

THE AFRICAN GRIOT

Issue no. 4 | February 2026

REVIEW

NUDITY IN FILMS

What Nigerian Law Says

CREATIVE WRITING

Do Authors Draw From Their Own Experiences?

ROMANCE & EROTICA

Giving Women Agency

LIP SERVICE

Are Africans Good Kissers?

Intimacy & The Arts

BLACK BADDIES

Kenyan Girls Exporting Sex to Europe

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EDITORIAL

February is universally accepted as Month of Love, so in this 'Valentine's Edition', we take a critical look at intimacy and how it relates to the arts, especially in Africa.

We are privileged to have contributions covering a wide range of topics – from movies to television to literature to music.

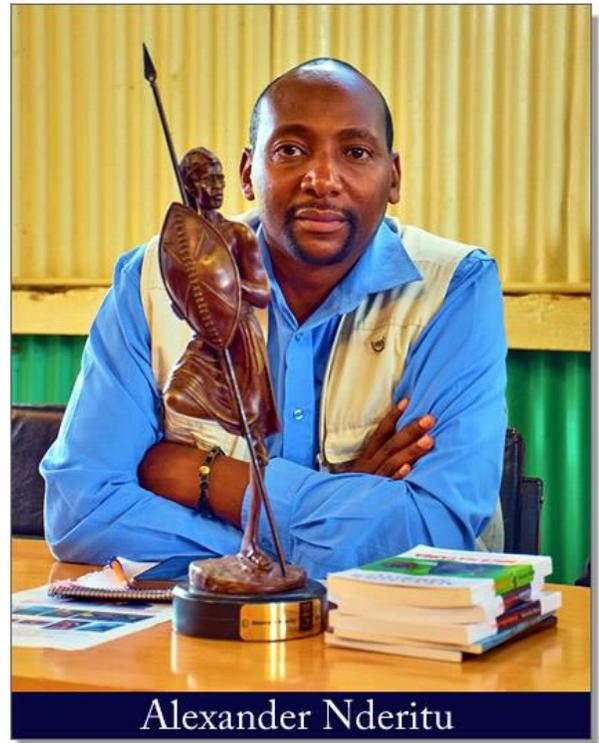
The Poetry section is especially rich, with contributions from the continent and beyond. Incidentally, one of the poetry contributors, Poetry Slam Queen **Shikkiey**, also doubles up as our 'cover girl'. She thus makes history as the first woman to grace the cover of *The African Griot Review*, and she does it with panache. We are also privileged to host the poetry of **Ada Rizzo** who recently represented Italy in the freshly-minted *2025 World Poetry Yearbook* (Pg. 28).

In the Fiction section, journalist/author **Gilbert Mwangi** has decided to make us bawl over with laughter, bringing back memories of Wahome Mutahi's 'Whispers' column.'

The Non-Fiction section is also well-endowed, so to speak. We examine the motivation behind African girls flooding the European flesh market in *London Calling*. In addition, first-time contributors, Myra Muili and Uju Peace Okeke have given us food for thought, and we hope to see more of their intellectual insights on various topics in the future.

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



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)

ARTICLES

Give The Woman Some Agency by Myra Muili



A popular Internet meme mocking mushy romantic novels.

As an editor, I spend my days watching intimacy constructed on the page. I read scenes where hands hover before touching and glances stretch too long. Where desire is choreographed with the precision of a ballroom dance. A few weeks ago, a Western historical romance landed on my desk that reminded me how easily fiction can train desire.

The story followed a familiar structure. A duke meets a woman who has recently lost her home because of decisions he made. Her brother had gambled recklessly, and the duke acquired the property. She confronts him about it. He is powerful. She is financially vulnerable. He speaks sharply. She resists him. The narrative presents their antagonism as romantic tension.

As I read, I noticed how the writing persuaded me to overlook the imbalance. The duke had taken her home. He had social status, wealth, and influence. She had none of these. She was actually also homeless.

Yet the story framed his authority as part of his allure. By the middle of the book, I understood how easily a reader could interpret dominance as depth. The writing was persuasive enough that I momentarily accepted the imbalance.

This is how narrative intimacy works in those stories. It assigns meaning to behavior. It calls control “intensity,” and surrender “love.”

Stories Train Desire

We often ask whether art imitates life or life imitates art. In practice, they shape each other continuously. Writers observe patterns in relationships and record them. Readers absorb those patterns and rehearse them. Later, those rehearsed dynamics appear again in new stories. I grew up reading Western romance fiction. I admired restraint stretched across chapters. I admired longing for that delayed gratification.

What I did not notice at the time was how frequently the woman's desire was secondary to the man's transformation. He changed. He softened. He claimed. She waited and endured until she was chosen. Over time, those structures stop feeling fictional. They begin to feel aspirational.

Last year, I began reading and writing erotic fiction online. I am an adult woman. I understand desire from the inside as well as the page. What unsettled me was not the presence of sex, but the pattern of power I reproduced.

I wrote a story based closely on a real-life encounter. I changed names and locations, but I did not alter the emotional framework. The man initiated. The woman responded. The man escalated. The woman adapted. I sent the draft to an editor on the platform before publishing. He had few corrections about language. His main comment addressed the structure of the relationship: "Give the woman some agency."

That sentence forced me to examine more than my prose. In the real encounter, I had accepted dynamics that placed the other person in control of the pace, tone, and direction of intimacy. On the page, I repeated that structure. I did not give the female character decisive desire. I did not allow her to initiate. I did not allow her to withhold. I wrote her as completely reactive.

Art had shaped my expectations. Then I had reinforced those expectations through art. This is why debates about sexuality in media often miss the point. The issue is not simply whether music videos are too explicit or whether novels describe too much. The primary issue is not whether African films should depict nudity. The deeper question is about power inside intimacy. Who decides? Who initiates? Who benefits? Who adapts?

A scene can be explicit and still preserve agency. A scene can be restrained and still erase it. The moral weight of intimacy in art does not rest on how much skin appears. It rests on whether the people involved are treated as subjects with will or objects within someone else's fantasy. Many imported romance structures center male authority. The wealthy man reforms. The brooding man opens up. The emotionally unavailable man commits. The woman's role is to endure long enough to be selected. Readers internalize this as proof that

"Last year,
I began reading
and writing
erotic fiction
online."

patience produces reward. When those readers become adults, some of them enter relationships that resemble the stories they consumed. They tolerate imbalance because it feels familiar. They interpret volatility as chemistry because fiction trained them to do so.

Reclaiming Intimacy on Our Own Terms

African literature has an opportunity here. Writers like **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** and **Lola Shoneyin** have demonstrated that African narratives can portray complex relational power without reducing women to ornaments. But conversations about intimacy in African art still tend to orbit morality rather than structure. We ask whether sex should appear at all. We debate decency. We debate influence. We debate Westernization. We do not always ask whether our characters possess agency.

If African writers can analyze political power, we can analyze intimate power. If we can critique colonial hierarchies, we can critique romantic hierarchies. If we can narrate public resistance, we can narrate private consent. Intimacy belongs to us as much as struggle does. We do not need to imitate Western erotic excess. We do not need to sanitize desire either. We need to write scenes where black women choose. Where they initiate. Where they decline. Where they articulate pleasure without apology. We need to write men whose strength includes restraint and whose desire does not depend on dominance.

I do not require exhaustive anatomical description to believe a scene. Suggestion can preserve dignity. Explicitness can also preserve dignity. What cannot preserve dignity is imbalance disguised as romance.

'The issue is not simply whether music videos are too explicit or whether novels describe too much. The primary issue is not whether African films should depict nudity. The deeper question is about power inside intimacy.'



Art will continue to influence life. Life will continue to influence art. That exchange is inevitable. The responsibility lies in what we normalize inside the stories we tell. When we write intimacy, we are not only describing bodies. We are modeling behavior. Give the woman some agency and have some fun. 🐘

Myra Muili is a Nairobi-based poet and editor whose work explores intimacy, agency, travel, and the quiet negotiations of power in everyday life. She has performed poetry on stages in Nairobi and continues to build a body of work committed to clarity, emotional honesty, and cultural self-definition. She writes at the intersection of lived experience and literary critique, asking how the stories we consume shape the lives we lead.



'The role of the artist is the same as the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see.'
- James Baldwin (writer/activist)

Observations on Intimacy and the Arts



ONE-MAN THINK TANK: British intellectual Stephen Fry
(Image: *What About Me?* documentary)

British writer and intellectual, Stephen Fry, on the subject of biological drives:

'We have this peculiar thing about ourselves. We have this contingent state of worrying about *why* we are, and feeling bad about it. We feel bad about the fact that we masturbate, that we feed, that we have to have sex in order to reproduce. What is to be ashamed of in that? I mean, how bizarre. That's the state that we are given – 'This is how you make another one of yourselves: you put this penis into that vagina and you pump out lots of seed and another baby gets made'. It's a huge part of our lives. Not allowing that to be on television. As if it is something to be ashamed of. And words that describe it...are made taboo words. Whereas 'kill', 'cruel', 'torture' – we could use those words when describing the traffic, and they are not taboo words. But those are the things that we do of which we should be absolutely ashamed. Completely ashamed.'

Exiled Somali scribe **Nurrudin Farah** (one of Africa's best-known living authors) disparages the *hijabs/burgas/bui buis* that women are required to wear in public in conservative Muslim communities:

'I think there are only two ways to think about sex...The minute you cover everything in a *hijab*, in a body tent, you are making people think about the hidden thing...Somalia is no longer relaxed (about sexual discourse).'

