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## The transition from Research into Writing

ANFASA

**ACADEMIC  
AND  
NON-FICTION  
AUTHORS  
ASSOCIATION  
OF SOUTH AFRICA**  
DEDICATED TO EMPOWERING AUTHORS

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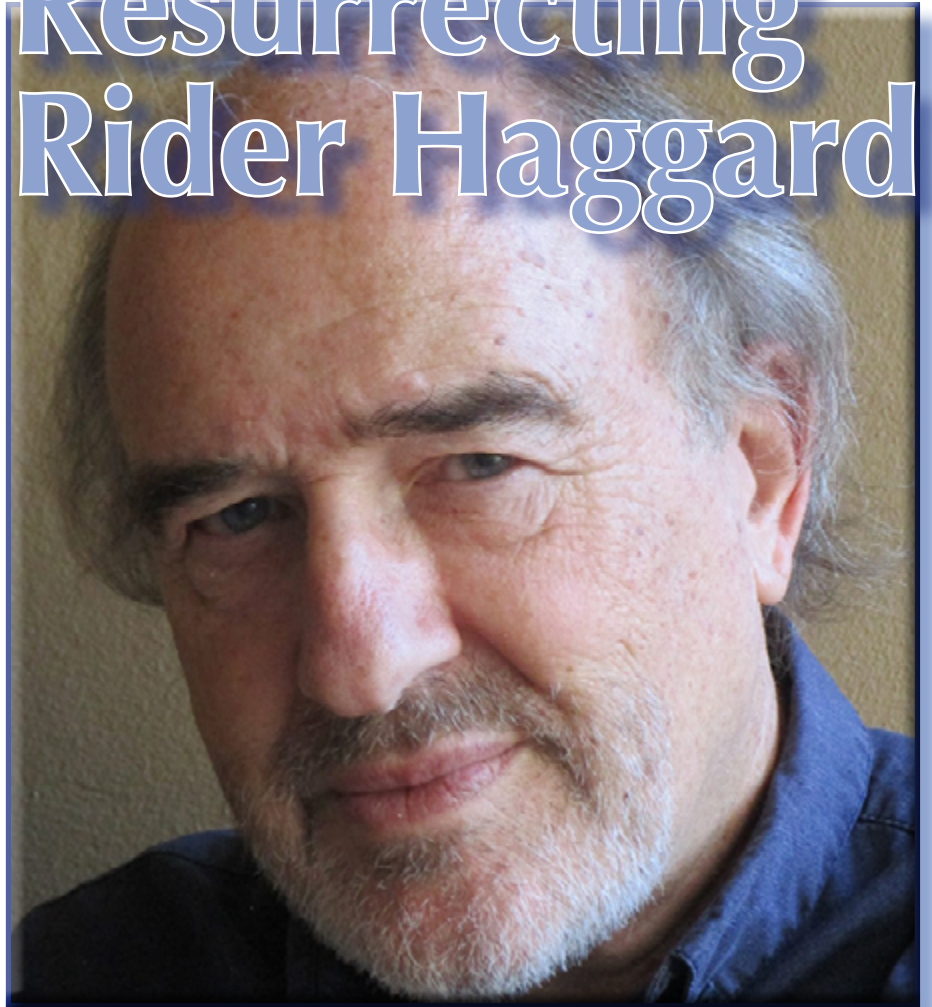
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# Resurrecting Rider Haggard



**Stephen Coan\***

**H**ow I came to write a biography of H. Rider Haggard, author of *King Solomon's Mines*, *She* and *Allan Quatermain*, was detailed in 'Stumbling on History' (ANFASA magazine Volume 4, issue 1, 2020), written when I was nearing a final draft suitable for submission to a publisher. *The Buried Man, A Life of H. Rider Haggard* was published in March this year and the editor of the ANFASA magazine requested an article on the 'writing process'. So here goes.

I began serious archival research on Haggard in 1997, here in South Africa and later overseas, out of which came two major diversions from the biography: *Diary of an African Journey* and *Mameena and Other Plays*; previously unpublished works by Haggard which I edited and introduced (the latter volume with Alfred

continues on page 2:

\* Stephen Coan is an author, an occasional ANFASA Magazine contributor and a literary researcher.

Stephen Coan began serious archival research on H. Rider Haggard in 1997, here in South Africa and later overseas, but only began writing the biography after his retirement when the necessary time became available. Photo: Antoaneta Slavova.

***"At the outset I decided not to approach a publisher. I wanted to write the book I wanted to write, free of outside pressure, least of all a deadline."***

## The transition from Research into Writing

continued from page 1:

Tella). At the time I was working as a journalist, and it soon became evident the kind of biography I envisaged was beyond my capabilities – and the required time – until my retirement in 2015.

At the outset I decided not to approach a publisher. I wanted to write the book I wanted to write, free of outside pressure, least of all a deadline. The ‘deadline’ was a draft I was satisfied with prior to proceeding further.

What type of biography should it be? A conventional cradle-to-grave chronology? A semi-travel book – ‘In the Footsteps of Rider Haggard’? One with a more oblique and novel approach? I settled on the conventional format on the basis there was a need for precisely that: a full account of Haggard’s life and work, the linkage between the two, and an emphasis on his time in South Africa from 1875 to 1881. The previous Haggard biography, Tom Pocock’s *Rider Haggard and the Lost Empire*, had come out in 1993, but by the time I began writing Haggard was no longer a well-known name; conversely, he had become an object of ever-increasing academic interest, and the academy would be my main audience.

