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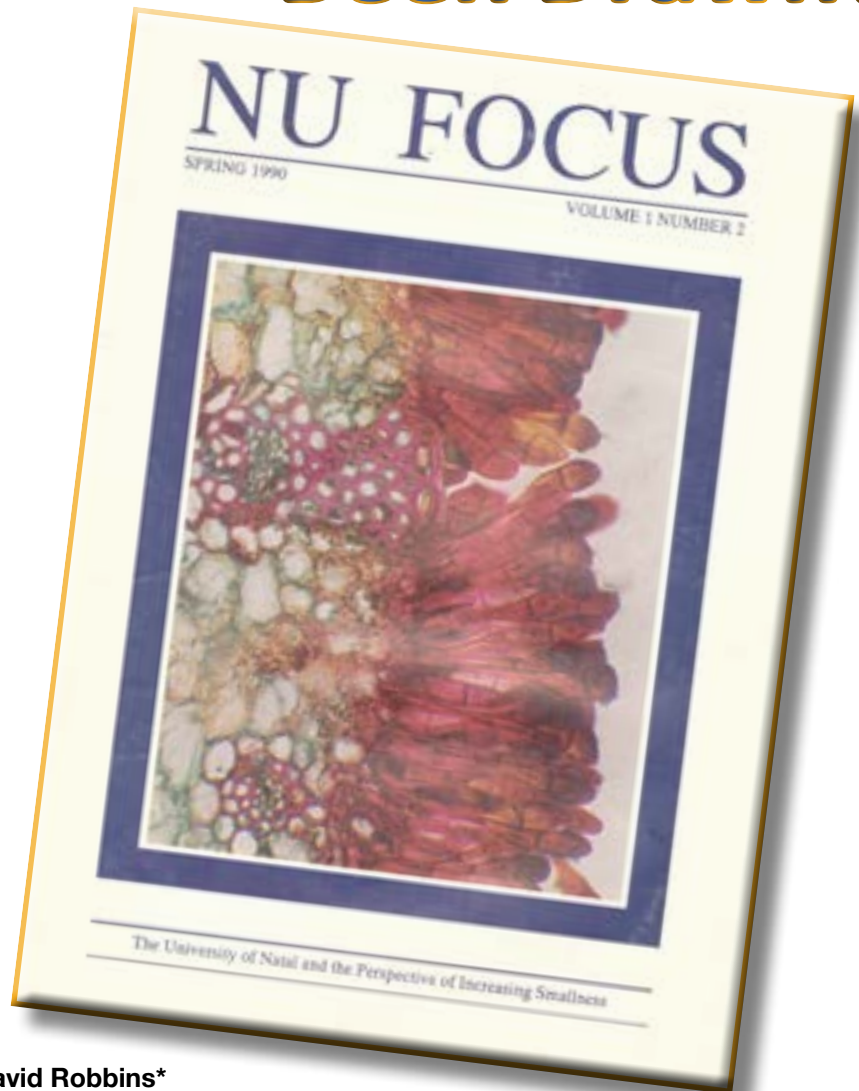
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Probing the fraught relationship between the Academy and the world on the far side of the moat

# Has the Drawbridge Been Drawn?



David Robbins\*

A chap named Jeffrey Rakabe recently sent me a manuscript entitled, *Renaissance of the Ancestral Ritual Storytelling*. It had a longish sub-title as well: *Boys' and Girls' Ritual Ceremonies in South Africa, Reflections on Their Role in Societal Gender Polarities*. This was an 'academic' dissertation, with section headings like 'Hypothesis', 'Ethical Considerations', 'Statement of Limitations', and 'Literature Review' listed on the contents page. But I saw no university or academic supervisors mentioned on the manuscript. Nevertheless, I asked him to come and see me.

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\* David Robbins is co-owner and supervising editor at Porcupine Press

**“ Why have I told you Jeffrey’s story? Because it richly illustrates the bridge that exists between higher learning and the world”**

## Probing the relationship between the Academy and the world on the far side of the moat

continued from page 1:

He was a 26-year-old from the Lebowa region of Limpopo province. He had graduated after three years at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) with a diploma in Art and Drama. We chatted briefly about Bertolt Brecht and Wole Soyinka, both playwrights he had studied. I asked him why he had written the dissertation. He said his real interest was writing plays, and that the links between initiation traditions and the modern epidemic of gender-based violence had gripped his interest. But he had realised he did not know enough to begin his play-writing career: hence the dissertation.

I wondered if he would approach the authorities at TUT about the possibilities of peer reviews, etc. But in the meantime, I suggested another route. I noticed he had written his introduction and conclusion in the first person, and he mentioned during his visit that as an adolescent he had participated in male initiation ceremonies.

I made a suggestion: 'Why not write for Porcupine Press a first-person narrative that incorporates your personal involvement, not only as an adolescent initiate in deep rural Lebowa but also as an aspiring playwright burdened with a gripping theme? Write about your research,' I added. 'It's a story worth telling.'

Jeffrey warmed to the idea. He told me about a librarian at the Johannesburg Library who had been exceptionally patient with all his requests for obscure titles. They had become friends. 'Even my partner brought home some books she thought might interest me,' he said.

