mgqolozana, founder of Abantu Book Festival

‘It ([Jaipur Literature Festival](#)) is the largest literature festival. It’s like an Indian wedding that runs for five days...Literature and books are just a starting point to the festival.’ - Vikram Chandra, best-selling Indian author

‘The publisher, in the Arab world, he’s the publisher, he’s the distributor, he’s the wholesaler and he’s the bookshop. There is no distribution company existing in the Middle East. So, the Arab publisher can distribute his books only through the book fairs around the Middle East. It gives them the choice and the options of meeting another international publisher and signing deal for translating Arabic book to foreign language.’ - Ahmed Al Ameri, Director of Sharjah International Book Fair

‘The Port Harcourt Book Festival is organized annually by the Rainbow Book Club in Port Harcourt. Hundreds of literary enthusiasts make their way to the Garden City yearly to participate in this six-day event which comprises a book fair, writers’ workshops, diverse literary forums, a symposium, drama performances and other cultural displays. Guest authors in the past have included Nigeria’s Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, J P Clark, Elechi Amadi, Gabriel Okara, Buchi Emecheta, Ghana’s Kofi Awonoor and Ama Ata Aidoo, Kenya’s Ngũgi wa Thiong’o, American writer Petrina Crockford and Jamaican writer Lindsay Barrett.’ – [RainbowBookClub.org](#)

‘The Ruler of Sharjah, Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, believes that any country’s journey towards renaissance and development can only be achieved through knowledge, which begins with nurturing one’s mind with culture and knowledge, the main source being literature. The Sharjah book fair is not merely a place for the sale of books and intellectual rights. It is an exhibition and a cultural and literary festival that offers an inspirational platform for industry professionals, academics, artists and the public.’ – The chairman of the Sharjah Book Authority, [speaking at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2015, Ahmed Al Ameri](#)

‘*Weep Not Child*, the second novel but the first to be published by Heinemann in 1964, won a UNESCO First Prize in the first Black and African Writers and Artists Festival in Dakar. I heard the news while in Leeds. I got congratulations from all over the world. A UNESCO prize for literature? My financial worries in Leeds were over and I voiced my hopes to my fellow students who were not a little impressed by the fortune befalling one in their midst. You can imagine my disappointment when later I learnt that the prize was honorary after all. An honorary first prize. I have never talked about this prize or cited it as one of my accomplishments. Fortunately, I heard the honorary news after I was already in the middle of my third

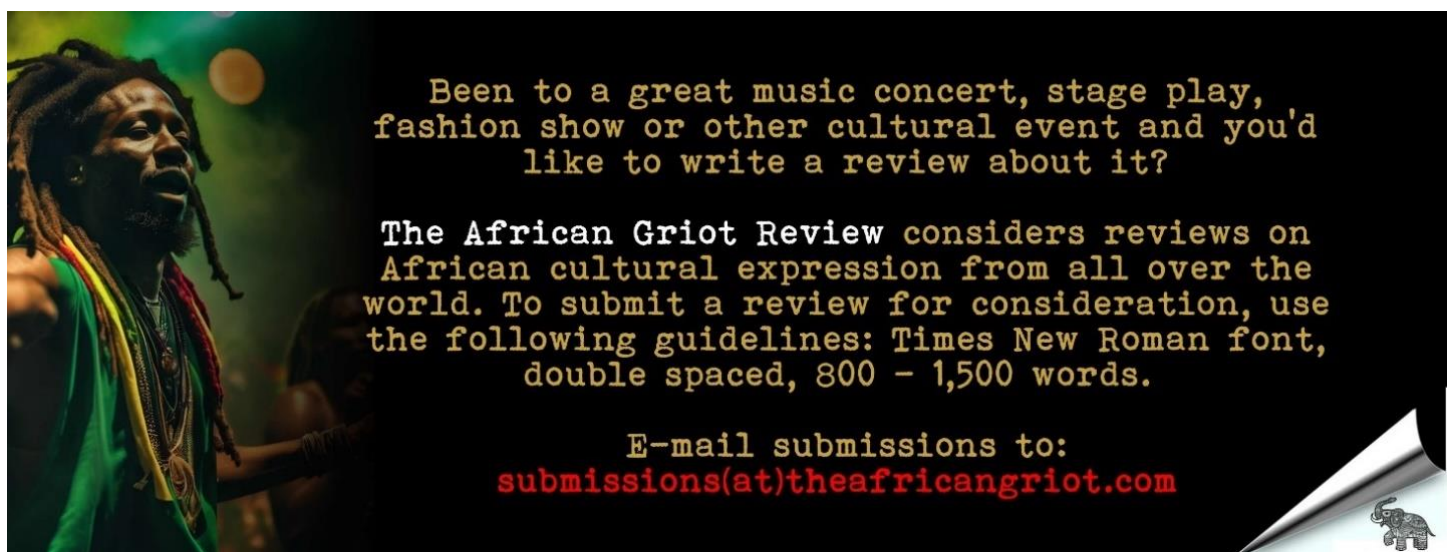
novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, and I hoped that it would not win any honorary first prize. Not while I was a British Council Scholar in Leeds anyway.’ - Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms in African Literature* (1993)