The writing? First came the title, ‘The Buried Man’, a phrase taken from an essay by Graham Greene, ‘Rider Haggard’s Secret’. Haggard ‘was a public author’, wrote Greene (a Haggard fan), and though his ‘private life remained the private life in so far as he could control it’ was in his books that could be found ‘the emergence of the buried man’. The title would be a touchstone, a reminder of original intentions.

How to move from research to writing? A useful piece of advice was provided in an article I read featuring eminent biographer Michael Holroyd, who said research didn’t have to be complete before writing; rather begin writing, carry



Henry Rider Haggard in the early 1890s.  
Photo: Cheyne Collection.

on to the end and where there are gaps return and fill them in later. Which is pretty much what I did, while applying my own piece of writing advice: ‘the writing is in the writing’. Don’t dither, don’t talk about it, just let go and write; in the process something happens, a subtle chemistry, ideas suddenly pop up out of nowhere, you remember things you didn’t know you knew, the writing takes over, one sentence leads to another, and the book takes on a life of its own.

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**“... research didn’t have to be complete before writing; rather begin writing, carry on to the end and where there are gaps return and fill them in later.”**

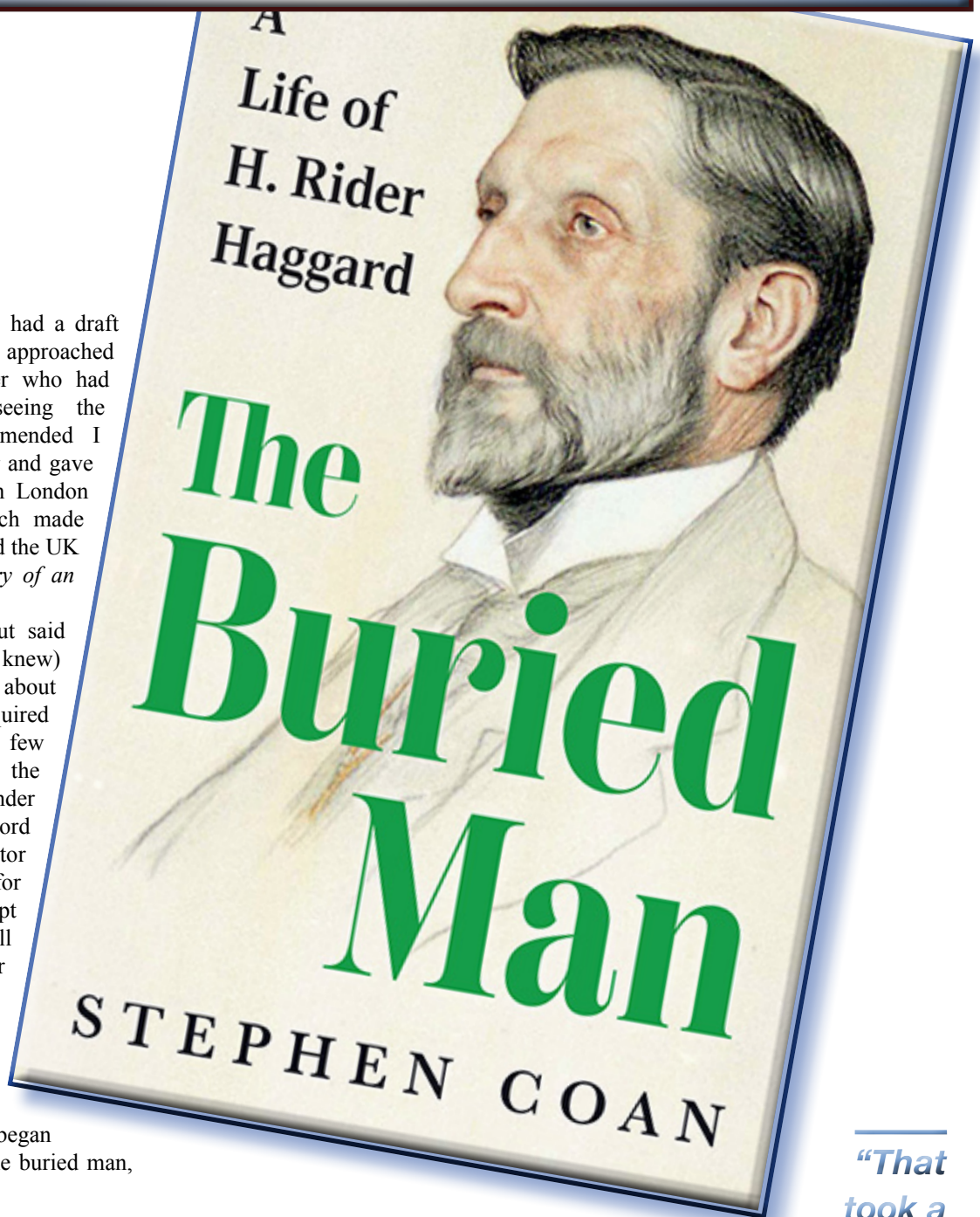


## The transition from Research into Writing

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It took five years until I had a draft I was happy with. I first approached a South African publisher who had expressed interest in seeing the manuscript. They recommended I seek an overseas publisher and gave me some names. Hurst in London was top of the list, which made sense as they had published the UK edition of Haggard's *Diary of an African Journey*.

Hurst were interested but said it was too long (which I knew) and suggested how to go about cutting it down to the required word count. That took a few more drafts to the point the manuscript, now safely under the permitted 275 000-word count, was in need of an editor who could see the wood for the trees. The manuscript was assigned to Russell Martin, a skilled editor with a second-to-none knowledge of nineteenth century South African history, who obligingly filleted the longueurs. And thus, ten years after I began writing, Rider Haggard, the buried man, was resurrected.



