

To: SA PEN Members

E-Newsletter No. 6/2013 – 16/04/2013



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN CENTRE OF
PEN INTERNATIONAL**

A World Association of Writers

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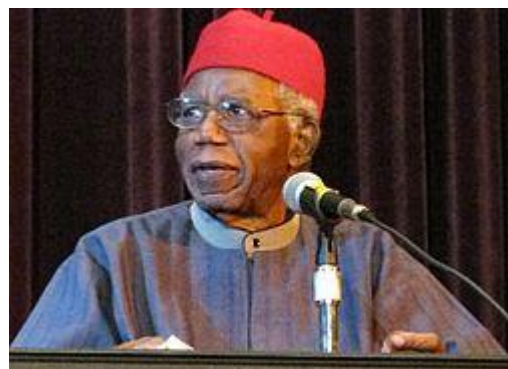
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What South Africa can learn from Chinua Achebe (16/11/1930 – 21/03/2013)

By Anneke Rautenbach

In South Africa it is difficult to imagine a place, or a moment in time, where enamel crockery was preferable to hand-crafted Nigerian pottery. Enamel holds a unique set of connotations for us, many of which we would rather forget. But this is what Chinua Achebe recalls from his childhood in his seminal essay, *The Novelist as Teacher* (1968). He also recalls the reaction of shock and horror at the decision by a local girls' school to perform traditional Nigerian dances



instead of the usual, 'genteel' Maypole dance of England. Using these analogies, he makes his point: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."

What can we draw from this essay in the South Africa of 2013? Africa has come a long way since the 1960s when it was written: a time of emancipation for many of its countries – pre-colonial ways of life lost forever, and the struggle with inherited culture and infrastructure only just beginning. Because post-colonial circumstances were so extreme, with inherited crises in the economic, political and social spheres, the question of relevance was a pertinent one for the writer as an emerging figure in modern Africa. Having been released from our own shackles of apartheid as late as the 90s, South Africa is still experiencing the ripple effect of turbulence, and in many ways our writers’ struggle for identity during the last twenty years has not been very different to the struggles experienced in Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana in the 1960s. We still ask ourselves what the role of the writer, critic and artist is in the new South Africa – what responsibilities do they have to political commentary and to the nation in general? What are the pitfalls – social or aesthetic – of writing for a European and American readership rather than a local one? As JM Coetzee wrote through the mouthpiece of his character, Elizabeth Costello: *“African novelists may write about Africa, about African experiences, but they seem to me to be glancing over their shoulder all the time they write, at the foreigners who will read them (...) How can you explore a world in all its depth if at the same time you are having to explain it to outsiders?”*.

Deftly Achebe has achieved this balance during his rich and wide-spanning career. His decision – a controversial one – to write in English has re-invented the language for African readers and writers and has meant that children across South Africa and elsewhere were introduced to *Things Fall Apart* at the age of 17, as I was. Despite glamour, international acclaim and more than 40 honorary doctorates from universities across the world, it is the children of Africa who Achebe always had in mind when writing. He reaffirmed the act of writing not as something which comes from an ivory tower -- isolated and isolating – but as something public, social, relevant and indeed, necessary. For Achebe, the writer’s role was as important as the teacher’s – something which, in South Africa, was nearly re-classified as an essential service. *“I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach a boy that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather,”* he wrote, *“and that the palm tree is a fit subject for poetry.”*

11/04/2013

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Blog del Narco

Dear colleagues,

Go to <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/03/mexico-drugs-blog-del-narco> to read an excerpt from a book to be published later this month by the two anonymous Mexicans who set up and run Blog del Narco (<http://www.blogdelnarco.com/>), a website where citizens can upload uncensored reports, photos and videos on Mexico’s drug war. It makes inspiring if sobering reading.