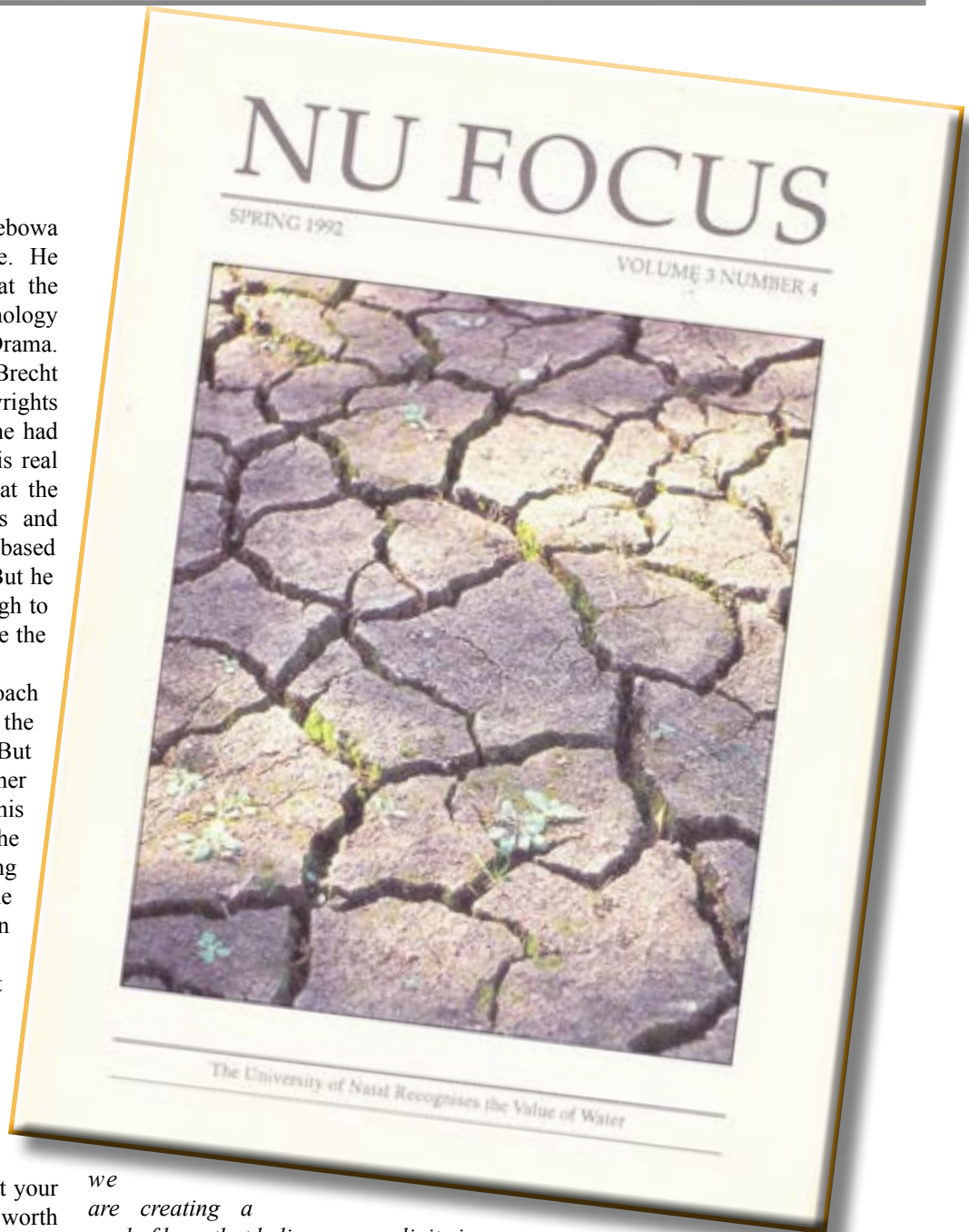
He had brought his partner with him, a rather gorgeous young woman, and they smiled a little impishly together. Meanwhile, I saw the title of Jeffrey's first-person narrative jump into focus: *The Women Brought Books*. There'll be a quote from Jeffrey's dissertation as well: *'Koma is about children, little boys. In physically preparing them for manhood, we are damaging them psychologically;*

*we are creating a pool of boys that believes masculinity is a threat to women.'*

Why have I told you Jeffrey's story? Because it richly illustrates the bridge that exists between higher learning and the world. It also suggests the idea of reciprocity between these two sides. What changes hands is not like for like, but the exchanges are of equal value. In large measure, the world pays for the work of higher learning and its associated research, and the world needs these higher-learning products as it fights to survive in increasingly complex – and increasingly hostile – environments.

But I wish to focus specifically on the world of literature, by which I mean the writing and reading of books and other

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***“But my overarching experience of academics is of really interesting people who have been more than willing to talk with me”***