**“That took a few more drafts to the point the manuscript, now safely under the permitted 275 000-word count, was in need of an editor who could see the wood for the trees.”**

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An interview with Joanne Lombard, author of *Misdaad/Liefdaad*

# Writing Juvenile Literature – Debut Novelist takes it in her stride



An interview with Joanne Lombard,  
author of *Misdaad/Liefdaad*

Joanne Lombard, who wrote a novel for younger readers.  
All photos by Ann de Beer and Mauritz Lombard.

Hetta Pieterse

**D**uring 2024 Joanne Lombard wrote her debut children's novel, *Misdaad/Liefdaad*. To her delight and surprise, this Afrikaans book was selected as the winner in the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture's Publishing Hub Competition for 2024 in the Afrikaans literature category, a Competition in collaboration with ANFASA.

1 Hetta: Joanne, perhaps we firstly need to explain to readers the unusual book title, which is virtually untranslatable into English, in a literal sense. But in Afrikaans, a beautiful wordplay is created within the book title – using the word 'Misdaad', or Crime, and the word, 'Liefdaad', meaning An Act of Love. Do you want to expand on how this theme is central to the book?

You're absolutely right – the title plays on a word combination that's difficult to translate directly. *Misdaad/Liefdaad* captures the duality at the heart of the story: the tension between harm

and healing. The title of the book refers to how Lora, the self-appointed solver of all problems that she sees, coins the word liefdaad—an "act of love"—as the opposite of wrongdoing, signalling her belief that compassion can be a solution where punishment fails. Kindness is the central thread that runs through *Misdaad/Liefdaad*, shaping the characters' relationships and guiding the story's moral vision. Kindness defines the personal bonds in the story, especially in the warm, imaginative exchanges

***"the title plays on a word combination that's difficult to translate directly. Misdaad/Liefdaad captures the duality at the heart of the story: the tension between harm and healing."***

between Lora and her father, who never mocks her ideas but meets them with encouragement and affection. Kindness becomes a tool for healing, visible in the gradual emotional reconnection between Lora and her sister Tanya, who writes her a heartfelt letter, and in Lora's friendship with Basetsana, which grows from shared creativity and emotional support. Kindness also takes the form of patient restoration, seen in the long process of repairing

broken toys in Oom Anthony's doll hospital—an evocative metaphor for the slow, careful work of mending damaged lives, including Tanya's journey through addiction recovery. Kindness extends into social action, as the family donates toys to a shelter and builds new connections across class and circumstance,

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## An interview with Joanne Lombard, author of *Misdaad/Liefdaad*

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showing how small gestures can build solidarity. Kindness leaves a lasting legacy, as Oom Anthony donates his house for use as a halfway home, and the restored doll becomes the centrepiece of a museum exhibition—symbols of hope, generosity, and care.

This theme of kindness resonates with the work of Alexander McCall Smith, whose fiction also embraces compassion as a quiet force for good. I am a great fan of McCall Smith and inspired by his uplifting, feel-good fiction. He has openly discussed his motivation for embedding kindness into his writing. In an interview, he expressed a desire to highlight the importance of kindness in today's world. His stories celebrate empathy, moral integrity, and the quiet strength found in understanding others. This focus on kindness offers readers a reminder of the profound impact of simple, compassionate acts. It is no coincidence that kindness, as a guiding ethic, is also reflected in the recent educational emphasis on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which validates the emotional and relational literacy that both McCall Smith's work and *Misdaad/Liefdaad* seek to cultivate. In both cases, kindness is not sentimental—it is transformational.



**2 I found that the story you weave around Lora and her family just flows effortlessly— as a narrator you also move with ease across different characters. Older characters, younger, male and female – but of course Lora is the central figure. What would you say is the secret of ensuring that a character rings true? That each voice is built out to full potential within the relative limited space of a story?**

I think the secret lies in listening carefully to how each character sees the world – their fears, their longings, and their silences. Lora is the centre of the narrative, but through her eyes we access a whole constellation of voices – Tanya's letters, her father's quiet encouragement, her mother's academic detachment, the unpredictability of Hendrik. Each voice is given its own texture. Even minor characters, like the boy from the shelter or Anthony, carry a particular emotional weight, and that helps build their credibility in a short space.

**3 You manage to capture the dynamics of a modern suburban environment in realistic details, which is vital to drawing the reader into the story. How did you go about choosing the various environments?**

The environments in the book – the suburban home, the auction, the rehabilitation centre, Anthony's house, even the dam – were all chosen because they allow Lora to encounter different kinds of brokenness and different ways of repairing. Every space is a reflection of internal emotional landscapes: the chaos of Anthony's rooms, the sterility of the clinic, or the neglected warmth of Lora's home. These places are real, tangible, and just a bit imperfect – like the people in them.

***“... Oom Anthony's house, which is also the doll's hospital, really appeals to all the senses. It is not just a place, you see, it's something you feel. First, upon entering the house, the smell is noticed: a mix of vanilla and dust from a box of scented oils that has fallen over.”***

**4 My favourite setting in the book is the house filled with broken toys and miscellaneous objects, occupied by the loner character, ..... This**

**environment becomes a virtual wonderland – it really gets the imagination going. Through the eyes of Lora, an enchanting world is shared with the reader. Would you like to expand on this?**

Yes! I am pleased to hear that Oom Anthony's house, which is also the doll's hospital, really appeals to all the senses. It is not just a place, you see, it's something you feel. First, upon entering the house, the smell is noticed: a mix of vanilla and dust from a box of scented oils that has fallen over.