Nigerian novelist and journalist **Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's** first novel, *Season of Crimson Blossoms* (Parresia, 2015/ Cassava Republic, 2015), addressed the issue of female sexuality – a taboo subject in many places, not least in northern Nigeria which is predominantly Muslim and 'conservative' in cultural matters. A snippet from a Deutsche Welle online article:

The subject of Ibrahim's novel is the sexual emancipation of Hajiya Binta Zubairu, a Muslim woman in conservative Nigeria. It is a society in which women are denied the right to sexual desire, especially when they have fulfilled 'the obligations of childbirth' and are post-menopause. Binta, who belongs to this category, speaks for millions who have previously remained silent. She has done what society expected of her and lived according to its rules and yet, nonetheless, succeeds in liberating herself from its constraints by having an affair with a local crook twenty years her junior.

The author, a recipient of the 2016 Nigerian Literature Prize, had this to say about his career:

‘Even before I could write, I was drawing pictures. Then when I learned to write, I took off...In northern Nigeria, there is a tradition of literature. Most recently, there is a literature written in Hausa...I think literature is a way for Nigerians from different regions to understand each other...My intent of writing *Season of Crimson Blossoms* was to tell a good story. I tackled the issue of sexuality because in the north, we talk about sex in hushed tones, sometimes you don’t know where religion starts and culture begins...We need to talk about things people are not talking about – relationships, sexuality – things that push barriers, and have conversations about things that shape the way we think...The steps that need to be done to bring African literature to international community, it starts with us – the writers. When you have publishers from the continent, they give writers the avenue to tell stories the way they want to be told. But most importantly, we have to write.’

Other modern African works of note that address the issue of female sexuality include **Taiye Selasi’s** rather highbrow coming-of-age story, *The Sex Lives of African Girls* (Granta) and **Lola Shoneyin’s** signature novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*.

Clearly, opinions on the expression and exhibition of sexual matters differ greatly, not just from culture to culture, but even from individual to individual within a given culture. Famed African-American ‘Master Teacher’, **Dr. John Henrik Clarke**, was one of those opposed to graphic sexual descriptions/public discourse, believing it to be contrary to traditional African culture. In a public lecture on ‘History of the Zulus’, he said:

‘African women don’t talk that way (as depicted in the famous *Shaka Zulu* TV series.) Clinical descriptions of sex belong in a medical book.

You don’t just go around talking about clinical descriptions of sex. It’s a highly personal, confidential thing between a man and a woman. Group sex is as bogus as group therapy! But the dogs on the street don’t think so, because they’re dogs and you’re human. *You’re* supposed to think so. It’s a personal, secret thing to human beings. And it is a matter of maneuver and negotiation and conviction and convincing between two human beings. And even if it fails, you don’t go out and publicize. It still remains a confidential matter between two human beings and not the community. You give it that dignity. And Africans gave it that dignity. And they didn’t shout about it.’

And then there’s this:

In 2014, Booker Prize winner Ben Okri (Nigeria) won the Bad Sex in Fiction Award for his novel *The Age of Magic*. In an article titled ‘Ben Okri Wins Bad Sex in Fiction Award For Scene Featuring Rocket Going Off’, Mark Tran wrote (in *The Guardian*):

An ‘ecstatic’ love scene featuring a rocket going off somewhere in the night has earned Ben Okri, winner of several prestigious literary awards, a more ambiguous trophy – the Literary Review Bad Sex in Fiction award...*The Age of Magic*, Okri’s 10th novel follows a team of filmmakers, shooting a documentary about the idea of Arcadia, who wind up in a hotel by the lake in the shadow of a looming mountain. The 1991 Booker winner scooped the prize for a love scene involving Lao, the film’s presenter, and Mistletoe, his girlfriend...Unable to attend (the prize-giving ceremony), he (Okri) issued a terse and less than ecstatic statement: ‘A writer writes what they want to write and that’s all there is to it.’...



Are Africans Good Kissers?

As part of a documentary project and video installation commissioned by THE MENIL COLLECTION (Houston, USA), for the 'Progress of Love Exhibition', Zina Saro-Wiwa, daughter of slain Nigerian scribe Ken Saro-Wiwa, interviewed a number of African-born people on African expressions of love. One of the questions was, 'How do Africans Kiss?' The resulting video went viral on the Internet and started a multi-nation conversation on African sexual norms, especially prudishness. Below are some of the responses given by interviewees:

TWENTY-SOMETHING LADY: 'How do Africans kiss? I don't know – I don't really see Africans kiss.'

DARK-SKINNED TWENTY-SOMETHING MAN: 'I don't think Africans kiss, really. Now that I think about it.'

ATTRACTIVE ETHIOPIAN/ERITREAN-LOOKING LADY: 'I don't think I've seen one – well, a couple – kiss before...So it's a little hard to answer that question...(I would like to be kissed) passionately and maybe aggressively, depending on the situation.'

DREADLOCKED YOUNG WOMAN: 'I think for me, Africans kiss secretly.'

ELDERLY LADY IN HEAD WRAP: 'I am not comfortable watching them kiss. And I think that is probably attributed to (sic) the environment in which I was raised.'

DREADLOCKED YOUNG MAN: 'Compared to Europeans, very badly. To be honest. Because kissing is not part of our African culture. It's European culture and we did borrow some stuff to complete our love but, honestly, we are bad kissers...I became a good kisser when I arrived here in America.'

MARRIED ETHIOPIAN COUPLE: 'I wouldn't say "passionately"...I think it all depends on the exposure, where you live, how you're brought up and everything. In the rural areas, I didn't see any kissing going on...In the city – parties and stuff like that – we see kissing...But generally we held (sic) our emotions. We don't express it as much as it needs to be expressed.'

The entire video clip, directed and produced by Zina Saro-Wiwa, is available online at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvvdZXOkMkw>

Female Nudity in Films: Breach of The Law and Gender Based Violence by Uju Peace Okeke



*British Actress Nathalie Emmanuel in **Fast & Furious 7** (2015): 'In 2018, of 100 films, percentage of full or partially nude women was 27.3 percent while that of male was 8.5 percent.'*

Films are entertaining, educative, inspiring and relaxing. Expectedly, they have become part of daily reality. They mirror the issues of a society, creating awareness while in turn, influencing the society as audience commonly adopts characters and attitudes they see in movies. Youths spend more time watching films, thus are the most influenced by them. This is evident in their way of life as they choose role models from among their favorite actors and actresses, copying their life styles and mannerisms like the way they walked in the popular films, dressed, danced and grew moustache. For instance, the current sagging, tattooing as well as moustache growing by youths could be attributed to influence of films. It follows that when nudity becomes part of films, youths would embrace it off-screen.

Nudity and the Law

This is where it becomes a problem because it is against the law. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA) describes nudity as indecent exposure, an offence punishable with a one-year imprisonment and N500,000.00 fines. Laws usually reflect norms of a society, where they are or where they want to be.

It follows that the present standard in Nigeria is against nudism and consequently embracing nudism could lead to the breaking of law. It is worthy of note that ignorance of the law is said not to be an excuse.

Culture

Culture is broadly considered as the way of life of a people. The UN, through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined it as 'the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs' it is powerful because it unites a people and is the foundation for development. Modesty is said to be Nigeria's culture and maybe the reason nude protests usually get attention. Nudity cannot be allowed to disrupt Nigeria's culture otherwise it will destroy the fabric upon which the nation is built.

'Ignorance of the law is said not to be an excuse.'

Health

Beyond law, nudity has health consequences. Researches have shown that the sun is good for the body but this depends on the intensity of the sun and for how long the skin is exposed to it. It takes health education to know what is good for the body. The concern is that when nudity becomes fashionable, the uninformed would suffer unduly. This is because exposure to ultraviolet radiation can cause heat illness and in the long term, skin cancer. These uninformed are many times the impressionable ones who try to belong by adopting lifestyles that seem to be trending. In the event of health consequences, they mostly will be unable to afford healthcare goods and services mostly purchased in Nigerian through out-of-pocket payment (OOP). This could lead to untimely death. Invariably, nudity could be exposing youngsters to suicide unwittingly. Even the ones that can afford healthcare goods and services could be stretching the already overburdened healthcare facilities.

Gender and Human Rights

Relating to gender, in the United States, in 2018, of 100 films, percentage of full or partially nude women was 27.3 percent while that of male was 8.5 percent. This is confirmed in Nollywood where women are said not to be subjugated but sexually objectified. Data indicated a 32 percent emphasis on the females' breast/chest; 54.7 percent on the buttocks and 13.2 percent on the lips. Some see it as a marketing strategy as filmmakers are out to make money and in seeking international market, are pressured to show more nudity. Irrespective of the reason, it impacts on women's right to dignity, guaranteed in section 34 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended). The Court of Appeal explaining it in the case of *Uzoukwu and 5 Ors v. Ezeonu II and 8 Ors*, held that torture include '...brutalization of the human body or a mental torture in the sense of mental agony or mental worry. Degrading treatment has the element of lowering the societal status, character, value or position of a person...'

Nudity in films lowers the societal status of the women involved. In ordinary parlance, this right means the right to be treated like a human being. Where nudity demeans a woman, it implies that she is treated less than a human being. The South African Constitutional Court

held in case of *S v Makwanyane*, held that dignity is not just a right but is the foundation of all other rights.

Dignity is inextricably linked to right to life because it gives meaning to it beyond mere human existence. Women are intellectual beings capable of leading in life. Suggesting that their value is tied to their looks and sexual appeal to men is indignity.