## Probing the relationship between the Academy and the world on the far side of the moat

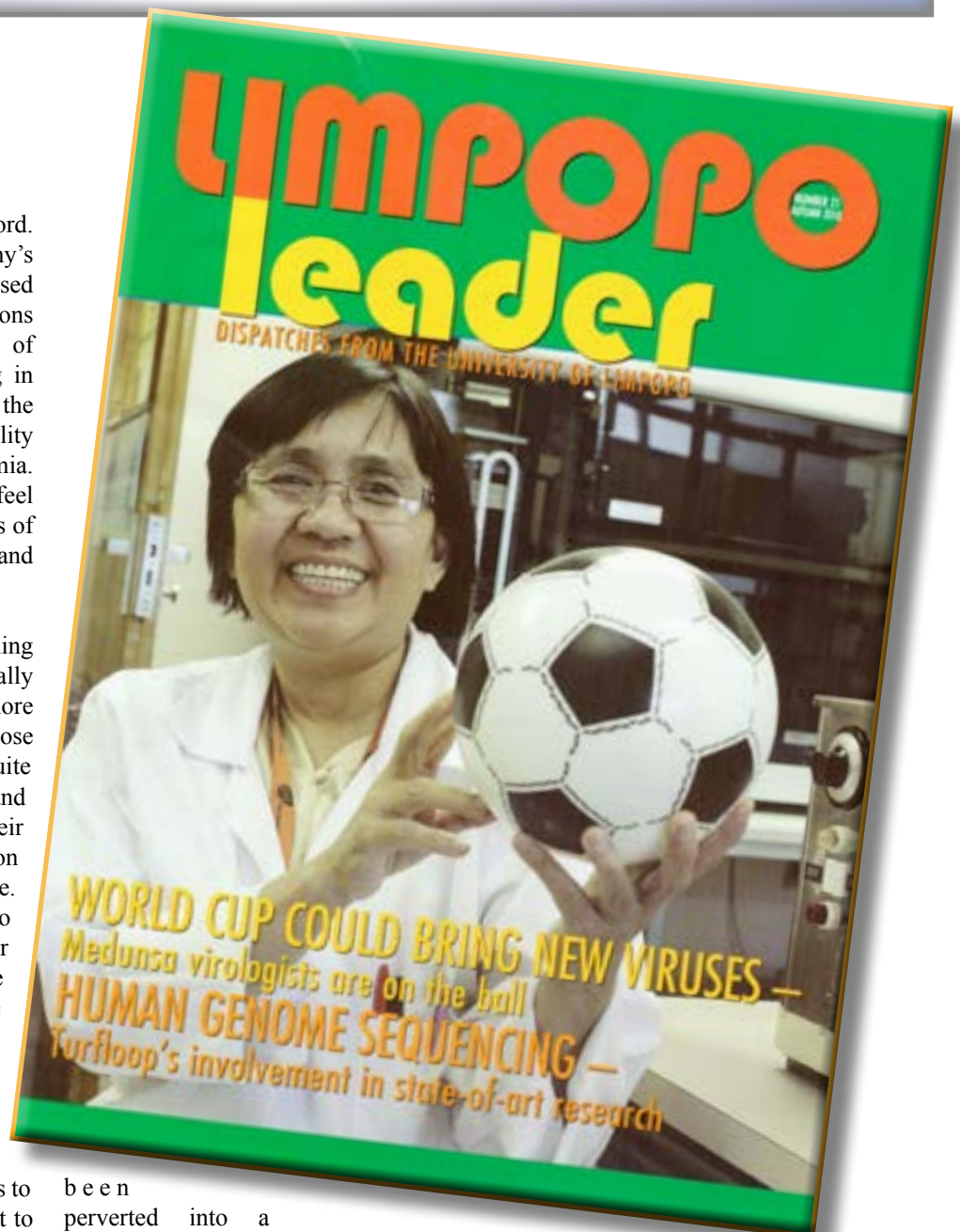
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platforms for delivering the written word. Here, it often seems to me, the Academy's drawbridge is already drawn and closed to traffic. How could my suggestions concerning Jeffrey's dissertation be of any value to the wise-heads drifting in and out of those ivory towers beyond the bridge? I think the idea of accessibility might be considered a fault in academia. Could it be that some university folk feel more secure if there are large numbers of 'ordinary people' who can't understand what on earth they're talking about?

Perhaps. But my overarching experience of academics is of really interesting people who have been more than willing to talk with me. The purpose of our conversations was invariably quite straightforward. They were experts and I wanted to write about aspects of their expertise. They had deep knowledge on their minds, I had accessibility on mine.

As an aside, I have worked at two universities, both times as editor of their flagship publications. The pictures scattered about this article are the front covers of a few of these. The point of the publications was to open the bridge and increase the traffic going both ways. After all, I know of no South African public university that does not have three legs to their pot of services that they dish out to the world: teaching, of course; research, absolutely; and community involvement. It hardly needs emphasising that this combination is particularly important in the developing/southern parts of the world. (\*Hence the illustrative university magazine covers for this article).

But I must stick to my focus, which is literature, the way it is produced, the way it is disseminated, and the way it is received. It goes without saying that academic literature, all those zillions of research theses gathering dust in university libraries and on some very handy websites, is of profound importance in the mix. They break new ground; they stimulate new directions for new research; and those responsible for their production are obsessed with maintaining standards. Of course, this is as it should be. But far too often this caring about standards has



been perverted into a form of snobbery behind which there does seem to be a fair flavour of the urge for status and job security and all the other perks to be had in the Academy.

However, the damage being done to the relationship between 'town and gown' is more than considerable. For the world, there's a diminishing popular grasp of what is actually happening (when it comes to climate change, for example, or the current rise of fascist nationalism). For the Academy, there's increasing external scepticism about its work and the attendant danger of losing the right to those freedoms of thought and inquiry without which universities cannot thrive.

Imagine my surge of interest, then, to discover an organisation called the

***“Writers are often a subversive lot, and perhaps they were seeing the necessity of sharing their thoughts and finding new ways of increasing the two-way flow of ideas”***

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## Probing the relationship between the Academy and the world on the far side of the moat