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## An interview with Joanne Lombard, author of *Misdaad/Liefdaad*



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a box of scented oils that has fallen over. This is strange but comforting, like an old cupboard that has been closed for years. Then there is what people see on entering: the rooms are packed with boxes and shelves, old tools and doll parts, and everything is covered in a soft, faded layer of age. Even the rug by the door is so worn it is just threads. The reader gets a strong sense of touch too, for example, the doll's dress is so thin in places that it is almost see-through, and the copper gears and springs on the workbench catch the light in a way that makes them seem delicate. The sound is subtle—there's a fan buzzing, and when Oom Anthony explains what he's doing, his voice is quiet but careful, almost as if he doesn't want to wake the toys. Together, these descriptions make the space feel alive in a quiet, strange way.

***“Tanya’s voice is crucial. Her letters are not just exposition; they serve as a kind of emotional bridge, drawing both Lora and the reader into her fragmented, self-aware inner world. I wanted Tanya to be both absent and present—a member of the family dynamic, temporarily living elsewhere in search of healing.”***

The room with the broken toys becomes a metaphor for what's at stake in the story. Through Lora's eyes, it is both a wonderland and a hospital – a place where things others have discarded are being gently and attentively made whole again. It is a place of hope. I was inspired by the idea that repair, whether of toys or people, is slow, deliberate work.

**5** The storyline has a second narrative line, linked to the mysterious and troubled older sister. But this is a pivotal character within the book, not so? The voice of the older sister is first introduced by way of letters to the younger sister. The impact of the older sister on the rest of the family is also subtly felt on various levels. How did you manage to integrate this into the main story?

Tanya's voice is crucial. Her letters are not just exposition; they serve as a kind of emotional bridge, drawing both Lora and the reader into her fragmented, self-aware inner world. I wanted Tanya to be both absent and present—a member of the family dynamic, temporarily living elsewhere in search of healing. Her impact is felt in how the household organises itself around her absence: the long drives, the unspoken comparisons, and Lora's deep need to make sense of her sister's pain. Structurally, I allowed Tanya's voice to thread through the narrative quietly but powerfully—first through the letter at the start, then in the domestic details of personal items like clothing, books, toiletries, and consumables like cold drinks and snacks, and later her almost wordless presence at the rehab centre. In

this way, her transformation could unfold in parallel with Lora's growing empathy and emotional maturity.

**6** Joanne, dis sekerlik nie maklik vir jou as volwassene om die boek te skryf uit die oogpunt van n jong tiener nie. Die dialoog is egter oortuigend, net soos ook die dialoog van die verskillende karakters. Wat is die geheim daaragter, as jy sou raad kon gee aan ander skrywers?

Baie dankie! Dis vir my 'n groot kompliment. Ek dink die geheim lê daarin dat ek, selfs as volwassene, nog baie goed

continues on page 7:



## An interview with Joanne Lombard, author of *Misdaad/Liefdaad*

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page 6:

onthou hoe dit gevoel het om daardie ouderdom te wees. Ek onthou my eie kinder- en tienerjare nog helder—nie net die gebeure nie, maar die gevoelens, die onsekerhede, die logika van 'n jong mens wat nie altyd sin maak vir volwassenes nie, maar vir jouself vanselfsprekend reg is! Dit help my ook baie dat ek na ons eie nefies, niggies, kleinkinders en kinders van vriende kan luister; hul manier van praat, hul waarnemings en opmerkings, en soms ook hul stiltes. Ek dink as 'n mens nie probeer om namens hulle slim te klink nie, maar eerlik en met empatie probeer skryf, kom die karakters se stemme en die dialoog vanself nader aan die waarheid.

7 Maar ek dink die grootste sukses is die vaslegging van die lewendige gedagterewêreld van Lora, vanuit wie se perspektief die storie grootliks vertel word. N mens sou selfs hoop dat dit baie empatie sal ontlok by ander jongmense – en dat meer dalk ook geprikkel sou word om hul eie stories te begin neerskryf. Het jy al enige reaksie van jongmense oor hierdie faset van die boek gekry?

Ja, ek het reeds terugvoer van lesers ontvang, en dit was vir my baie kosbaar. Een tiener het spesifiek gesê dat sy haarself in



Lora herken het—veral in daardie impuls om dinge vir ander mense te probeer 'regmaak', selfs al voel dit of jy nie regtig kan help nie. 'n Ander jong leser het my laat weet dat Lora haar laat dink het aan haar nefie wat ook deur 'n moeilike tyd gaan, en dat sy ná die lees van *Misdaad/Liefdaad* vir die eerste keer gevoel het dat iemand verstaan hoe dit is om net 'n kind te wees, maar tog alles intens te beleef. Ek het dit ook tydens 'n voorlesing

***“Ek wil graag Misdaad/Liefdaad aan 'n wyer gehoor wil bekend stel, veral aan jong lesers in skole. Weens die boek se temas is daar toevallig baie raakpunte met tegnologie- en lewensoriënteringtemas soos gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid, probleemoplossing, emosionele welstand en verantwoordelike burgerskap.”***

in 'n boekwinkel interessant gevind om te sien hoe baie jongmense aanklank gevind het by Lora se liefde vir uitvindings, veral meisies wat gesê het dis die eerste keer wat hulle op so 'n kreatiewe manier aan tegnologie of ingenieurswese dink. Dit wys dat Lora se stem nie net empatie ontlok nie, maar ook 'n soort kreatiewe selfvertroue aanwakker.