Gender-Based Violence

Nudity may be an art in filmmaking but it smacks of gender politics and violence when female bodies are on display while men get to keep their clothes on. Violence against women (VAW) has been variously defined, beginning with the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UNDEVAW) of 1993, the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) of 2003 and even Nigeria's VAPPA of 2015, which though protects everyone from violence could be interpreted to have similar meaning. The latest treaty- Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (AUCEVAWG) of 2005, has the most elaborate definition:

'All acts perpetrated against women and girls that cause or could cause them verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm, including the threat to take such acts, or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on, or deprivation of, fundamental freedoms in the private and public spheres, or in cyberspace, in times of peace, armed conflict, transition, post-conflict, disaster, and post-disaster situations.'

Female nudity in films could be said to be a form of sexual, emotional and economic violence. Sexual violence is act that violates sexual integrity of a female. They include non-consensual non-contact acts of a sexual nature. The organs exposed in nudity include sexual organs. Goldenweiser said that 'in the beginning was sex and sex will be in the end... sex as a feature of man and society was always central and remain such. ...' Sexuality is an undeniable part of human beings but sexual organs ordinarily should be private.

One might argue that the females involved consented to it but uninformed consent is no consent. Emotional or psychological violence is violence that undermines a female's sense of worth. So, where nudity demeans a woman, it is a form of violence, manifesting power imbalance in a relationship wherein the perpetrator uses it to maintain control over the victim. For instance, Sweeny, an actress, is quoted to say that getting nude in *Euphoria* diminished her acting role: 'There were times when she had to tell the director that she thought nudity wasn't necessary for certain scenes...Another environment made her feel disgusting and want to go home and scrub herself completely raw.'

Economic violence is where females are compelled to be financially dependent. Research shows that though females constitute 60 percent of the Nollywood film audience and tell more complete stories, they constitute mainly actresses and makeup artists. More men are directors, wielding the power to determine acceptable stories. This could drive unequal pay for equal work. It follows that many females may accept nudity roles as a form of economic survival.

According to Kigali Declaration on the Elimination of Gender Violence in and through Media in Africa, misogyny, portrayals that objectify or sexualize women across print, broadcast and digital media and other forms of GBV are gender stereotypical which must stop by 2034. Research in Ogun State revealed that audiences consider sexual content bad, unhealthy, excessive and irrelevant in most cases. This means that whatever story filmmakers tell they should allow humans use imaginative ability and desist from excessive nudity and sexualizing films. It is said that showcasing women's body rather than their intelligence in films and adverts keeps them perpetually as sex objects affects the confidence and aspirations of girls. Clearly, this is gender injustice and affects females in other professions through body shaming and appearance anxiety. Consequently, it impacts Nigeria because where her female citizens do not maximize their potentials, it will not achieve the SDGs and will remain underdeveloped.



Uju Peace Okeke lectures law at the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC).

'The night is hot as hell.
It's a lousy room in a lousy part
of a lousy town.
I'm staring at a goddess.
She's telling me she wants me.
She smells like angels ought to
smell, the perfect woman...the
goddess.
Goldie.
She says her name is Goldie.'

- Frank Miller,

*Sin City Volume 1:
The Hard Goodbye*



Do Authors Draw From Their Own Experiences?

'The best writing is certainly when you're in love.' – Ernest Hemingway



Bestselling American novelist Danielle Steel on TV's Good Morning America.

In *Ways of Escape*, British novelist **Graham Greene** penned:

'The main character in a novel must necessarily have some kinship to the author. They come out of his body as a child comes from the womb.'

And Graham Greene meant what he wrote. Greene's *The End of the Affair*, about an illicit war-time love tryst, is said to have been based on his own extra-marital affair with a woman named Lady Catherine Wanston.

This kind of thing – raiding one's own life experiences for literary material, is commonplace.

American novelist **Danielle Steel**, best known for romantic and familial sagas, has sold 1 billion copies of her books internationally. The diminutive, fashion-forward scribe has been married five times, once to a convicted criminal and another time to a heroin addict. Her side of the story:

'I had two indiscretions in my youth and they came back to haunt me. I am probably the most uptight, conservative person you will meet. I have been this way my whole life. That is why I married those two morons instead of just sleeping with them.'

Husband No. 4, wealthy cruise ship owner John Traina,
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had this to say about Ms. Steel:

‘I thought I married a woman and realized I had married a storyline.’

Like most love relationships, the Steel-Traina connection began magically but ended anti-climatically. In the dedication page of her 1989 novel, *Star*, Steel gushed: *‘To the only man who has ever brought thunder and lightning and rainbows into my life. It happens once and when it does, it is forever.’* The wealthy couple – who lived in a white mansion on San Francisco Bay – had a bitter divorce in 1996, with Traina winning a multi-million-dollar settlement. Steel had a total of 9 children (5 with Traina), one of whom died from a supposed drug overdose. But, love her or leave her, Danielle Steel remains one of the most stupendously successful authors of all time. During an autograph-signing session, a fan once asked her whether it was true that she had sold more books than *The Bible*, to which she replied: ‘I hope not!’

Not only do many authors use their own lives or the lives of people they know as fodder for fiction, but famous book characters and/or their names have been inspired by actual people. ‘Richard Sharpe’ the loveable rifleman of **Bernard Cornwell’s** bestselling *Sharpe’s* series got his name directly from a rugby player called Richard Sharp.

The same goes for James Bond. After a career in journalism and a stint in the navy, novelist **Ian Fleming** moved to sun-soaked Jamaica. He had first visited the island in 1942 while working as an undercover agent in Bermuda. Four years later, he bought a property and built a villa he dubbed ‘Goldeneye’. It was there that he first dreamed up a book series starring a suave secret agent character. As for the name of the character, he didn’t want something outlandish ‘like Peregrine Carruthers or Standfast Maltravers’, he wanted something that belied the agent’s exciting persona:

‘When I started writing books, I wanted to find a really flat, quiet, name and one of my bibles out here (in idyllic Jamaica) is James Bond’s *Birds of the West Indies*. And I thought “James Bond” – now that’s a pretty quiet name. So, I simply used it.’



Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond

At the age of forty-two and on the eve of his marriage, he wrote *Casino Royale*, the first of the James Bond novels. By the time of his death in 1964, Ian Fleming’s fourteen Bond adventures had sold over forty million copies and Bond became the most popular character in publishing history (now possibly overtaken by Harry Potter).

The absolute master of weaving real-life experiences into literary gold, however, was Ernest Hemingway. For example, after spending a considerable time in East Africa, he penned *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *The Green Hills of Africa*. In 1953, while on an East African safari with his wife, a small plane they were flying in plunged into the ground. His wife suffered two broken ribs while he ruptured his kidney and liver, damaged his lower spine and suffered several concussions. He recuperated in Nairobi city. These injuries, along with others previously incurred during WWI, contributed to his heavy drinking as well as his later physical and mental deterioration. That same year, he was conferred the prestigious Pulitzer Prize (for *The Old Man and the Sea*). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature the following year. An excerpt from *The Green Hills of Africa*:

‘All I wanted to do was get back to Africa. We had not left it, yet, but when I would wake in the night I would lie, listening, homesick for it already. Now, looking out the tunnel of trees over the ravine at the sky with white clouds moving across in the wind, I loved the country so that I was happy as you are after you have been with a woman

that you really love, when, empty, you feel it welling up again and there it is and you can never have it all and yet what there is, now, you can have, and you want more and more, to have, and be, and live in, to possess now again for always, for that long sudden-ended always; making time stand still, sometimes so very still that afterwards you wait to hear it move, and it is slow in starting. But you are not alone because if you have every really loved her happy and untragic, she loves you always; no matter whom she loves nor where she goes she loves you more.'

Did the adventurous Hemingway ever sample the local cuisine, romantically speaking? He is rumoured to have had a dalliance with an Akamba girl in Kenya circa WWII. A snippet from the Facebook group 'Historia Ya Wakenya' ('The History of Kenya'):

'Hemingway, who so popularized the word "safari" in the west that it was incorporated as an English word, wrote about his flirt with a young Kamba girl during his second Kenyan odyssey (1953-1954). The book was titled *Truth at First Light* and was published posthumously by his son Patrick Hemingway in 1999.'

As with Africa, Hemingway's visit to France resulted in another literary masterpiece; a love letter not to a person but to a place. 'If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man,' Ernest Hemingway wrote 'then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris a moveable feast.'

After Hemingway's death by suicide his 'Paris memoir', titled *A Moveable Feast*, was published and become both a bestseller and a classic. A quote from the revered Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winner:

'Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and

if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day. For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed.'

Should fiction writers weave their personal life experiences and personal philosophies into their works? Why not? Most do it consciously or subconsciously anyway. The product (article, book etc) will most likely be more 'realistic', engaging and ultimately profitable than fantasies spun entirely out of whole cloth. 🐾

'We've already had enough of squalor, poverty, syphilis, and violence in African literature. Look around us. There are beautiful girls, good-looking men, Brazza Beer, good music. Doesn't all that inspire you?'

- From *Tram 83* by Fiston Mwanza Mujila (DRC), winner of the Etisalat Prize for African Fiction

Is Kenyan Theatre on the Decline?