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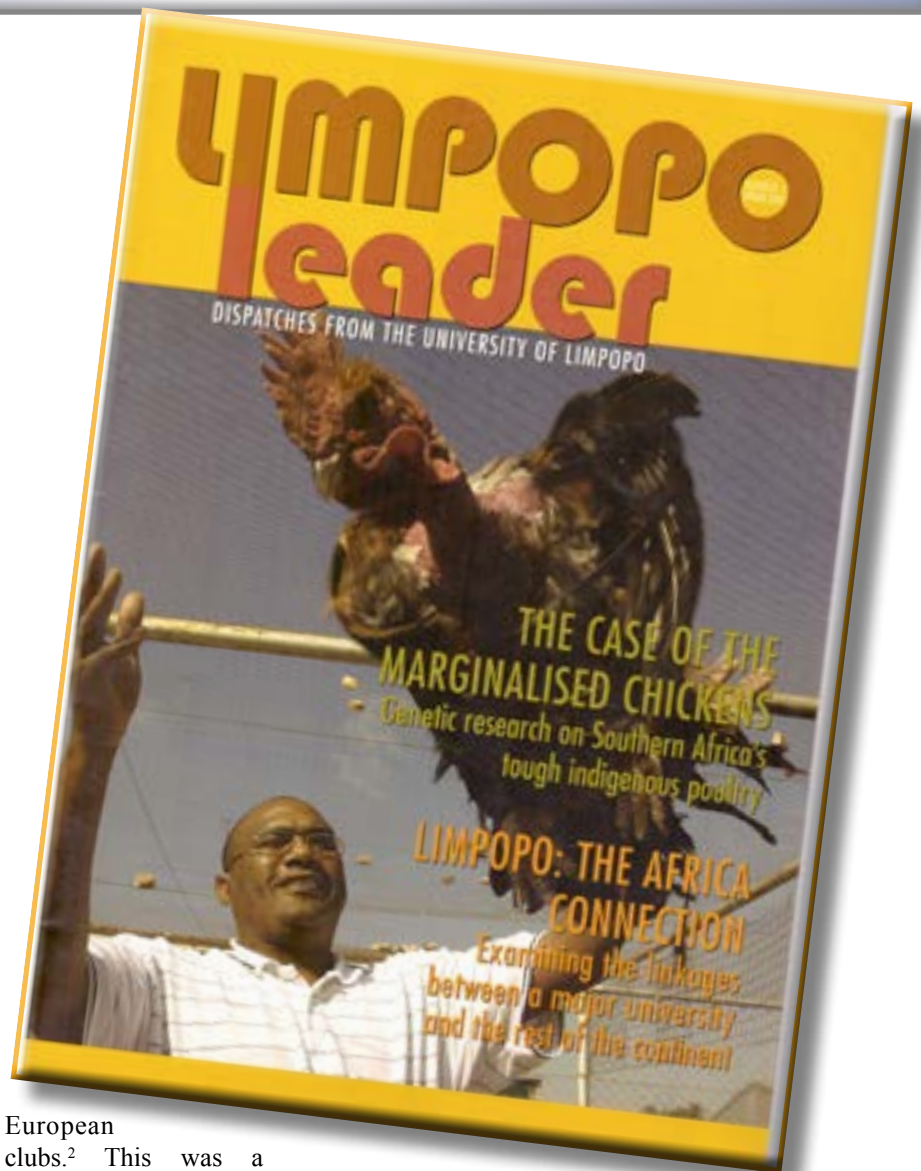
Academic and Non-Fiction Writers Association of South Africa (ANFASA). Was this a visionary attempt to at least partially open the drawbridge? Writers are often a subversive lot, and perhaps they were seeing the necessity of sharing their thoughts and finding new ways of increasing the two-way flow of ideas.

ANFASA's office administrator, Samukelisiwe Mfuphi, explained that the ANFASA model was adapted from the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Association which had approached Monica Seeber<sup>1</sup>, a distinguished editor and publisher, to do research and consultations on whether it was viable to have such an institution in South Africa. Seeber gave the thumbs-up, and she and a handful of interested academics and other writers officially launched ANFASA in 2004. The Association is partly funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Pretoria, and current active membership stands at over 300, of which several are deeply committed senior academics.

One of these is Distinguished Professor Keyan Tomaselli, University of Johannesburg, who is currently co-editor of the online ANFASA Magazine. When asked about the important matter of bringing within reach of non-specialist readers the work of academics, Tomaselli replied: 'This is a discussion we've often had in the ANFASA board. We acknowledge that it's important to bridge the gap, but the two sides are not easy to manage. The academically inclined are more active in the affairs of the Association, while the non-academic membership, with a few exceptions, sign up simply to become eligible to apply for our annual AGSA grants, sponsored by the Norwegians.'

Tomaselli added that he had tried to mesh the two membership components by giving prominence to articles written by non-academics and to placing a review in an accredited academic journal of a self-published memoir of the first local black soccer player to be signed up by major

<sup>1</sup> Sadly, Monica Seeber died in mid-2022, leaving a large cavity in the experience and vitality that has driven ANFASA forward since inception.



European clubs.<sup>2</sup> This was a book published by Porcupine Press, the Johannesburg self-publishing company with which I am associated.

I mention this because there does seem to be a widespread stereotyped view of self-publishing as inferior, 'vanity publishing' in new clothes. Tomaselli agreed: 'There is always the stigma around self-publishing that mars perceptions.'

Several times recently, I have written of the dilemma facing young writers, particularly in the developing world, who are trapped between the globalisation of

<sup>2</sup> Lyton Ncube (2018) Kalamazoo Remembered, *Critical Arts*, 32:2, 134-136, DOI: [10.1080/02560046.2017.1405454](https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2017.1405454)

continued on page 5:

### Reference:

Mokone, Louise. 2017. Kalamazoo Remembered: South Africa's Football Legend. Johannesburg: Porcupine Press

***"I mention this because there does seem to be a widespread stereotyped view of self-publishing as inferior, 'vanity publishing' in new clothes."***



## Probing the relationship between the Academy and the world on the far side of the moat

continued from page 4:

mainline publishing and the high cost of DIY publishing. It is my belief that this entrapment is strangling the creation of literature, which is inevitably local, and which in turn is of little interest to publishers lured by the glitter of those big global markets.

To add to the problem, there is an urge for stratification – a them-and-us phobia – that seems to plague academia. Dudu Zwane, co-editor of the ANFASA Mag and a PhD graduate, is surprisingly forthright: ‘I believe there is unspoken contempt emanating from academics to grassroots authors,’ she said. ‘Academia is perceived as prestigious, scientific, rigorous and high-level authorship. It’s the type of writing that garners hundreds of thousands of Rands in grant money. Conversely, grassroots writing represents toil, tears, and lots of risk with too little reward.’