8 Eintlik word jou verhaal so lewendig en onderhoudend vertel, dat ek my dit kan indink dat n rolprent daarvan gemaak kan word. Hoewel dit n redelik eenvoudige storie is, is daar n rits baie belangrike onderwerpe wat aangeraak word – juis kwessies wat duisende Suid-Afrikaanse gesinne se lewens raak. Juis hierdie temas

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## An interview with Joanne Lombard, author of *Misdaad/Liefdaad*

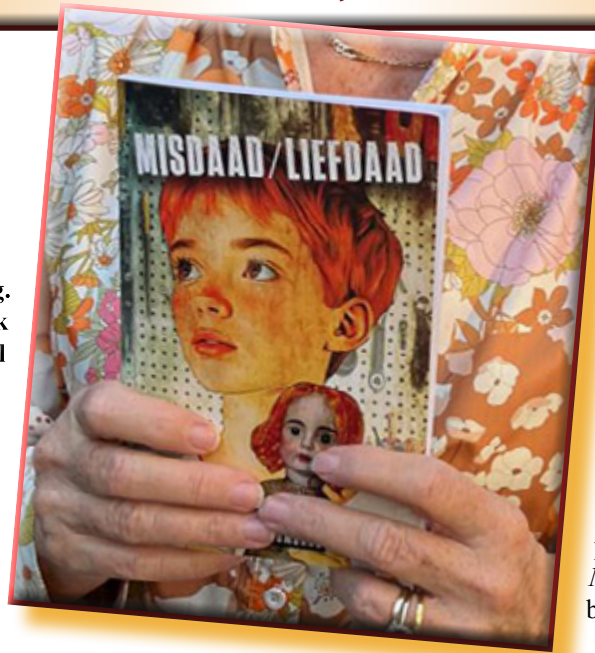
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maak dit hoogs nuuswaardig. Dit sou ideal wees vir die boek om ook in n ander vorm of taal gestalte te kry – byvoorbeeld as n draaiboek vir n rolprent, n verhoogstuk of vir n TV-reeks, of minstens ook in Engels vertaal te word. Dit is geweldig belangrik dat tieners en hedendaagse families verhaale kry waarmee hulle kan identifiseer – jy raak temas aan van misdaad, dwelmmisbruik, vereensaming, – eintlik dus geestesgesondheid binne die verskillende lede van gesinne. Wat sal jy graag in hierdie opsig wil aanpak om die boek wyer te kan bekend stel aan Suid-Afrikaners?

Die storie leen hom tot verfilming, ja, onder andere weens die kleurvolle visuele elemente wat deurgaans opduik in die speelgoed-tema. Vertaling in Engels is my volgende mikpunt en daarbenewens is daar baie navrae van mense wat die boek in digitale formaat wil hê.

Ek wil graag *Misdaad/Liefdaad* aan 'n wyer gehoor wil bekend stel, veral aan jong lesers in skole. Weens die boek se temas is daar toevallig baie raakpunte met tegnologie- en lewensoriënteringemas soos gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid, probleemoplossing, emosionele welstand en verantwoordelike burgerskap. Die skryfstyl maak dit ook moontlik om karakterontwikkeling, spanningslyn, dialoog, intrige, konflik, ruimte en dies meer te ontleed. Ek glo *Misdaad, Liefdaad* kan 'n voorgeskrewe of aanbevole boek wees.

Die bemerking van die boek kan gekombineer word met prettige, praktiese ervarings. Op 30 Maart het ek tot my vreugde 'n insetsel op die joernaalprogram, *Kwêla*, gesien oor 'n poprestoureerder, Janet Jooste, wat sowaar 'n regte Edison-praatpop besit, nes die een in my storie en op *Misdaad/Liefdaad* se voorblad! Ek het ook onlangs bewus geraak van die Repair Café-beweging in Nederland, waar kinders saam met vrywilligers gebreekte speelgoed herstel, so ek sal iets soortgelyks in Suid-Afrika wil help vestig. Dink net hoe spesiaal dit kan wees as 'n mens afskop met 'n Repair Café-werkswinkel tydens die Toyota SU Woordfees in Stellenbosch in Oktober! Die kinders kan poppe en elektroniese speelgoed sit en regmaak, net soos Lora en Basetsana se speelgoedprojek in die storie, terwyl 'n mens oor temas in die boek praat. So 'n werkswinkel sal die boek bevorder én 'n ruimte skep vir jong mense om vaardighede en positiewe



ingesteldhede by ouer mense te leer. Dit sal wonderlik wees as hierdie idee tot 'n langertermynprogram in skole en biblioteke kan groei.

Op 'n ernstiger noot, dit sal nuttig wees as organisasies wat ondersteuning met middelafhanklikheid bied, soos Narcotics Anonymous, Nar-Anon, SANCA, asook privaatrehabilitasieklinieke, van *Misdaad/Liefdaad* kennis neem, die boek aanbeveel, en ondersteun.