Thespians at an Applied Theatre workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. (Photo: Njoroge Muthoni)

The nominees for the 5th edition of Kenya Theatre Awards (KTA) were unveiled on the 29th of January 2026. Although the jury watched more performances in 2025 as compared to 2024 there was a drop in the number of categories to be awarded. There were 36 categories in the 4th edition but the 5th edition has 29 categories that the public has been voting for in the open voting lines. This is a huge indictment on the industry as some of the biggest and most popular categories shelved include Best Musical Production, Best actors in musical production (male and female), Best Learning Institution (this is normally reserved for colleges) and Best standup comedy show. It is also good to note that another reason given why the categories had to be shelved are that some categories did not have enough entries and would therefore be unfair to enter one production to compete against itself. Some producers had also requested for reasons best known to them, not to be included in the awards. This means that their teams bear the brunt of that decision and none can be nominated despite outstanding performances in their respective categories. One reason not mentioned but is actually worth attention is the effect of emerging theatre trends in the industry.

More upcoming producers are breaking away from traditional forms of theatre production and experimenting with new forms of. This experimental theatre is not recognized by the Kenya Theatre Awards as it is still practiced by a few individuals. Among these new or previously unexplored forms of theatre were Digital Theatre by Alacoque Ntome, Applied Theatre by Vitalis Waweru and Street Theatre by Thuita Mwangi.

Digital Theatre was pioneered by I AM, a theatrical performance created by Alacoque Ntome. I AM has previously won awards at the Kenya Theatre Awards so it was not eligible for participation again. This show, is heavily investing in augmented reality. It seeks to have actors to do less on stage while giving the audience a wider experience through projected two-dimensional silhouettes and voice. This work attracted funding from an organization and was able to tour the country in 2025. However, it is yet to be embraced by other producers. Alacoque calls this type of show “Digital Theatre”. It involves serious pre-production in audio visual studios. The biggest challenge for him has been limited funding to push the show to its full capacity and

also lack of experienced and dedicated technical directors well versed in augmented reality. “Practitioners need to be properly educated on the technical elements of production to handle these kinds of shows”, Alacoque says. He has also only managed to produce that one show as it takes a lot of resources and time to create. He is presently collaborating with a local university to push this form of theatre to the next level.

Another form of theatre that is yet to make its mark on the Kenyan theatre scene is Applied Theatre. Other versions of this have been used extensively in the communities and labeled as either TFD (theatre for development) or TFE (Theatre for education). Applied theatre as produced last year by Vitalis Waweru is yet to be replicated or embraced in Kenya. Vitalis, who has since completed his studies in Applied Theatre decided to delve deeper into Applied Theatre by being the first to produce a fully-fledged production without donor backing. He engaged the services of two professionals to help him stage this production. The two, Thuita Mwangi and Brian Irungu worked hard to bring this to life.

The marketing and publicity for this show was not done in the conventional way. The show was not open to the general public maybe out of fear because the Kenyan audience is known to be unforgiving when it comes to unfamiliar theatrical works. Communication was shared with a handful of industry players and friends and families of Vitalis, Thuita and Irungu. Tash Mitambo, a theatre producer and director was among those who attended the show. He explained his experience this way: “This was a whole-day event held at a serene venue a few kilometers away from the central business district where most theatre goers attend shows. The whole space was the stage and Irungu, an award-winning production designer had set up a great theme for the show. The setting was a traditional African home. Thuita, also an award-winning performer took charge as the lead facilitator. Using his storytelling skills he introduced topics and raised questions that the audience participated in by telling their own experiences. There were breaks in between where everyone enjoyed refreshments made the traditional way. Irungu also led the audience in games and team building activities as part of the program. This was really good as the audience comprised of people from all ages. What started at around noon ended with darkness setting.

Maybe future productions would consider proper time management. These are kinds of shows that you cannot pull a big audience as Kenyans are used to watching shorter performances. Although the audience clearly enjoyed, this type of theatre needs to be more refined for it to be embraced by the audience and more producers. A lot of work has to be done on the script. Most of the content seemed to be created on the go and for a person who believes in rehearsals, it certainly appeared random and under rehearsed. Future productions should consider a more serious approach in pre-production. The choice of venue was also a bit tricky for the audience especially since most of us rely on public transport. A more central venue would work well for the audience. There was little done after the production to talk about the show either online or in artistic spaces by the producers hence it still remains an experience that most people know nothing about. As an investment is this model sustainable for commercial theatre? A lot of resources were spent in this but no tickets were sold, everyone attended free of charge.” We hope Vitalis has something up his sleeves for Applied Theatre in Kenya in 2026.

Thuita Mwangi also a practicing thespian is also producing a new type of theatre known as “Theatre Kwa streets”. Theatre Kwa Streets by itself is a form of applied theatre. Thuita introduced this style in 2024. The audience, mainly those interested in knowing the city more is taken through a tour of the central business district of Nairobi. In every stop, Thuita tells the stories on the significance of the spots to the Kenyan history. As the audience walks through the streets, Thuita acts as a tour guide. For about the hours, the audience gets to enjoy the stories through the streets. This cannot accommodate big audiences and so it has to be strictly via booking to get the few spots available. Security is also a challenge as there are sections of the city Thuita cannot venture with his audience.

So far the production has been constrained to uptown because venturing downtown requires more elaborate security arrangements. Special licenses from the city government are also required for these activities. In Kenya where theatre is not directly supported by the government, performance in the streets is seen as a high-risk investment with low returns. This explains why for a long time it has remained the preserve of Thuita.

Although he won an award for this in the 4th edition of KTA, it might be difficult to have a category for theatre in the streets in future editions of KTA since no other producer is willing to take it up.

There is a silent uprising in the industry as thespians try out new forms of theatre to attract the ever-dynamic Kenyan audience while making their mark in the books of Kenyan theatre. 



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POETRY

If Love Were Tea by Shikkiey

If love were tea,
you would lift me gently,
both hands steady
not from fear,
but from a knowing
that some warmth deserves patience.

You would slow your steps,
let stillness settle between us,
as though every breath
is a promise not to waste
what you hold.

And when you taste me,
it would not be hurried.
You would sip
as though time bends for this moment,
letting me bloom on your tongue
soft, unfolding notes of spice and sweetness,
heat and a soothing calm entwined.

I would soothe the tired edges of you,
mend what the day has frayed,
whisper peace down your throat
while leaving a trail of warmth behind.
You would drink deep,
and I would give,
yet in giving, I am filled
because devotion tastes like reciprocity,
like being wanted slowly,
completely,
and without rush.

And when the last drop lingers,
you will find
that loving me like tea
doesn't just quiet your hunger
it restores you.
It wakes you.
It reminds you that tenderness,
when savored,
refreshes both the cup
and the one who drinks.



Shikkiey, formerly known as Shikanga Shiboko, is an award-winning Kenyan poet and author. She is the 59th Slam Africa Champion and has been published in the anthology Poems of the World by Paza Sauti. She is also the author of her debut poetry anthology, How to Grieve a Heartbreak. Through her work, Shikkiey explores themes of identity, grief, transformation, and becoming, with a voice that is both intimate and resonant.

***What My Body Remembers* by Timelines**

What my body remembers
Is the trail of your lower lip as it
Found its way to where it clicked
As my tongue found a dance with yours,
Slow, smooth, back and forth, on the floors of our
mouths,
You hammering your nails on my back, as I plant my
thumbs in your mouth
Your eyes on my pupils, teaching them to be wet, clear
enough to make me see a future with yours,
Petals soaking with honey, making me want to be a bad
boy
What my body remembers,
Is the safety your eyes give
Suddenly this body doesn't feel the desire to hide under
cloth



***Timelines** is an artistic luminary, writer, poet, theatre maker, director, scholar and the 67th Poetry Slam Africa Champion, whose works contribute to the betterment of humankind.*

***The First Kiss* by Ada Rizzo**

I don't remember the first passionate kiss
I love your lips that brush my forehead,
a deep connection that halts time,
a silent caress upon the soul.

Presence,
essence,
a gentle touch,
a blanket of stars that illuminates and envelops.

It is an act of care,
a dance of souls that speaks of us,
a tender embrace between soul and heart.

Every time your kiss grazes me,
it is an eternal moment.
In your eyes, there is home, a safe harbour.
In your kiss, I always find my sea.



***Ada Rizzo**, born in Sicily (Italy), is writer, poetess, cultural Promoter, Peace Ambassador, amateur journalist, translator, Life Counselor, Mindfulness Facilitator, and volunteer in Kenya. Her works have received numerous international awards. In addition to her literary activities, she participates in cultural projects. Her poems have been translated into several languages and included in various literary journals and international poetry anthologies.*

***How I Want You* by Myra Muili**

I don't want you like a storm.
I want you like heat -
Something that starts in the center of my chest
and forgets to ask before it spreads.
I want you the way my body already knows your name
before my mouth says it.

I want you without armor, or rehearsals.
Just the honest language of skin
remembering it was made to be answered.
Come closer.
Not like you're trying to take something,
but like you're trying to listen.

I want to learn the weight of your hands
the way you learn a city -
by walking it slowly,
by getting lost on purpose,
and discovering which corners make you stay.
Touch me like you're not in a hurry
to arrive anywhere else.
Kiss me like you're not trying to prove anything.
I need that quiet pull that says, stay here.

I want my body to recognize yours
like a familiar song
I didn't know I'd been humming all day.
There are places in me that don't open for words.
That only answer to closeness -
To the way your attention
becomes a kind of undressing.
I don't want to be consumed.
I want to be met.

I want that slow, deliberate yes
that starts in the body
and teaches the mind how to follow.
And when we finally stop pretending,
we're not already leaning toward each other -
don't rush.