Kind regards,

Tamsin Mitchell | Researcher and Campaigner - Africa and Americas, Writers in Prison Committee | PEN International

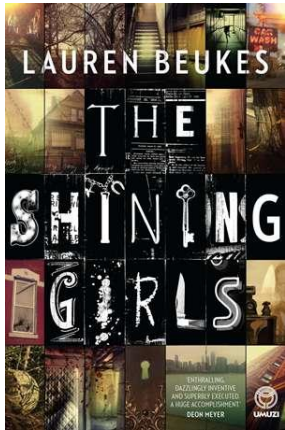
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Book Launches – *The Shining Girls* by Lauren Beukes, 19th & 23rd April, Cape Town

Join Lauren for one of two events in Cape Town to launch her new novel, *The Shining Girls*.

The Book Lounge launch

Date: Friday, 19th April 2013
Time: 17:30 for 18:00
Venue: The Book Lounge, 71 Roeland Street, Cape Town
RSVP: booklounge@gmail.com / 021 462 2425



Kalk Bay Books launch

Date: Tuesday, 23 April 2013
Time: 18:30 for 19:00
Venue: Kalk Bay Books, 124 Main Road, Kalk Bay
RSVP: books@kalkbaybooks.co.za / 021 788 2266

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PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature: New York, 29th April – 5th May 2013

Several SA PEN members will be involved in this Festival.

On **Friday, 3rd May**, 6.30 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. Margie Orford will be participating in an event entitled *A Literary Safari*: Explorers may discover a bedside reading, a dinner-table discussion, or a poet in the elevator at this event, where each participant is given a map and left to roam the halls of the city’s oldest and largest artist community: the notoriously labyrinthine Westbeth Artists’ Housing.

On **Saturday, 4th May**, 5.00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. Siphiso Mahala, Zakes Mda and Margie Orford will be participating in *South Africa in Two Acts*: Working with PEN chapters in South Africa, this panel will focus discussion on literature and accountability in the new South Africa. Does the literary community reflect the country’s demographics? Can literature unpack questions of corruption from a legacy of racism? Co-sponsored by The Cooper Union and South African PEN.



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Commonwealth Book Prize & Commonwealth Short Story Prize

Congratulations to member Jamala Safari who has been shortlisted for this year's Commonwealth Book Prize for his novel *The Great Agony & Pure Laughter of the Gods*. The Commonwealth Book Prize is awarded for the best first novel.

Political, religious and social conflict runs through many of this year's shortlisted entries, but there are also humorous stories, stories of hope, and stories full of imagination and power. The unmatched global reach of the prizes allows readers internationally to engage with a world of literature that might otherwise remain undiscovered, consistently bringing less-heard voices to the fore.

Encompassing a span of 54 countries, entries are judged within the five regions of Africa, Asia, Canada and Europe, the Caribbean and the Pacific, each of which will produce a regional winner for the two prizes. These will be announced on 14th May 2013. Good luck Jamala!

See more at: <http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/updates/shortlists-announced-2013-literary-prizes#sthash.AK76PnPa.dpuf>

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Publications received

SA PEN has received the following publication. Should you wish to read it please contact Deborah on rudebs@icon.co.za

- *Japanese Book News 75*, Spring 2013

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Forthcoming events

- ❖ **World Book Day** – 23rd April
- ❖ **PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature** - New York, 29th April – 5th May 2013. www.worldvoices.pen.org
- ❖ **World Press Freedom Day** – 3rd May 2013
- ❖ **Dancing in Other Words / Die Dansende Digtersfees** – 10th & 11th May 2013, Spier, Stellenbosch. This is an international poetry festival, curated by Breyten Breytenbach. www.dancinginotherwords.co.za
- ❖ **45th Annual Conference of The Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International** - Bled, Slovenia, 8th to 12th May 2013
- ❖ **PEN International Writers in Prison Committee Conference** - Krakow, Poland, 14th to 17th May 2013
- ❖ **Franschhoek Literary Festival** – 17th to 19th May 2013. www.flf.co.za
- ❖ **Fugard Festival & JM Coetzee & Nobel Laureates Festival** – 23rd to 26th May, Richmond, Karoo. www.richmondnc.co.za

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Uganda hosts 2013 Caine Prize workshop

Wednesday, 3rd April 2013

For the first time in the history of the Caine Prize its annual workshop will take place in Uganda this month and will see the launch of the Prize’s 2012 anthology, published by the Uganda Women Writers' Association, FEMRITE, one of eight co-publishers of the Caine Prize anthologies.