**9 Om af te sluit, vertel ons wat lê vir jou voor as skryfster – waaraan werk jy tans, of wat sien jy vir jouself in die nabye toekoms? Sou jy graag meer kontak wou maak met lesers, en sal ons jou te siene kan kry by kunstefeeste later hierdie jaar?**

**“Geskiedenis was my swakste skoolvak, maar snaaks genoeg, nou as volwassene, is dit juis geskiedenis waaroor ek die graagste lees, die graagste praat en die graagste skryf.”**

Geskiedenis was my swakste skoolvak, maar snaaks genoeg, nou as volwassene, is dit juis geskiedenis waaroor ek die graagste lees, die graagste praat en die graagste skryf. Ek en my man, Mauritz, klim maklik op 'n Saterdagoggend op die motorfiets of in die kar en gaan verken plekke soos Stoom Pub & Grill op Middelburg-stasie, of die art-deco-gebou van die Randse-lughawe. Onder- of ongerapporteerde geskiedenis van die lewe fassineer my. Dís vir my lekker: om oor iets te lees, na die aandenkings daarvan te gaan kyk, die herdenkings by te woon, en dan daaroor te skryf. En om menselywe in sulke feitestories te kan insit, gaan dink ek oor 'n paar interessante era's wat ek, of my familieledes, al beleef het. Ek werk tans aan so 'n geskiedkundige roman wat losweg gegrond is op gebeure in die Laeveld in die vroeg-twintigste eeu waarby van my familie betrokke was.

Die kontak met lesers is kosbaar en maak dat die storie op papier nie stom word nie. Elke keer as iemand vir my sê hoe 'n karakter in *Misdaad/Liefdaad* tot hulle gespreek het, voeg hulle meer betekenis tot die verhaal toe. Die kunstefeeste in Suid-Afrika is die beste plek om sommer 'n klomp mense te ontmoet wat in boeke en stories belangstel, so ek sal baie graag hierdie jaar nog 'n hele paar wil bywoon.

*This interview is conducted in both Afrikaans and English, given the original text is in Afrikaans. The book Misdaad Liefdaad (ISBN NO: 978-1-928466-26-0-3) by Joanne Lombard is available from the publisher Cover2Cover. Order by accessing the website <https://cover2cover.co.za/product/misdaad-liefdaad/>*



## Limpopo Book Fair – Photo Roundup



# Limpopo Book Fair in focus through the lens

All photographs taken by Hetta Pieterse



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## Limpopo Book Fair – Photo Roundup





## Pale Perceptions that Cloud the Researcher's Perspective

# The White Log in my Eye



Carl DG Martin\*

**R**eflexivity is not a new concept in academia. Nor was it new to me at the start of my research process. Each of us is, at any point, the subject of thousands of stories: male, Muslim, soccer player, tea-drinker, dog owner, Feminist, Marxist, white, *ad infinitum* (Sen, 2006). Reflexivity asks you to name and be critical of how you, as a person, reconcile these stories with the work you do (Berger, 2015; Shai, 2020). This practice is often demonstrated by case studies examining researcher-subject relations (Shai, 2020). Do you share a

### Pre-Angle

- ❑ Reflexivity is an important feature of all academic research. But I did not grasp to what extent.
- ❑ It is relevant to the entire process not just in the context of engaging with subjects. For me it has been instrumental in understanding how and why I have struggled to engage with literature at this early stage.
- ❑ This has been because I am a white South African and reading about white South Africans and whiteness.
- ❑ This positionality is also useful in my pursuit of the topic, but this usefulness can only be maximised in the context of reflexivity.

culture? Do you share a history? Or, in my case, do you share the skin tones that could signal both? I thought this would only become relevant once I began to approach

continues on page 12:

***“Each of us is, at any point, the subject of thousands of stories: male, Muslim, soccer player, tea-drinker, dog owner, Feminist, Marxist, white, ad infinitum (Sen, 2006).”***

#### \* Note on Author

Carl DG Martin is a Master's student in his first year at UKZN. He completed his BSocSci Honours with the Centre for Communication, Media and Society *cum laude* in 2024. In his undergraduate degree at UCT, he majored in Psychology and Linguistics and received a distinction in Linguistics.

## Pale Perceptions that Cloud the Researcher's Perspective

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potential subjects. I was mistaken.

I am a Masters' student at the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). My research niche is white identity and belonging in South Africa. Since the start of my academic journey, I've had my heart set on qualitative research. This fixation was partly a way to escape quantitative data processing (a mutual rejection). But primarily, it was because people's stories and experiences, what it feels like to *be*, are far more resonant with how I believe the world to function. While enamoured by the undergraduate fantasy of doing research without writing, I did not consider that my own story would be so prominent in this process. I am a male, son, student, partner, atheist, gym hobbyist, Terry Pratchett fan, and friend, but in the face of this topic and its literature, I struggle to feel anything but white.

My research is nascent, and I have been swimming in the existing literature on white South Africans. It is in this process, that problems have arisen. I found myself getting frustrated with the literature; surely "white" is not the be-all and end-all of their subjects. I approached each new article anticipating dissatisfaction. Every article seemed to have the same conclusions. It harmed my ability to engage with findings and theories meaningfully. I thought this frustration was rooted in some flaw in the design of the studies when it was in my identification with the subjects. Only when I acknowledged my investment in this topic and what I wished these articles

would say (when I started being reflexive) could I take a breath and approach this work with fresh eyes.

Doing this research, I struggle to feel anything but white because that's **precisely why I'm doing it**. I am a white South African, and I have brought that to my work. My story about myself has informed this research from ideation to application. I don't feel English, yet I am a monolingual white English-speaker in KwaZulu-Natal. Failing to be reflexive about this subjectivity and remain alert to knee-jerk reactions will hamstring my ability to contribute to the field.

Reflexivity is more than just identifying faults; proximity to the subject provides benefits that I must acknowledge. At this stage of my work, these are questions that I am asking myself. There is value in whether I feel that they are answered by the literature. These feelings are not sufficient to dispute findings, but they offer opportunities to build on existing work. I may feel that an author left important questions on the table or that the context has changed significantly. These points of departure are valuable.