Let it be obvious. Let it be inevitable.
Let it be the kind of quiet that only happens
when two bodies agree to tell the truth.



***Myra** is a Nairobi-based poet and editor whose work explores intimacy, agency, travel, and the quiet negotiations of power in everyday life. She has performed poetry on stages in Nairobi and continues to build a body of work committed to clarity, emotional honesty, and cultural self-definition. She writes at the intersection of lived experience and literary critique, asking how the stories we consume shape the lives we lead. When she is not editing or performing, she is often on the road - literally - drawing inspiration from long-distance motorcycle rides and the landscapes that reshape perspective.*

PILLAR

(c) Shikkiey

*I would bend over backwards
Curve my body through jagged splinters
And let my body whisper a hollow pain just to get to you
Bodies have a way of coming back to life
But the end of my soul would be where our souls part*

*For you are the peak of my high
The definition of a rock-steady foundation
You are the pillar of my heart
The very cornerstone where I lay my head
Where my deepest of fears are hidden at the bottom of your love
Light has never been so defined, leading my steps heavy
For I don't need to open my eyes to see the glory that you possess.*

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To submit your own poems for consideration,

e-mail submissions@theafricangriot.com

Entries may be on any subject must not exceed 40 lines in length. Also include your short bio and (optionally) a passport-style photo.

Contributors retain copyright over their works.



REVIEWS

Boney M, True Epitome of 'Old Is Gold' by James O Obuchere

Boney M, the German-based band that rocked the world in the late 70s through 80s and 90s has, doubtlessly, been immortalized through their ever-green hits.

Starring members of Black descent, it consisted of the beautiful Jamaican-born **Liz Mitchell** (lead singer), **Maizie Williams**, **Marcia Barrett**, and Bobby Farrell (aka **Daddy Cool**). The latter, who was the only male member, was also known for his electrifying, acrobatic dance moves.

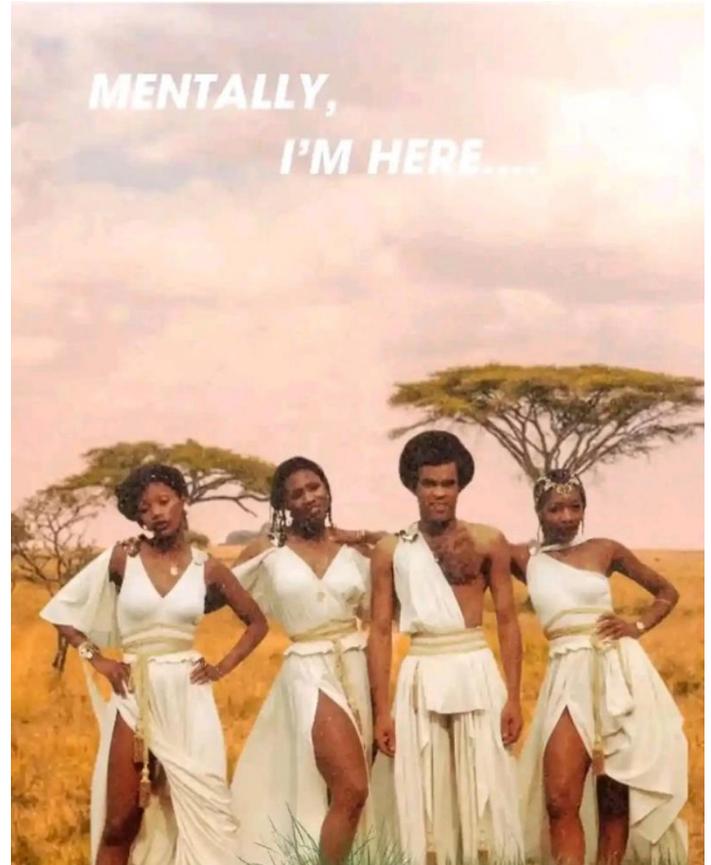
Mark you, some of the cover renditions done by this quartet would surpass the originals! Ever listened to their version of *Malaika*, originally done by Fadhili Williams? Or *Mary's Boy Child*, that song that annually graces the Christmas season, and that was originally done by Jim Reeves? If so, then you'll agree with me.

Under the German recorder/director Frank Farian, this band sometimes derived inspiration from the holy scriptures. Hence, their smash hit *By Rivers of Babylon* (Psalms 137), *Zion's Daughter* and *I'm Born Again* were inspired by The Bible.

Their other hits included *Consuela Biaz*, *Ma Baker*, *Rasputin*, *Sad Movies*, *Bahama Mama*, *Ribbons of Blue* and *Night Flight to Venus*. Sometimes listening to this band's songs can arouse fond memories - a throwback to those days when women dressed with modesty. When afro hairstyles and cornrows were still popular. 🐘

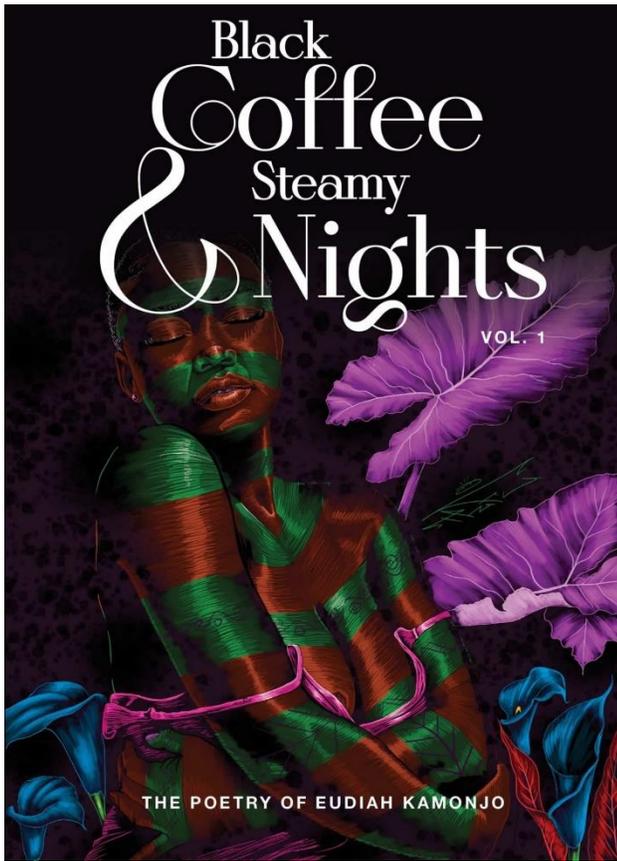
Oh, and how I used to envy my village's educated few - those who could sing along to *Brown Girl In The Ring!*

Old is gold, but it can also arouse nostalgic memories. And even trigger tears of remembrance.



'Do what you love no matter what. I had an English teacher in high school who told me to quit right then and there. My first novel, *The Thomas Berryman Number*, was turned down by thirty-seven publishers...Then it won an Edgar Award. Millions of readers love my books...I'm glad I didn't give up writing because of one teacher's comment.' - James Patterson

Black Coffee Steamy Nights Vol 1 Review by Jacob Oketch



Black Coffee Steamy Nights Vol 1 by **Eudiah Kamonjo** is not your ordinary collection of poems. And this is why; the pieces in this collection celebrate both same sex and heterosexual relationships. The persona in a number of pieces is a woman lover who is marveling at the features and mannerisms of a fellow woman lover. Some of the descriptions in the pieces are so graphic that a reader who is prejudiced or opinionated about how sexual encounters should be documented may cringe. It is important to note at the outset that this collection is suitable for a reader who is open minded.

The author delves deep into the subject of sexuality and she does not sugarcoat anything while describing the sexual experiences of the persona whether they are heterosexual or otherwise. In all fairness, there are pieces in this book which are not appropriate for young readers due to the sexually explicit descriptions in them. Suffice to say that this is a book strictly for adults. The author does not just focus on sexual encounters. There are pieces that celebrate the African woman's body.

Others celebrate the African man's physique. Yet other pieces focus on other themes that relate to intimate relationships like betrayal, low self-esteem, and insecurity. She also tackles themes such as freedom and grief.

The author also uses colours in a very ingenious way to signify various sensual feelings. She also brings out the theme of confidence in some of the pieces. There is also a piece that celebrates the African woman-daughter, mother and grandmother. She extols the virtues of a grandmother to a granddaughter.

In a piece which the author presents as an aphorism, she says, '*We write/Not because we have the answers/But to find the answers within/Those written lines*'. This is a truism that is rarely grasped by most writers yet it reveals itself quite often especially when one is writing from a broken place. The healing that comes with journaling, for example is a demonstration of this. The author also hits out at patriarchal tendencies that tend to use the woman's sexuality manipulatively. The piece castigates bosses who use their influence to lure women into sexual affairs in exchange for things like promotion or recognition.

The author uses two languages interchangeably in her pieces. Although most pieces are written in English, there are pieces written in Kiswahili. This is quite uplifting especially at a time when Kiswahili has just been declared a global language by celebrating World Kiswahili Day. The use of two languages in one book is a way of harmonizing two different cultures and in this globalization age, it is a big thing.

The author celebrates the African dress in one of the pieces. She isolates the African print dress as a standout.

Ultimately, this is a great read, especially for those who are uninhibited by prejudices of one kind or another. As a sex guide, it is expected that she ought to serve humanity regardless of sexual orientation and she does just that in this debut collection. 

***Black Coffee Steamy Nights* is available online and at Nuria Bookstore at Kshs 2,500/=**

FICTION

Romance Next Door by Gilbert Mwangi

Any time my campus roommate's sweetheart came visiting, I would get fifty bob richer. I will explain.