In response to these realities, and particularly in the light of the grassroots books revolution that is unfolding in South African cities, Porcupine Press has developed a new publishing model that we call Cross-Border Books. I have mentioned this initiative before in the ANFASA Magazine (Vol 6 Number 4) but a great deal has happened since then, not least that the National Arts Council has decided to assist us by funding some of our plans. Cross-Border Books has a new financial model that will not exclude talented writers who lack financial resources, and we will embark on an inclusive international marketing and selling operation, particularly in South Africa, southern Africa, the continent at large, and in other parts of the English-speaking world.

Now listen to Tomaselli again. While speaking of the stigma attached to self-publishing that often mars the perceptions of the academic institutions, he added that ironically ‘even the university presses are now asking authors for subventions – or they (the university presses) may face the prospect of going out of business.’

Dr Dudu Zwane also had a last word. She made reference to Monica Seeber, the founding mother of ANFASA. ‘I could be mistaken, but I think Monica wanted to erase this stigma of inferiority and the

### Opportunities Barred by Prejudice and Perception

Keyan Tomaselli

Our (self-funded) book on Biesjjeport (Lange, et al)<sup>1</sup> was distributed by Porcupine’s distribution arm across its rural and township outlets and sold out very quickly. But the University of KwaZulu-Natal refused to accept that the book was ‘scholarly’ simply because its scholarly publication committee did not recognise the publisher (Tormentoso) and the excellent distribution by Porcupine would no doubt have sealed its fate. No matter, the book was reviewed in the SA Journal of Science<sup>2</sup>.

On a second book, one published by a US press, on South African media co-edited by me, the only South African outfit I could persuade at the time to distribute the book locally was Porcupine Press. But the US press refused to enter into a distribution arrangement with Porcupine because they claimed that Porcupine is a self-publisher. So there are very few copies of a book on the transformation of the South African media available in SA simply because the US publisher confused a business arrangement (distribution) with content (academic). So an obvious market was foolishly squandered by the American scholarly press.



1 Lange, Mary, et al (2013). Engraved Landscape. Biesjjeport, Many voices. Gordon’s Bay: Tormentoso. Now on free Internet access: [https://issuu.com/coolcapital/docs/engraved\\_landscape\\_-\\_biesje\\_poort\\_many\\_voices](https://issuu.com/coolcapital/docs/engraved_landscape_-_biesje_poort_many_voices)

2 Butler-Adam J. The writing on the landscape. S Afr J Sci. 2015;111(3/4), Art. #a0100, 1 page. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2015/a0100>

invisible caste system among writers. Perhaps she also envisioned ANFASA as an entity that would foster inclusivity and collaboration for generations to come.’

My last word is about Jeffrey Rakabe. He’s already written a first chapter rough draft of his first person account of how he researched the relationship between traditional gender initiation and present day gender abuse. I have little doubt that Cross-Border Books (Porcupine’s new imprint) will be publishing *The Women Brought Books* sometime in 2023.

***“... even the university presses are now asking authors for subventions – or they (the university presses) may face the prospect of going out of business”***

## In Memoriam - Tributes to Monica Seeber

# A Life of Compassion, Love and Service

Athandiwe Saba

A life well lived in compassion, love and service was Monica Seeber's life. She has seen the world change from the rationing in Britain after the end of the Second World War and the liberation of Zimbabwe to South Africa's democratic dispensation.

Through these vastly complex phases in our history, she grew in love with people's conditions, their art and their spoken and written word and became a bastion and leader in ensuring those rights to education, appreciation of art and the rights of writers were always valued and cherished.

Monica was born on July 15 in 1942. Being an only child, she was adored by her father, Leiser, and mother, Judith Gruschka. She would talk of her many adventures, including her first trip to the US where she thoroughly enjoyed the sand and the beach in Miami. She was the perfect daughter, but also longed for the rough and tumble of hopscotch and tag during one of the most difficult times in Britain.

In the 1950s she moved to Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, where she met a group of people who became lifelong friends. There she swam, learned to sew, which she did until her last days, and began her love relationship with the African continent.

Both her parents died before her 21st birthday. In so many conversations she would speak of how her dad would read the newspaper every day and always had magazines close by. Her love of the written words, literature and arts grew.

Monica studied fine art at Wits University. She joined Ravan Press in her 30s and her journey in the publishing world took off with her becoming one of the leading experts in publishing and copyright and fought for the rights of many in the industry.

But, like all of Monica's life, it was not to be an uneventful path. Her roads led her all over Europe and America, making numerous friends and colleagues along the way.

As a worldly, sophisticated, witty 20-year-old she met the intellectual, Anthony Seeber, in London. They married and spent many years involved in the local politics of Bulawayo with their close friends and comrades, Lydia and Dr Michael Mkanyiso Ndubiwa.

The family welcomed Jeremy Leo Seeber in 1966. Three years later she vowed she wouldn't go into labour during the moon landing of 1969. Two weeks later she gave birth to her second son, who she named Gabriel Julian Seeber.

Despite bringing up two extremely active young boys her love for the arts never wavered. She found the time to punch needle, making complex pieces of art, as well as miniature houses and artefacts, and also painted. A wordsmith, an artist, a mother and



Monica Seeber: A life well lived

a wife, Monica was the embodiment of living one's passion.

Not five years later she and the family moved from Bulawayo into a small apartment in Pretoria. A year or two later she began teaching at a convent, before joining Raven Press and the British Council.

By the late 1980s, Monica had smuggled out many freedom fighters through bursaries supported by the British Council. She loved her work. She knew and celebrated

many prolific South Africans who valued education and freedom and wanted to one day give back to a democratic South Africa. She had many stories to tell about the British Council and many of her close friends and colleagues came from this period of her life.

Her journey would have her in the kitchens and homes of freedom fighters and stalwarts talking about the politics of the time. She was as passionate and engaging about human rights, artists' rights and South Africa's need for equality in her own kitchen over a bowl of homemade matzah ball soup, latkes or a good old-fashioned toad-in-the-hole. This passion and love for South Africa never dwindled.