Another advantage of my position which I don't take for granted is that other white South Africans I have spoken to are **highly** encouraging of this research. This support might not strictly be due to my subjective proximity to them, but the sentiment that "someone needs to do this" consistently bubbles through. Feeling that I am carrying some torch for people who are also grappling with these questions is a strong motivation. It staves off the inherent loneliness of research and gives me a sense of responsibility to do this and do this well.

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***"While enamoured by the undergraduate fantasy of doing research without writing, I did not consider that my own story would be so prominent in this process. I am a male, son, student, partner, atheist, gym hobbyist, Terry Pratchett fan, and friend, but in the face of this topic and its literature, I struggle to feel anything but white."***

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# Creative CNERGY 2025: Lighting up South Africa's Digital and Creative Future



Paul Mashia\*

The 2025 Creative CNERGY conference, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April at the IDCAuditorium in Sandton, was a battlefield of ideas, positions, and vision for South Africa's creative economy. Hosted by self-styled message architect Thami Nkadimeng,<sup>1</sup> the event brought together industry, policymakers, and creatives to deliberate digitizing, innovating, and monetising the country's creative potential. The City of Johannesburg's spokesman, Chris Vondo, stated the city's intention to engage with creative economy role players to *digitalize Johannesburg's Creative Space*. Solly Malatsi, Communications and Digital Technologies Minister, spoke on the need to *improve infrastructure needed to empower digital revolution*. Some of his key emphasis included: 1) enhanced digital infrastructure to support creatives competing on the international stage, 2) policy interventions to lower the cost of data, expand public Wi-Fi, and empower community networks, and 3) affordable smartphones. On the last point, he stated that a basic phone ought not to be a luxury: "Entry-level smartphones must be within everyone's reach." Malatsi further noted: "a robust digital creative economy requires accessibility."

Finally, Unathi Lutshaba, Executive Director of the South African Cultural Observatory, observed that "The creative industry has already created 1 million jobs," she explained. "We shouldn't downplay its strength." She added that *creative sector is spurring the economy*, contributing 3% of South Africa's GDP - about the same as agriculture - *but it has more potential*.<sup>2</sup> On how to harness this potential, Chris Kenny of Frontier

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.thaminkadimeng.com/>

<sup>2</sup> See Lutshaba's talk in Sunday Times, April 13, 2025, p. 13. And also the Commercial Producers Association Bobby Amm's preamble, "What Trump's tariffs would mean for the future of South African's film industry: A call to action at the Creative Energy", Sunday Times, April 7, 2025.

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## Cultural & Creative Industries Masterplan

The Cultural and Creative Industries Masterplan approved by Cabinet in 2022 assumes the integrity of Intellectual Property and copyright, that creative products have tradable financial value, and that small businesses must be generated and supported to open access to small-scale creatives.<sup>1</sup> An exemplary exercise in bottom-up democracy, the Department of Small Business Enterprises had workshopped the Plan with every creative sector and the civil society organisations that represent them. ANFASA was one such contributor to the Plan (Keyan Gray Tomaselli, 2025).<sup>2</sup> The private sector, through the CNERGY 2025 initiative,<sup>3</sup> aimed to animate the Plan with concrete action.

<sup>1</sup> [Cultural and Creative Industries \(CCI\) Masterplan May 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> This connection was made during his moderation speech at the CNERGY symposium in Sandton, Johannesburg.

<sup>3</sup> Organised and curated by Creative CNERGY (<https://creativecnergy.co.za/>)

\*Paul Mashia is a UJ graduate student and he provided this Overview of CNERGY 2025

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Economics talked about global success stories like South Korea's thriving content industry, which overwhelmed Netflix by heavily investing in infrastructure, cultural push, and smart policies.<sup>3</sup>

### Policy, Funding and The Battle for Fair Pay

CNERGY Day 2 was about *owning our narrative and Africa's creative explosion*.

Some of the key issues touched on the Copyright Bill Conundrum. The flawed Copyright Amendment Bill has, alongside other factors, stalled the creative sectors. "Why are artists still pleading for work?" one delegate demanded. The Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) *raised the bar*, affirming its commitment to investing in youth-driven storytelling in content creation, production studios, post-production and audience development.

Other key highlights included the boom in the music sector during the lockdown when consumption skyrocketed, with Spotify paying out \$400M in royalties (a 54% increase). South Africa's music isn't just about sales, it's about soul, and that youth must lead, not just watch. A burning question was: "Why are decisions about the future still being made for young people, not with them?" Young creatives are ready to innovate, disrupt, and lead; they just need a seat at the table. On *AI and the democratisation of creativity*, thanks to Meta's AI products, now everyone with a smartphone can be a content creator. Nigeria leads with 10M daily Meta AI users, proving that low-cost innovation thrives under pressure. Neville Matjie of Brand South Africa termed the country a *cultural superpower*: "South Africa's story shouldn't be about politics, it's about possibility".

**Key Takeaways** from the above conversations: 1) Stop talking, take action. The answer lies in the implementation, not the gap. 2) Success begets success. An innovative success elevates an entire industry. 3) Fashion is not trends, it's heritage. 4) Own your narrative. If not, who will?