Twelve writers from seven different African countries will convene at the Garuga Resort Beach Hotel for nine days (16th April – 25th April) to write, read and discuss work in progress and to learn from two experienced writers, Véronique Tadjo and Pam Nichols who will act as tutors and animateurs.

This year’s participants include last year’s winner, Rotimi Babatunde (Nigeria), three 2012 shortlisted writers; Billy Kahora (Kenya), Melissa Myambo (Zimbabwe) and Stanley Kenani (Malawi – **SA PEN member**) and eight other promising writers; Michael Phoya (Malawi), Wazha Lopang (Botswana), Elnathan John (Nigeria), Abubakar Ibrahim (Nigeria) and Harriet Anena, Davina Kawuma, Lillian Aujo and Hellen Nyana from Uganda. During the workshop, the writers will be expected to write a short story for inclusion in the 2013 Caine Prize anthology, which will be published by New Internationalist on 1st July 2013 and subsequently by seven co-publishers in Africa. Each year the stories conceived at the workshops are automatically entered for the following year’s Prize.

The official launch of the Caine Prize 2012 anthology, published by FEMRITE, will take place later that day (23rd April) at The Barn Steakhouse, 34 Windsor Crescent, Kololo, Kampala between 5.30 and 8pm.

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Invitation to submit new unpublished work to *Baobab: South African Journal of New Writing*

This is an invitation to submit new unpublished work to *Baobab: South African Journal of New Writing*. More details are below. If you are in contact with other writers please pass this invitation on.

From: Prof Andries Walter Oliphant, Head: Theory of Literature
Email: oliphaw@unisa.ac.za

GUIDELINES FOR THE PAYMENT OF CONTRIBUTORS

Introduction: Baobab is committed to ensuring that contributors are fairly compensated for their work. However since the journal is a non-profit-making entity, we are always encouraging contributors who are willing to give their work voluntarily as a gesture of supporting the mission and objectives of Baobab.

Complimentary Copies: As a rule, each contributor will receive two copies of the edition in which she or he has contributed.

Features: Contributors of features (interviews, essays and reviews) will be paid as follows:

- a. R1500 for theatre and book reviews of between 1500 - 2000 words in length.
- b. R1500 for interviews and essays of between 1500 - 2000 words in length.
- c. R3000 for essays of between 3000 and 4000 words in length.

Photography: Cover - R500 per image; Inside Pages - R300 per image
Assignments - R2000 per day (covers a minimum of four hours)

Fiction:

- a. Short story contributors will get R1000 per short story published.
- b. R250 will be payable for a poem irrespective of its length.
- c. At least R1500 will be paid for excerpts of unpublished novels, memoirs etc irrespective of their length.

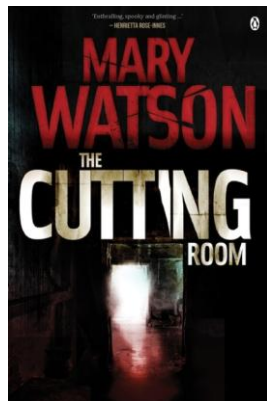
Commissioned Assignments: Where *Baobab* commissions contributors to embark on special assignments on the journal's behalf, different rates may apply and would be confirmed in writing between *Baobab* and the contributor/s.

Contributors outside South Africa: Unfortunately, at this stage, *Baobab* is unable to pay contributors outside South Africa and would instead encourage these contributors to take more copies of *Baobab* as a token payment.