Our campus rooms were doubles, divided with a hardboard walling in the middle. Which meant that you could hear your roommate burp in his bed. This, by extension, meant that you could hear other sounds you were never meant to hear when your roommate had female company: sounds of bed springs protesting and a daughter of Mūmbi pleading '*Njoro njūraga!*' This loosely translates to 'finish me Njoroge', one of those pleas made in the heat of the moment.

In my undergrad years, I was too broke to afford a girlfriend, too thin to attract one. My roommate, on the other hand, had this sun-kissed rose of a girl who would visit once in a while. With skin the colour of Ukambani mangoes and dimples deep enough to hide a coin, she was simply stunning.

And so, to make sure that they drank deeply from their wells of love without unwelcome audience coughing in the next cubicle, my roommate would squeeze a fifty bob note into my palms and usher me out. I was expected to idle out there till late, wandering the deserted shopping centre like a homeless philosopher, after which they would have cooled their passions.

And so, a day before Valentines of 2002, our last year in campus, Wahu visited, bearing a sisal *kiondo* laden with enough farm produce to feed a small family for several days. She mashed some *mūkimo* from *kabūrūra* leaves, *mitore* bananas and, *noe*, kidney beans. My roommate and I hadn't relished such a meal for days-which we topped up with Murang'a avocados. After dark, as expected, my roommate took me aside and squeezed a note into my eager hands.

At the shopping centre, alas, I realized that my roommate had given me a whopping Ksh 500! I started doing the math. I usually got fifty bob from him to give them privacy for some few hours - but here I was, with ten times the usual figure.

What plans did my roommate have for the girl? Was he planning to finish the beautiful lady with Olympic-level strokes? I wondered as I threw rounds for my broke buddies. But.... is she my sister? I justified my roommate smothering the love of his life all night.

After midnight, the money was still there. So, we walked to Kahawa Sukari to sample the night at Calabash Bezique. Soon, the money was gone, and we trooped back to campus, my friends singing hosannas unto me-their benefactor for the night. When I knocked at my door, it was 3am. I had given my roommate enough time to cool his fires.

Then the sun rose.

I was woken up by violent shaking, the kind usually reserved for chicken thieves. When I finally compelled my eyelids to part, I came face to face with my roommate staring at me, eyes blazing.

"WaNjambi, put my Ksh 450 on my palms or else...." he barked.

It didn't take me long to realize that he had given me the Ksh 500 note wrongly, mistaking it for Ksh 50. He ranted for some minutes while I contemplated the most philosophical way to address the matter at hand.

"*Mūndū*, did this beautiful lady come all the way from Mugoiri, Murang'a to listen to you quarrel with your roommate at 8am?" He kept silent. I knew my words were landing like well-aimed stones.

"Did you call her here to see you fight on Valentine's morning?" I went for the jugular, twisting the knife gently for emphasis.

To cut a long story short, there was a hasty agreement about me paying the money on friendly terms. Luckily, the girl had confused my roommate proper and so he forgot to insist we put that in writing.

“WaNjambi, where is my Ksh 450?” My friend, a respected teacher nowadays, always asks me anytime we bump into each other. “Some debts in life can never be fully settled,” I jokingly reply. We then croak ourselves hoarse when we reminisce about the Valentines of 2002- and how romance next door used to make me richer.

As for Wahu, the girl whose visits made me richer, she was never ‘finished’ by my roommate, as she always begged him to. Anytime I bump into her at Müküyũ market where she sells fruits, I walk away smiling, convinced that some stories ripen better than avocados on her stall. 



Gilbert Mwangi is a columnist with The Nairobiian weekly newspaper and the storytelling dynamo behind 'Drum Major' blog. He uses those platforms to crafts tales-both real and imagined-in areas around culture, language and history.

His debut literary work is Nobody's Darling, a historical fiction novel which dives deep into Kenya's forgotten colonial history, bringing untold stories to life. It's based on the heroic Muthoni Nyanjiru - the first martyr of freedom struggle in Kenya.

He has also authored The Camel from the Sky - a collection of previously unpublished folktales from Northern Kenya. His latest work is Mumbi and the Full Nine - a fantastical retelling of Agĩkũyũ myths. The last two titles are available on Amazon.com

THIS MODEL



This model is not a catwalk queen.
This model is not one of 'Baba Segi's wives.'
This model has no 'questions for Ada'.
This model does not believe that 'nearly all men in Lagos are mad'.
This model is not the femme fatale in Elechi Amadi's 'The Concubine'
African griots are yet to wax lyrical about this model.
Podcasters have not had the pleasure to interview this model.
This model has not graced the covers of magazines.
You will not bump into this model in the city streets.
You will not ogle this model at the local nightclub.
Dating or marrying this model is out of the question.
This model does not exist in the real world.
This model is a figment of her creator's imagination
This model is a product of Artificial Intelligence.
Do not be afraid of Artificial Intelligence.
AI is just a tool, like a computer or camera.
Up till now, every war, every genocide, every sexual assault,
Every human rights violation, every racist atrocity
Has taken place without the help of AI.
Be very afraid of Human Stupidity.
Be very afraid of wicked humans with wicked hearts.
Don't be afraid of AI
Don't be afraid of this model.

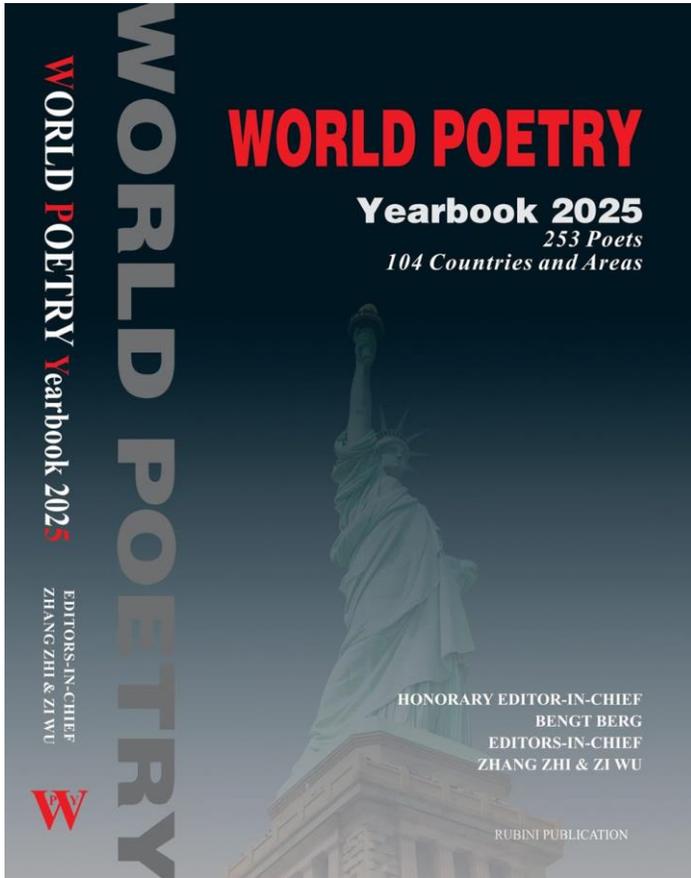
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'I was just in love with reading. I was in love with my girlfriend but sometimes, you know, if I had been given a choice, if they had said, "You can have your girlfriend or you can have books", I would have had to say, "Let me sit down and think about that."' - Stephen King

NEWS

The 2025 World Poetry Yearbook is Out



The English edition of “WORLD POETRY Yearbook 2025” was unveiled in February 2026. Its production was sponsored by the Center for Globalization of Chinese Poetry, Nankai University, The Journal of Rendition of International Poetry Quarterly, and World Union of Poetry Magazines. The Editors-in-Chief were Dr. Zhang Zhi and Mr. Zi Wu, alongside Editor-in-Chief was Bengt Berg, an outstanding poet in Sweden. It was published by Rubini Publication in Limassol, Cyprus.

The book is composed of poets, poetry, books reviews, poets talking about poetry, research papers, and top talk. It contains English works of 253 internationally renowned poets from 104 countries.

Asian Literary Festival Coming to Africa

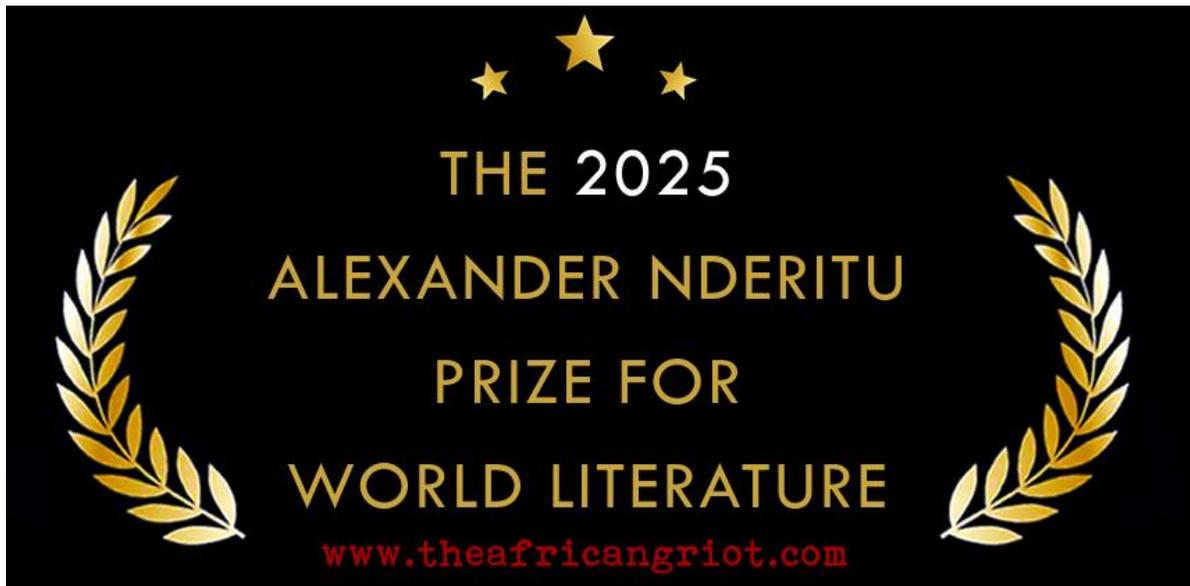
The Asian Literary Festival - an international literary event that promotes literature, culture, and intellectual discourse - is set to take place from 28 – 30 May 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya. The venue is the Louis Leaky Auditorium in the National Museum complex.