‘Translation is very important but what’s happening now is that the novels being translated are very weak as the gov’t is choosing them. Unfortunately, they choose weak novels because they give limited freedoms. I hope that international print houses start to look for artists on their own, without waiting for gov’ts to recommend writers.’- Sara Aljarwan Alkaabi, whose books have been translated from Arabic, in an interview with the BBC at [Sharjah Book Fair](#)

‘I have lived through so many changes in Africa, particularly in southern Africa. It’s been a fascinating time but I would not like to pontificate on any aspects of it except to say that Africa is Africa because it has as its premier people living in it, Africans. And so all my books have tried, from the very first one – *When The Lion Feeds* – to treat the African as in his rightful place in African history. And I will continue to do that. If I see abuse of other Africans by Africans, I am appalled by that.’ - Wilbur Smith, speaking at the 2016 Hong Kong Book Fair

‘There are a lot of book fairs in the Arab world; every country has at least one. And these fairs are used to primarily sell books. Publishers will take a stand to sell to the public, and when the fair is over, the merchandise is moved to another book fair and the process begins again...’ - Claudia Kaiser, general manager of KITAB, [Arab Book Trade Is Game for Growth](#)

‘Africa consists of 54 countries. Yet despite more than 2,000 languages, more than 3,000 ethnic groups, an immensely diverse geography, and a wide variety of cultures, the same images always come to mind when we think of the African continent: hunger, poverty, war. This reading series is an invitation to broaden our horizons and, together with the authors, immerse ourselves in the literary diversity of Africa.’ – Georgina Fakunmoju, founder of the “African Book Tour” series in Berlin



Been to a great music concert, stage play, fashion show or other cultural event and you'd like to write a review about it?

The African Griot Review considers reviews on African cultural expression from all over the world. To submit a review for consideration, use the following guidelines: Times New Roman font, double spaced, 800 - 1,500 words.

E-mail submissions to:
[submissions\(at\)theafricangriot.com](mailto:submissions(at)theafricangriot.com)



JUJA PREPARATORY & SENIOR SCHOOLS

Juja Preparatory Schools (JPS) was founded in 1997 with the aim of providing education in an atmosphere of a home-away-from-home.

The founders envisioned very high academic and developmental standards with the aim of producing well-adjusted members of a global community who are prepared to actively assume their roles and positively impact their communities.

Intake began in all eight classes and in December 1997, the first class sat for their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations.

Our inception class and their parents requested the management to incorporate a secondary school for the next phase of their children's education—thus Juja Senior School (JSS) was started in 1998.