Always one to reinvent herself and live her truth, by the early 2000s she came back to South Africa to give her knowledge to the arts and became one of the world's leading experts in copyright. In 2000 she and Nicholas Evans co-authored the first analysis of the publishing industry in South Africa, *The Politics of Publishing in South Africa*. Here they asked important

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## In Memoriam - Tributes to Monica Seeber

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questions about the politics of ownership and participation in the publishing industry, as well as the issues generated by representation, knowledge, language and literature.

Understanding the need to tackle these issues Monica founded the Academic and Non-Fiction Authors Association of South Africa (ANFASA) in 2004 and was its first director. Here she has spearheaded dozens of projects that have cultivated some of the country's most esteemed and respected writers.

Not one to focus on one project at a time, Monica was also involved in establishing the African Publishers Network (APNET), was part of the work of the World Intellectual Property Organisation and involved in publishing the book *Media Landscape 2014: Celebrating 20 Years of South Africa's Media*.

She never slowed down. In her 70s she was constantly editing and involved in publishing books including *Hani: A Life Too Short*; *The Backroom Boy: Andrew Mlangeni's Story*; and *The Social and Political Thought of Archie Mafeje*.

The last decade of her life was one of the busiest. At any given time she was working on two to three book projects in South Africa, Ethiopia, New York and anywhere she chose.

Monica was a regular traveller to London, Rome, Italy, Paris and all over Africa. She loved the warmth of South Africa and a drive down to Cape Town or Durban was on a whim. One of her favourite trips was to Europe where she tracked her lineage. She travelled through Russia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany.

As busy as she was with fighting for the copyright amendments, she made time to cook the most delicious meals for her family – her five grandchildren, her sons – and many friends. She made time for tea and cake. She made time to watch her grandchild recite at his first play. She made time to laugh and read. She made time to shop and converse about her latest trips. Never one to mince her words she made time to pamper herself and others, especially if you looked “dreadfully awful”. She was love personified every day. She gave abundantly to the industry and fought for writers' rights. She gave immensely to her family and friends.

She was meticulous with her work and her home. A quaint space of solitude and laughter and love for anyone who walked through.

There are many organisations' plights and causes she gave her time, expertise and passion to. I thank ANFASA, the Publishers Association of South Africa; the Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation, the Southern African Music Rights Organisation, the Department of Arts and Culture; the African Publishers Network, the Zimbabwe International Book Fair; the British Council; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; and the World Intellectual Property Organisation for continuing to remember her and keep her work alive.

Let us continue to remember Monica's legacy as much as her wise words, her smile, her wit, her laugh, her work ethic and what she has built in this country. She leaves behind a legacy for writers, artists and, most of all, her family.

She is love personified.

## A Life of Exuberant Generosity

Special words from her daughter-in-law in the UK, Laurian Kerr

To be working up to the age of 80 is admirable. To negotiate an overseas trip, fitting in friends, family and business at 79 is remarkable. To bestow carefully chosen gifts from her own childhood and life during that visit, to ensure the legacy of those things she held dear, was prescient and generous beyond measure.

Monica showed fearlessness and pragmatism in the inevitability of her death, demonstrating that it is not anathema to life but part of it. She contributed intellectually and artistically – as both artist and appreciator – imparted wisdom and actively participated in the nuts and bolts of living a life, until the very end. She loved her garden and her home. She was a dedicated, besotted but, most importantly, hands-on grandmother to Zyana.

There was nothing miserly about Monica. She celebrated generosity but lauded largesse and in her later years allowed herself the freedom to enjoy that aspect of life. It is liberating to free oneself from the bounds of eking out an existence to behaving with gay abandon and when she did it, she did it in style!

She had a unique ability to compartmentalise relationships, be they personal or business. Even where there was overlap she was never subsumed in trading gossip. This did not mean that she sat on the fence. Quite the contrary, she held strong views on most things but she also allowed others the space to be themselves.

She was a brilliant cook and a firm but diplomatic critic of culinary missteps. She was not one to compromise on flavour for the sake of health fads. Curry was to be eaten with white fluffy basmati, not brown rice. She pointed out that she liked cucumber in her salad when it was not there. I still hear her voice, “Vegetables like water,” when the roasted vegetables served were caramelised but dried out, no longer “plump”.

She lives on in flowers, music, food, art, books, lotions and potions and in people who continue to live, guided by her considerable influence and love. Her legacy will reverberate throughout the future because she invested in every life that she touched, sharing freely her knowledge, experience and appreciation of finery, frippery and basic pleasures.

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## In Memoriam - Tributes to Monica Seeber

# Conscientious, Diligent, Dependable and an Action-Taker

Veronica Klipp\*

Monica Gruschka Seeber (1942 – 2022). At Monica's funeral I was fascinated to learn that her second name - or was this is an affectionate given name? - was Gruschka, spelt in the German way with 'sch'. I knew that Monica had a German Jewish background, and if I remember correctly, her father was some sort of travelling salesman who managed to flee Nazi Germany due to his wide business contacts, first to the UK before settling in what was then Rhodesia. She once showed me a very elegant photograph of her parents promenading in Berlin (I think) in the 1930s before their escape to England.

Because of this family history I decided to look up the name Gruschka, which originally is Polish and means 'pear'. I also came across a personality description of what people with that name are supposed to be like:

... people with this name place their trust into logical thinking. They are conscientious, diligent, dependable and real action takers. Their great love for details usually results in co-workers estimating them very highly.

Even if completely made up, this is like a description of Monica. Her logical thinking and great love for detail meant that she was an excellent editor. She edited many books for Wits Press, often with early career authors whose works required focused and patient developmental editing. As Roshan Cader wrote:

Monica saw the potential in the new writers we asked her to work with. She cared tremendously – down to the last comma; she was always concerned that a proofreader, or another set of eyes looking at the edited manuscript after her, would change something that for her was purposeful and intentional. It matters, she would say.