### What's Next?

While the Masterplan is great, action is needed to transform the industry. The government, private sector, and creatives must collaborate better to fix film rebates, strengthen film incentives, enforce Intellectual Property legislation to be stronger, and boost local content production. As Keyan Tomaselli (University of Johannesburg) succinctly put it: "We have the policy. We have the energy. Now, we need real-world execution". South Africa's creative economy is simmering with potential. The question is: Are we going to seize the moment?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Korean model is discussed here also: Brown, D.M. *Theatrical cinema in South Africa: The Parasite within, South Korea as a model for survival*, *Journal of African Cinemas*, 13(1), 2021. And also: David Max Brown, "The Survival of Big-Screen Cinema in South Africa," *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 121–143, doi: 10.2979/blackcamera.14.2.08.

<sup>4</sup> To learn more, see (<http://creativecnergy.co.za>)



### Comments from the University of Johannesburg Students

*Abuyile Mkumbuzi* (PhD Candidate (Audiovisual Communication))

1. The event broadened my understanding of media policy as it exposed me to the various frameworks and regulatory bodies that protect content producers.
2. The intersection of academic learning and business concerns in various media platforms was indicative in the discourse around AI and how it influences content production. The most prevalent voice was that AI is a helping tool that advances content production and not necessarily a replacement for human skills and abilities.

*Paul Mashia*

1. This event was an eye-opener, especially considering the fact that my study is on digital migration.
2. Funding for business or projects may look easier to get than is the case.
3. We are still behind in policy implementations, and policies should serve the people more than the government.

*Noluthando Mncwango*

The most important aspects revolve around formulating and implementing policies that can protect the creative industry's products. Counterfeiting and piracy are significant, and I noted the critical role policy plays in combating these activities. I also saw the importance of inviting young creatives into these spaces to be educated about this industry.

*Thando Sibeko*

1. Academic Learning: Nkateko Maluleke's statement, "Create art for its sentimental value, not for revenue or viewers", reminded me to stay true to my work's purpose, rather than focusing on commercial success. Neville's insight, "Biases inform and shape the way we tell stories," highlighted the importance of being mindful of perspectives, ensuring authentic and thoughtful representations of ourselves and our communities.

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2. Business Concerns: I gained knowledge about opportunities for creatives starting their own businesses and how to access support and resources to grow a creative business.
3. Policy Concerns: I learned about policies protecting creative work and how AI can be used ethically to support creative work, with policies guiding its responsible use.

*Vanessa Munemo*

The Creative CNERGY event showed me how academic learning can inform innovative thinking, but it must be balanced with practical business strategies to bring ideas to life. It also highlighted how policies—especially around funding and Intellectual Property - can either support or hinder creative industries, making it important for creatives to understand the broader ecosystem.

*Addamms Mututa, Researcher*

CNERGY was looking beyond politics and thinking about the entire value chain productively. Even though the participants differed on their approaches to the priority issues - ranging from fostering ease of business to local economic empowerment - there was a shared vision for achieving industry resilience. My takeaway is thus on what I see as the short and medium-term speculation which arose from the symposium: how to manage change within the industry to foster business productivity for both local and foreign content merchants. In this mainly business view, the government appeared to be playing the role of the umpire between the liberal market forces (with Netflix and other audiovisual content platforms taking the lion's share) and the largely underrepresented local content producers. The academia, in my view, were the spectators of this duel rather than active participants.

The intersections established through the CNERGY workshop are, therefore, tiered:

1. Business concerns and policy - what emerged was the fragile policy ecosystem in which the industry operates. The disharmony between business priorities and government legislation, which may have sustained this situation, was acknowledged and debated. We cannot make a conclusive observation on why there is not much so-called local content. Was it because global producers were not coming with capital for the local content market? Perhaps the pro-local content policy may work by enabling local content producers rather than obstructing global players.
2. Academic learning and the 'industry spectacle' - The academia, erstwhile involved in formulating the Creative Industries Masterplan, finds itself orphaned from its interpretation and implementation. The academia should

participate through liaising with the industry for the sake of streamlining training within universities to align with industry succession priorities. Furthermore, it is for the mutual good to foster collaboration between academic learning and the creative industry's practices, and senior academics with government policy projects. Research on creative economies must not just be about statistics versus cultural needs; there is a space for academia to play its role as cultural, governance, and industry referees.

### Observations by Dr Aimee Viljoen (UJ film senior lecturer)

The event was extremely valuable for my Honours or MA students studying film and television. This was their first proper insight into what "the industry" truly entails. I'm often asked by students, "How do I break into the industry?" and this Creative CNERGY event was particularly useful in addressing the challenges of postgraduate employment.

The conference underscored how the film and TV industry can be highly insular, cliquey, and exclusive, making it difficult for newcomers to establish themselves. It emphasised—both to me and my students—the critical role of networking and finding collaborators who share your creative vision. Additionally, it reinforced the importance of authenticity in storytelling and creativity, not just for students but for me as a lecturer.

A key takeaway was the recognition that South Africa has many skilled creative individuals struggling to enter the industry due to systemic barriers such as siloed sectors and policy shortcomings. Most notably, the event highlighted the pivotal role of producers within the film industry—an area our own courses don't emphasise enough. This is something I now see as a key challenge to address in our curriculum.

### Another crucial lesson from the event was the reality that filmmakers cannot depend solely on external funding.

It became clear that we must explore innovative ways to shoot films without relying on massive budgets. At UJ, for example, our screen studies and film students receive no production budgets for their projects. As a result, they learn to be resourceful—using free locations, emerging actors, and crowdfunding to bring their films to life. Meanwhile, students at private institutions often have significant financial backing. While this disparity is challenging, it has taught my students resilience and ingenuity, proving that compelling storytelling doesn't always require large budgets. This was a theme that resonated strongly with me throughout the event.

*Note: This report compiled by Keyan Tomaselli and Addamms Mututa.*