Confirmed speakers include **Ciku Kimani-Mwaniki, Nahida Esmail, Alexander Nderitu, Peter Ngila, Ama Dadson, Lexa Lubenga, Gilbert Mwangi, Harriet James, Wacera Gikonyo, Mildred Achoch, Scholastica Moraa and Carolyne Afroetry.**

Activities will include panel discussions, documentarary screenings, in-depth conversations with authors, book launches, the announcement of the 2025 Alexander Prize for World Literature winner, Spoken Word performances, a book swap, public lectures, workshops, master classes, a ‘readerthon’, stage play auditions and the unveiling of a new international investigative journalism.



2025 Alexander Nderitu Prize For World Literature Longlist



TheAfricanGriot.com has announced the longlist for the second Alexander Nderitu Prize for World Literature. The fifteen longlisted stage plays were selected from **266** entries (up from 73 the previous year) submitted from **23 countries** worldwide.

In no particular order, the longlisted writers for the 2025 Alexander Nderitu Prize for World Literature are:

1. *Retreat in the Berkshires* - Schwartz (USA)
2. *Last Rites* – Charlene Adhiambo (Kenya)
3. *Big Fat Wish* – Christopher Franciosca (USA)
4. *Surveillance* – Sabina Ramet (USA/Norway)
5. *A Lesson in A Flat* – Mike Power (USA)
6. *Clowns of the Crown* – Chiemezem Everest Udochukwu (Nigeria)
7. *Two Women* – Meri Holl (USA)
8. *My French Tutor and the Dragon Under My Bed* – Lucas Huang (USA/Taiwan)
9. *Untitled Saint* - Wei Cheng (China)
10. *Bella Napoli* – Steve Gold (USA)
11. *Yesterday By the Beatles* – Sean Sullivan (USA)
12. *Breaking the Wall* – Dan Borengasser (USA)
13. *Body Count* – Ifedolapo Olaniyi (Nigeria)
14. *Y?* – Frank E. Robinson (USA)
15. *The Worst Table* – Karen Poulsen (USA)

Also in no particular order, the Honourable Mentions are:

1. *Curs'd Be Macbeth* – Donna Latham (USA)
2. *We Don't Say Bleh Bleh Bleh* – Evan Edwards (USA)
3. *No Country For Young People* – Phil Ibsen (Kenya)
4. *The Nazarene, The Jew and the Jihadist* – John Ladd (USA)
5. *Eden Revisited* – Christopher P. Minichono (USA)
6. *Weekend Warrior* – Lisa Emily Patterson (Denmark)
7. *After the Funeral* – Martin Heavisides (USA)
8. *Ojukwu* – Stephen Adinyoi (Nigeria)
9. *A Harvest Truth* – Richard Lyons Conlon (USA)
10. *Beneath the Garment* – Jeff Iwu (Nigeria)
11. *Cutting Season* – Elizabeth Hess (USA/Canada)
12. *Much Fuss About Everything* – Kithusi Mulonzya (Kenya)
13. *Solid 8* – Jeffrey Gold (USA)
14. *Call & Response* – Marcus Scott (USA)
15. *A Loaf of Bread* – Erick Kitheka (Kenya)

The submissions came from USA, Nigeria, Kenya, the Philippines, Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Taiwan, Zimbabwe, Denmark, Canada, Iran, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Ghana, Zambia, Norway, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Uganda, Cameroon, China, and New Zealand.

NON-FICTION

London Calling: Africa's Sex Exports



A panoramic view of the city of London.

Meet Panther (not her real name, that would be ridiculous). She's a Black girl from Mombasa, the dreamy holiday capital of Kenya. In her mid-twenties, she's slim, dark, with large fiery eyes set in a rather angular head from which luscious red-painted lips pout at the world. Sexy she certainly is, and it helps in her line of work because she peddles sex in London town. Oh, and business is good! Panther averages £1,000 per week (over Kshs 180,000). She's so busy that her two mobile phones hardly ever stop ringing, even on Wednesday which is her 'off day'. On Wednesdays, she gets to shop at designer stores, eat at choice restaurants, and spend quality time with her daughter. Believe it or not (God, I sound like the host of *Ripley's*), Panther told her daughter exactly what she does for a living and is neither ashamed nor apologetic about it. In fact, Panther is quite brazen, in general. She almost made conservative patrons choke on their food when she blurted out, 'I need my White meat!' during an interview with a magazine. (She only sleeps with White men.) But how did a village belle from the East African coastline come to be selling sex in *the* city? Let's find out...

Panther was an innocent island girl until the White man came for her. But I tell a lie - she's a freak who's been posing topless since she was fourteen! Growing up in Mombasa, she met a British soldier who brought her back to Cool Britannia as his wife. Before long, she snapped up an offer to pose nude and spread-eagled for

a steamy magazine. The photos were an instant hit and she started 'modelling' behind her husband's back. As her fame grew, so did the risk of exposure and it wasn't long before one of the guys at the barracks showed her husband a nude centrefold of her. Chaos reigned that night as the military man beat Panther black and blue. She reported the matter to the police and started a court case but didn't see it through. Interestingly, she reckons that instead of beating her up, hubby should 'have been proud' of her. (Go figure!)

She left hubby, found a place a train-ride away from London and continued turning men on for a living. Now an underground celebrity, it wasn't long before the people of her sleepy neighbourhood were enlightened by a nude magazine spread of her which was pinned to the wall of her local pub. From that time onwards, the beery men there would get erections that would put Big Ben to shame whenever she breezed in. Women scrawled obscenities across the photo. 'It's always the women who have a problem,' Panther argues, 'because they know they can't compete. The minute a woman sees her husband talking to me, the claws come out'. For now, Panther is - as in Xaviera Hollander's notorious book title - 'a happy hooker'. She has a new White boyfriend who knows her trade and she lives in the lap of luxury.

But Panther isn't the only Black girl 'on the game'. European males appear to relish the thrill of having sex

with exotic women, and ebony skin apparently ranks very high. Consider the case of British super model Naomi Campbell who was so popular in her hey-day that she graced the cover of every major fashion magazine then in existence. But she had to put up with various demeaning remarks - like being referred to as a 'black panther'. She sued the author of a travel guide funded by the Spanish government for describing a peak near Madrid as 'black, svelte, hard and slippery, like Naomi Campbell's loins'.

On 22nd August 2003, a Kenyan newspaper revealed that for the previous thirty years, some British troops had been sexually abusing rural Kenyan women. (About three thousand British soldiers are deployed to Kenya for training every year). Many of these women have mixed-race children, as a result. Through a London-based lawyer, the complainants have been seeking justice but, so far, without much luck. But consensual encounters are commonplace. Prostitutes avail themselves to 'Johnnies' (British soldiers) even if it means travelling from Nairobi to smaller towns like Nanyuki where they are to be found aplenty.

In Simon Nye's hit British TV sitcom, *Men Behaving Badly*, a male lead once mused, over a beer, that 'the thing with your Mediterranean bird (girl) is that her sexual urges have been gently brought to the surface by the (warmth of) the sun' whereas 'your British bird, bless her, has spent her life (all wrapped up) freezing at a bus stop: she's in no position to open up sexually.' If that's the case, then it's no wonder that some foreign girls have made London their Mecca.

In the UK, 'black escorts' are in high demand, as evidenced by the numerous 'adult entertainment' websites that enthusiastically advertise them. Incidentally, online prostitution is a safer option to traditional 'street walking' because while transactional sex is not illegal in England, 'soliciting' and 'loitering' are.

There's a time to live and a time to die. And for the middle-class foreign-born sex queens in the UK, this is the time to live. I'm talking plush homes, fat bank accounts, posh dining, rides that would make *Top Gear* fans weep with envy, designer labels, and any other luxury available on the third rock from the sun. Which is

hardly surprising in a country where - according to no less than the Office of National Statistics - the flesh trade contributes about £5.3 billion to the Gross Domestic Product! In fact, 'the game' is hardly a newsworthy topic, unless someone frightens the horses (like the time British actor Hugh Grant was arrested with a Black hooker in Los Angeles, 'doing the nasty' in a public place.)