Many things mattered to Monica. In her bones, she was a political person. She detested bullying and inequality. She was a fighter and if she got her teeth into

something, like a bulldog she would not let go. In fact the first time I met Monica in the 1990s, she was teaching a workshop on copyright and contracts for PASA, and aside from editing this became her abiding passion. Few people put more energy into the fight against the Copyright Amendment Bill than her, which she believed would further impoverish authors and jeopardise the already precarious local publishing industry. She would sometimes say, this will kill me one day. But that didn't stop her from continuing the fight.

When I last saw Monica in hospital, she was very weak and found it exhausting to speak. She said to me, "We'll have lunch at the Salvation Café soon and have some of their lovely cheesecake." I think she was trying to reassure me and also that she already knew that this would not happen anymore. After about 10 difficult minutes, in her characteristically direct way, she said to me, You can go now. We had said our goodbyes.

The industry and many individuals who loved Monica will miss her. Rest in peace, dear friend.

\* Veronica Klipp is the Publisher for Wits University Press



A passionate campaigner for South African writers and publishing

## Wisdom and humour

Beth le Roux\*

Over two decades, I knew Monica as a teacher and expert (her copyright workshops were invaluable!), then as a mentor and finally as a friend. She generously included me in her projects and plans, including a long-discussed sequel to *The Politics of Publishing*, endless drafts of white papers and reports, and – of course – ANFASA's Grant Scheme for Authors. I will miss her insight, her warm encouragement, and her wicked laugh.

\*Beth le Roux is Associate Professor, Publishing Studies at the University of Pretoria

***"Many things mattered to Monica. In her bones, she was a political person. She detested bullying and inequality. She was a fighter and if she got her teeth into something, like a bulldog she would not let go."***

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## In Memoriam - Tributes to Monica Seeber



*Remembering three legends of South African publishing: Monica with Vishnu Padayachee and Glenn Cowley at Ike's Bookshop, Durban, on 7 March 2001 at the joint launch of Changing Men in Southern Africa by Robert Morrell (University of Natal Press) and Monica and Nicholas Evans' book, The Politics of Publishing in South Africa (Holger Ehling Publishers & University of Natal Press). (Photo © Robert Morrell)*

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### Monica Seeber in memoriam

Helge Rønning\*

**I**t is with great sadness all the Norwegian friends of Monica Seeber have received the news of her passing.

The first contact between Monica and Norwegian writers and publishers occurred at the Zimbabwe International Bookfair in 1994 when the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers Organisation (NFFO) and the Norwegian Reprographic Rights Organisation (Kopinor) were partners with the Bookfair in organising an Indaba about the rights of authors. The Bookfair took place in a year of momentous change in Southern Africa, and a large contingent of writers and publishers from South Africa participated in the Bookfair, one of them was Monica.

She showed great interest in the work we from Norway were doing in establishing closer contacts with Southern Africa in order to promote the interest of literature and publishing and particularly the rights of authors. Over the years the contacts between Monica and our organisations developed. And with the establishment of ANFASA as part of the cooperation between NFFO and South African authors the role of Monica became even more central. Her dedication to promoting and defending the rights of authors and her belief in the importance of international cooperation was a vital component in this joint work over the years.

Monica's interest in the international promotion of the rights of authors and publishers also manifested itself in her work with The International Federation of Reprographic Rights Organisations (IFRRO) whose history Enabling access – 25 years of IFFRO

she wrote in connection with the organisation's 25th anniversary in 2009.

Monica will be greatly missed by all her friends and collaborators in Norway. May she rest in peace.

**\*Helge Rønning is the former Chair of NFFO and the Board of Kopinor.**

### A Eulogy for Monica Seeber

Tsietsi Winston Dennis Mohapi

**M**onica was a legend and a heroine of the past, current and future in the literary world. She was a custodian of the publishing fraternity and protective of the rights of South African authors in all languages. She was very concerned about the future of the book industry, particularly transforming theses into book form. As she usually said: "Not for theses to gather dust in the library."

It is an opportune moment to say how I came to know Monica. It was in 1978 at the British Consulate when I went for an interview for a British scholarship for English Language Teaching. Naturally I didn't get it, as I hadn't completed the requisite time as a lecturer or a teacher.

Nine years later I got the scholarship to study Junior Primary School Teaching at Leeds University on a Molteno Project. Monica played a pivotal role in my success and my departure to Britain. She helped ensure I got a British scholarly education and a comfortable stay at Leeds.

In 2007 she handpicked me to join ANFASA and immediately become an ANFASA Board Member.

I remember Monica as an independent, bright and informative person. We discussed many subjects ranging from religion to astronomy. Our interests ranged from the planet Jupiter, to the Beatles and many 60s, 70s and 80s pop songs, and we also discussed South African English language usage, especially clichés such as "interrogating a document; and words such as impact instead of effect".

The last time I heard her voice was when she left her son's house in London for the International Authors' Forum.

Monica, may your Soul rest in the hands of the Almighty Lord, the Father of Eternity. I'll miss you very much. Your voice still echoes in my mind saying: "Winston!"