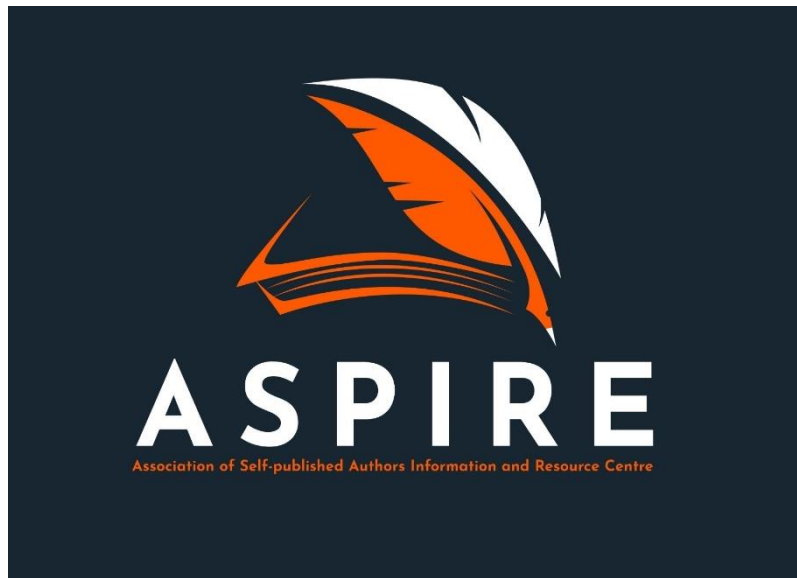
Both the Kenyan national Curriculum 8-4-4 (KCSE) and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) curriculum were implemented that year, diversifying the curriculum offered to our students.

In order to provide comprehensive educational services, a kindergarten school was also started in 1998, catering to pupils between the ages of 2 to 6 years old.

All three schools have continued to grow, contributing to the academic, social and spiritual development of children in this country. Since 1997, we have continued to evolve to provide our students with skills that prepare them to face emerging trends and adapt to an ever-changing world.



Deportee, Wanjiku's debut novel, is purely a work of fiction. The story revolves around Kim, who gets deported from the US and comes back home to Kenya with nothing and to nothing. He faces rejection from his family, he has no friends left, and life seems hopeless. Suddenly, his life takes a turn as secrets from his family's past start to unravel. The book takes you on a thrilling and dramatic adventure as Kim is swept into a series of puzzling and exciting events.



Aspire Authors is a collective formed by Zachary Kimari (Msomi), with the intent of creating a team of authors, editors, booksellers and publishers that can help sell books from authors and expose authors to deals and opportunities.

1. Beth Ruga (Tataguo) is an award-winning Debut Author by Writing Wright. She has co-authored in two anthologies; *Behind the Scenes* and *Women of the Light*. Her recent award-winning novella *Shadows in my Sunshine* is a marvel. She is a Global Arts in Medicine Fellow and has a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing. Apart from drama and humour she engages in charity literary works for needy girls and cleft lip defects. Beth lives in Nairobi, Kenya.

2. Wanyiri Maina is a Kenyan Author who is as intense as they come. He likes poetry, that invoking of memory, sweet or sour and the truth that harbours different emotions. His fluidity is that of lyrical prose and story-telling, intimate, reflective and very human. His debut book *#Hanifa: The Voices that Refuse to be Silenced* is a deeply reflective work that blends poetry and prose to explore memory, identity, love, silence and survival as inspired by true life events. His work earned him a nomination for the Writing Wright awards finishing second in the polls.

3. Chance Publishers is a professional publishing and creative media company that transforms ideas into impactful stories and brands. Chance specializes in book publishing, editing, printing, branding and content development. Chance gets authors under their umbrella to empower them and move their needle domestically and internationally.

4. Michael Ngirigacha (Mike Will) is a journalism graduate but has also spent a huge chunk of his life studying accounting to little success. He is a jack of all trades, having worked as a waiter, casual labourer, journalist and now is a matatu driver. He is also a poet and likes psychological thrillers and horror. His debut book, *Oliver Maina*, talks about his life in the third person - domestic violence by his step father, bullying, love, heartbreak and an illness he was mocked about.



Betty Kathungu-Furet is a Kenyan writer, publisher, and former filmmaker whose work focuses on African history, memory, identity, and long-form narrative storytelling. Before turning fully to publishing and literary work, she spent over two decades in film and television, producing and directing feature films, documentaries, and dramatic series across East Africa.

Her writing is driven by a deep interest in the people, ideas, and historical forces that have shaped the African continent across generations. Through Kathungu & Furet Publishing, she is committed to creating thoughtful and enduring African works that combine historical depth with accessibility, emotional resonance, and cultural clarity.

She is the creator and co-author of *Africa's Book of Greats*, a long-form historical series dedicated to documenting influential African lives across disciplines, eras, and regions.