Early this century, a Kenyan-born woman known as Anne O'Brien became a victim of her own success and ended up in Southwark Crown Court facing charges of 'controlling prostitutes'. To paraphrase rapper Ma\$e, she was 'crucified for sex in the city'. Her story:

The petite Anne O'Brien was born in Kenya where her parents were *squatters* (landless people). On completing school, she reportedly worked beside her mother, selling vegetables at a market stall, before leaving for the UK. Less than two years later, Wambui married Irishman Patrick O'Brien and settled in Ireland, but not for long. Wanderlust and the lure of big money took her to London where she joined the flesh trade. She changed her name to 'Nancy'. (She was forever changing names and still goes by various aka's.) Before long, became a well-paid vice girl in London brothels. She later moved to Park West Apartments in Edgware Road to work in a brothel owned by a fellow Kenyan, a Ms. McDowall from Naivasha.

Living in the fast lane, the two immigrants later relocated to Baker Street, where McDowall set up another brothel - Emma's Escort Agency. After working for McDowall for several months (raking in over Kshs 10,000 per hour), O'Brien moved out and started her own operation in Paddington, West London, in 1997. She provided a procession of call girls to her male clients, some as young as fourteen. She also employed 'card boys' to post thousands of nude pictures of her girls, contact information supplied, in London's public phone booths (a common way for London hookers to advertise themselves before cell phones revolutionized communication). The Force, as *Star Wars* fans might say, was with her and the business grew at a premium.

O'Brien paid over £1 million in cash for her upmarket Kensington property which had a penthouse that conjured up memories of *Penthouse* magazine. It also had

a dungeon for those who like a little pain with their pleasure (Me, I'll have a nice Catholic girl with all the trimmings and mustard on the side, please!) Customers were given a 'take-away sex menu' offering every kind of sexual pleasure under the sun, with prices starting at £250 (Kshs 47,000, adjusted for inflation) per hour. Her twenty-four-hour call-girl service had three shifts of prostitutes from Europe, Asia and Mother Africa. 'She was ruthless and exceptionally greedy,' revealed Ruth Nyambura, a Kenyan girl who worked for O'Brien. 'A very aggressive woman whose success knows no boundaries... That is how she made her fortune.'

Sweet was the smell of profit. O'Brien allegedly stuffed £1.6 million (Ksh 302,000,000 million) in twenty-seven bank accounts under the company names: Marble Arch Services, Anne Hair and Beauty, and Dream Girl Creations. She paid £487,000 for a four-storey building in Crickle Wood in North West London. Her personal profit was reportedly £1,200 (over Kshs 226,800) per week. She bought her mother back in Kenya two *matatus* (public service vehicles) christened 'Dream Girl' (after her escort agency) and a mansion worth Kshs 7 million.

Too successful to remain secret, O'Brien's operation came under investigation. Detectives from Scotland Yard paid her a visit. They asked some penetrating questions and probed deep into her assets. Newspapermen all over the Land of Hope and Glory dedicated several inches to O'Brien and her girls. She was arraigned in Southwark Crown Court where a jury found her guilty on three counts of controlling prostitutes, between October 10, 2003 and April 15, 2004. In 2005, O'Brien was convicted of three counts of controlling prostitutes. She was briefly jailed and later put on community service.

The O'Brien affair sent tremors across Kenya, bringing the international flesh trade into the limelight once again. 'This woman said to be selling natural resources in England is my constituent,' said then Kabete MP Paul Muite, who is a lawyer by profession. 'Prostitution is not prohibited in England. What is prohibited is living on

earnings of immorality.' Meanwhile, O'Brien's mother rushed to her daughter's defence, saying that O'Brien was a Christian and had no truck with prostitution. She simply owned a highly successful hair salon. (Yeah, right - and Bill Clinton 'didn't have sexual relations with that woman, Monica Lewinsky'!)

After her release from the 2005 sentence, O'Brien restarted her brothel business, along with her husband and sister. They allegedly ran two London bordellos which operated twenty-four hours a day, the girls working in three shifts. In July 2018, the Southwark Crown Court found O'Brien guilty of charges that included 'conspiracy to control prostitution for gain' and 'facilitating travel of another person with a view to exploitation'. She was sentenced to ten years in jail.

Side-stepping the issue of morality, I find O'Brien guilty on two counts: exploiting girls and being greedy. In fact, had she not been such a money-grabber, she would probably have flown under the radar. But because she made money her god and worshipped at the altar of the almighty pound, she not only did jail time but lost *all* her wealth, including the cash in the twenty-seven bank accounts. What was the moral from the movie *Rush Hour 2*? - 'Greed will imprison us all.'

I have side-stepped the issue of morality because prostitution - aka 'the selling of one's natural resources' - is one hard nut to crack. History records that prostitution was humanity's first profession. Before there were lawyers and doctors, there were prostitutes. Before there were soldiers and spies, there were prostitutes. The sex trade is unlikely to fade away in London as elsewhere. Mega scandals like the Profumo affair, the shocking Jimmy Savile sex abuse revelations, the jaw-dropping Ghislaine Maxwell/Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking hustle, and the recent Prince Andrew sexual assault case show the lengths to which so-called 'gentlemen' will go to fulfill their sexual desires. London, brace yourself for the girls from Africa.

God save the King.

QUOTES



'I really hate my brother's fiancé. She hasn't worked in a year 'cause she's "writing a children's book". And I was, like, that can't take more than an hour. And I know she doesn't like me, either. 'Cause she's, like, "Gawd, you're so thin!" And I'm like, "So are children's books." ' - Olivia Carter, standup comedian

'If you see a man opening a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.' – Anon.

'Writing books is a solitary business and I have to be on my own, I have to live with my own thoughts for six months or eight months to get it done. So, it's different. A businessman reacts with other people on a day-to-day basis, dozens of people. I don't. I react with my characters, in my head. It's a sort of clandestine arrangement. Like having a secret girlfriend.' - Wilbur Smith, South African novelist

'I think that almost all of literature is about love...I love love.'
- Chimamanda Adichie, author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*,
which she wrote because she 'wanted to write about love and war'

'The main character in the African novel is always single, neurotic, perverse, depressive, childless, homeless and overburdened with debt. Here, we live, we f**k, we're happy. There needs to be f**king in African literature!' - From *Tram 83* by Fiston Mwanza Mujila (DRC), winner of the Etisalat Prize for African Fiction

'I would like to write an erotic novel. But I have to wait until my mother dies.'
- Isabelle Allende talking to David Frost on Al-Jazeera

'There is no sky as big as this one anywhere else in the world. It hangs over you, like some kind of gigantic umbrella, and takes your breath away.'
- From *Rules of the Wild* (novel) by Francesca Marciano

‘With her back to the fire, gold hair aflame, in red and gold *kekoi*, she stands...Sunk in chairs, legs crossed on the floor, propped up against the wall, all our eyes hang fascinated on that slight figure...The flames flicker; her half-closed eyes awaken to our mutual appeal. As ever, desire and the long-drawn tobacco smoke weave around her ankles, slowly entwining that slight frame; around her ankle it curls; a shudder, eyes close. Contentment! Power! The figure in the golden *kekoi*.’

- From *Vertical Land* by Frédéric de Janzé

‘I have a feeling that wherever I may be in future, I will be wondering whether there is rain at Ngong.’

- From *Letters From Africa* by Karen Blixen

‘I was working, I had a person whom I loved, I had money, but I was not fulfilling my dream. My dream was, and still is, to be a writer.’ – Paulo Coelho

‘Sex to me is not dropping my underwear to my knees and lifting my dress up to my neck and lying on a plush settee in an expensive restaurant where the waiters don’t intrude after coffee’s been served.’

– From *Just a Matter of Time* by James Hardly Chase

‘If ever a title was tailor-made for the masthead of Culture Publications, Inc., it’s “Arms and the Woman,” for in *Spicy Detective* they have achieved the sauciest blend of libido and murder this side of Gilles de Rais. They have juxtaposed the steely automatic and the frilly panty and found that it pays off.’

– From *Somewhere a Roscoe* (essay) by S. J. Perelman

‘I do it (writing) for the sheer love of it...I loved doing it when I wasn't making any money out of it, why would I not want to do it if I stopped making money now? I did it for many years without making much money. You do it just to see how far you can push this, and there's always a new frontier.’ - Dean Koontz

‘The colour drained slowly from my face, entered the auricle, shot up the escalator, and issued from the ladies and misses’ section in the housewares department.’

– S.J. Perelman, *The Love Decoy*

‘White people love to look at their family tree. Just look at it. Because if they shake it, a nigger might fall out.’ – From *Race* (DVD) by Paul Mooney

‘I am a fan of e-reading. I am a fan of e-books and this electronic communication. When I first started hearing about e-reading, I was like "Oh, no, you've got to have paper books". And of course, I love paper books and there will always be a place for them but the convenience of the e-books is hard to beat.’

- Patricia Cornwell

‘I love everything that's old: Old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine.’

Oliver Goldsmith, Irish dramatist and novelist

‘There’s a saying that “You destroy what you love”. It’s the other way around: what you love destroys you.’

– George Plimpton

‘Whoever does not love knowledge, then there is no good in him; so there should not be any acquaintance between you and him, and nor any friendship.’

– Imam Malik ibn Anas, Arab Muslim jurist, theologian, and hadith traditionist

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

- Salman Rushdie, three-time Booker Prize winner

'India pretty much splits people into two categories, you love it or you can't stand it. I'm in the former group.' – From *Slow Waltz in Cedar Bend* (novel) by Robert James Waller

'I'm a storyteller. I have never pretended to be a great literary writer. I don't want to be a literary writer and I probably couldn't be a literary writer. But I love to tell stories.'

- Jackie Collins

'There is no mistaking a real book when one meets it. It's like falling in love.'

- Christopher Morley (1880-1957)