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Members' Publications

The Cutting Room by Mary Watson



When her husband Amir abruptly leaves home, film editor Lucinda is left angry and puzzled. Where has Amir gone, and why? In the months before he left, Amir seemed troubled and preoccupied and their marriage had become strained and tense. Soon afterwards, Lucinda is brutally assaulted in a knife attack, which throws her even more off balance.

Searching for composure, she finds a distraction in assisting an older friend, Austrian film-maker Thomas, with a documentary he is making about an old mission station which is allegedly haunted. But the experience becomes an unnerving one for Lucinda who finds Thomas's growing obsession with the story behind his film worrying. As tensions build, so does the underlying mood of constant menace, until Lucinda is confronted with a disturbing revelation.

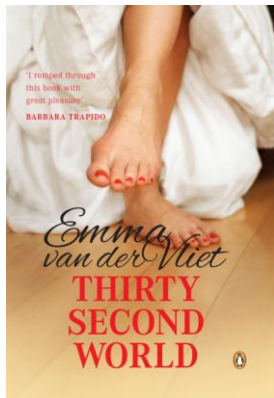
The Cutting Room is a thoughtful and provocative novel of loss and loneliness, longing and guilt, and the different ways in which people can be haunted.

Light on a Dark Secret by Glynnis Hayward

Insightful, Revealing, Shocking! A glimpse of what it was truly like to live and love under the repressive regime of Apartheid. In 1982, Fran Walker was born in California and given up for adoption. Twenty years later, she is on a quest to find her biological parents and solve questions that have plagued her since childhood. Four women are the storytellers and each narrates her perspective of events that began in 1980, when two students fell in love in South Africa. In addition to Fran, the women are her birth mother, biological grandmother, and adoptive mother. 1980 was a difficult time in apartheid-era South Africa for those who opposed government policies; it was extremely dangerous to act outside the law. As a bi-racial couple in a country governed by strict laws of racial segregation, Valerie and Johan's love affair was clandestine. The consequence of their forbidden love, if discovered, would be immediate incarceration. A child from such a union was unthinkable. Discovering she is pregnant, Valerie is faced with imminent exposure. Unable to communicate with Johan, who is being closely monitored by the police, she makes decisions that will have far-reaching consequences. Her actions, as well as those of her mother, Sharon Spencer, and Grace Walker - Fran's adoptive mother, raise the question: More than biology, what does it take to be a mother? Fran despairs when, amidst prejudice and recrimination, her search discovers a family alienated and broken. But the journey to South Africa is a coming of age for her when she falls in love with a fellow student. She gains insights which help her understand and forgive the circumstances that surrounded her birth.



Thirty Second World by Emma van der Vliet



Alison seems to have life sorted. Despite her high-flying job producing commercials she still manages to keep her infant son on the breast and her daughter in Strawberry Pops. But her texts to her best friend Evie tell a much less glamorous story.

Beth is new to the ad industry and desperate to impress. But the more she succeeds at work, the more things seem to be unraveling at home. And to make matters worse, she's finding it hard to resist the advances of a sleazy colleague.

Things get really messy when a shoot takes their team to an isolated hell-hole in the middle of the South African bush. Accidents happen and dark secrets are revealed, and soon both Beth and Alison are forced to face some home truths.

Saucy and smart, *Thirty Second World* is a funny, moving, real-world tale set in the unreal world of the South African film industry.

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Had a book published recently? Attended or participated in a Festival? Won an award? Achieved a personal milestone of note? The compiler would welcome any news of your activities for future issues of the SA PEN e-newsletter. Please e-mail your contributions to rudebs@icon.co.za.

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All information regarding awards/competitions, residencies, festivals, etc., included in this newsletter is passed on to you as a service to SA PEN members. Any questions regarding entry rules, entry processes, festival programmes, etc., should be forwarded direct to the relevant organisers. SA PEN attempts to establish that the information received is genuine before passing this on to our members, but we cannot be held responsible should that not be the case.