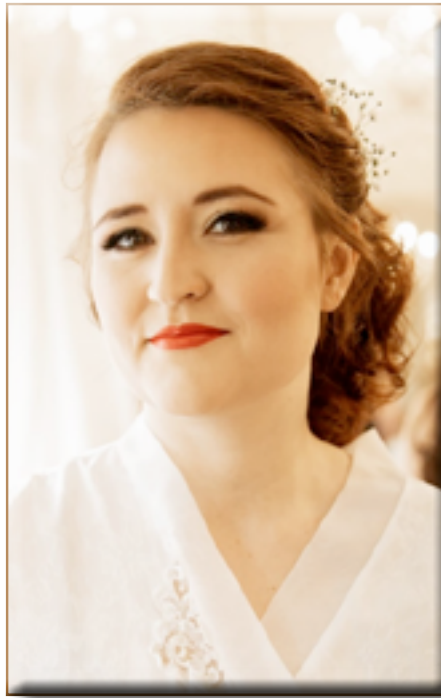
God bless her soul. Thank you, chairperson.

# How to write a PhD thesis and actually enjoy it?

Aimee Viljoen-Stroebe<sup>\*</sup>

**T**hink about some of the comments you have heard from scholars either in the midst of their PhDs or who had just handed in. They all agree that it was “hectic” and that they are experiencing “PhD blues” or “PhD exhaustion” and one can understand why. The PhD thesis is a massive 80 000-word minimum collection of all the knowledge a scholar could find about one specific topic, conducted over two years (although for some this process could go on for 4+ years). Imagine the level of frustration with a topic after spending that much time and energy on it? However, it is not just the size of the project that is daunting and tiring, it’s the mental toll it takes on the researcher and their loved ones as one is glued to a computer screen for hours on end, reading...writing...editing...reading again...writing some more. Add in the continuous feedback and corrections provided by the supervisor and it is easy to understand why, for many emerging researchers, the PhD thesis is a crucible.

Now, I am probably going to elicit some eyerolls when I say that “I actually enjoyed my PhD experience”. But before you start “rolling”, this is not what I felt like throughout the entire duration of the process. I can identify two distinct times where I felt like saying “I’m out”. The first was when I got my first batch of feedback on my research proposal from my supervisor. The second was when I was trying to find people to take part in my online survey. I have discussed both these instances in previous ANFASA articles which I will like below. Basically, when I say that I enjoyed the experience, this was said after finishing and looking at the process holistically. Yes, it was still hectic. Yes, I struggled with PhD exhaustion,



*Aimee Viljoen-Stroebe: I struggled with PhD exhaustion, especially as a mom and working full-time. However, I found a few tricks which really helped ease the process*

especially as a mom and working full-time. However, I found a few tricks which really helped ease the process. None of these tricks are my own inventions and were acquired through discussions and venting sessions with other researchers, though I can’t remember who and when exactly. So, if your PhD is kicking your behind, try these steps and see whether or not they make a difference:

- ❑ 1. Set aside one-to-two hours every day where you only focus on your PhD (or dissertation). For those of us with full time jobs this could be a difficult thing to do. What worked best for me was using the first hour or two when I got to the office in the morning. So, between 07:00-09:00 my office door was closed, a note was put up, and everyone knew that I was “out of the office”. These two hours can be used to do research, to read one or two articles, to write a paragraph or to read through your supervisor’s feedback. That leads me to point 2.

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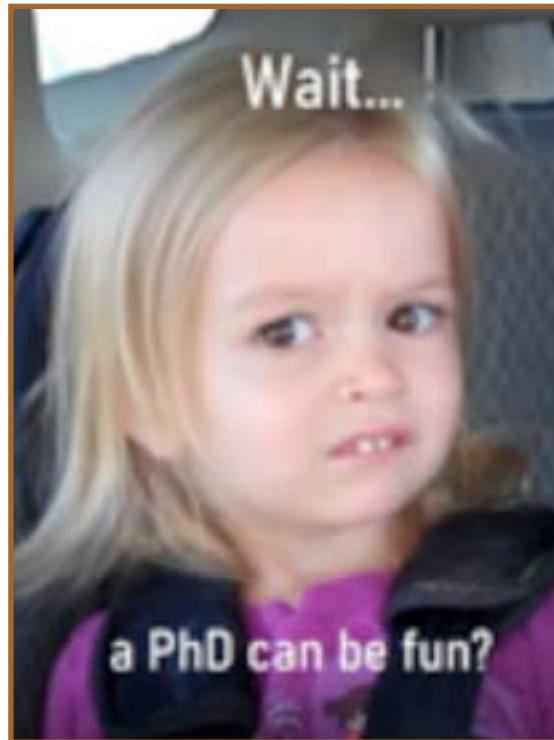
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- ❑ 2. Don't try to do too much with your two-hour-slot. Break your workload into chewable bites and only tackle a small portion every day. This will prevent you from sitting with huge bulks of reading and writing that need to be done before deadlines. This leads me to point 3.
- ❑ 3. Set deadlines for yourself and send these deadlines to your supervisors. This way you hold yourself accountable and your supervisors will know when to expect content from you. They can then also make sure they set aside some time to give feedback.
- ❑ 4. Tip 4 is something I only learned much later in my research process. If you can, join an online writing group that meets at a specific time each week or a few times a week. I joined a writing group, consisting of scholars who were doing varying types of research projects, and we met on Zoom every Friday at 08:45. We would log on, tell each other what our goals were for that session and then log off. The session ended at 12:00 at which time we would log back on and give feedback on our progress for that session. This is another way to hold yourself accountable.
- ❑ 5. This trick might seem obvious, but you will be surprised how easy it is to forget. When doing research and adding it to your thesis, make sure you add the references to the reference list. Do this continuously as you research and write so that you don't end up with a completed thesis and half a reference list. Trust me, you will spend hours trying to track those missing references down.
- ❑ 6. Finally, and this one is very important, believe in your awesomeness! Not just anyone can write a thesis and do it well. So, when you get positive feedback on your work, celebrate it



and don't underestimate yourself too much. Confidence plays a big role in the success of your work.

There you have it. These tricks aren't earth shattering and you probably already knew about most of them. However, implementing these steps will really help make your PhD experience a little easier and that means, a whole lot more fun!

### References

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