



The Cape Town Book Fair

a personal perspective

RHEINA EPSTEIN

Correspondent

How to describe the Cape Town International Book Fair held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre from the 17th to the 20th June - the venue, the exhibitors, the vendors, the publishers, the writers, the visitors?

Each component excelled in creating a truly memorable experience for anybody connected with the book or, more appropriately, the word world. Even the Cape Town weather played ball providing typical Cape winters' days - dry, sunny and crisp.

Out of town visitors must have thought they had died and gone to heaven.

The Convention Centre lived up to its title of international - a superb venue for events of this nature with all the stands

in the main exhibition area and panel discussions and most author appearances in the rooms upstairs. A felicitous touch was the identifying plaques on each door with the name of a South African writer - Olive Schreiner, Alex La Guma, CJ Langenhoven, K Sello Duiker, Ingrid Jonker, Alan Paton - with explanatory biographical and bibliographical data.

A number of workshops, talks and presentations were also held at stands in the main exhibition area which made hearing occasionally difficult but the ambient buzz simply added to the vibrant atmosphere.

The range of exhibitors was vast with the stands arranged in the various sectors - the educational publishers on one side, the university presses in their area, general and specialist booksellers in their positions and the international visitors occupying their space. It was truly international as in addition to a varied African contingent the Swiss, French, German, Indian, Thai, Malaysian, United States and Canadian representatives punted their wares. Related industries - freight, printing and paper too had their place.

Libraries were there with the National Library of South Africa sharing its stand with the Van Riebeeck Society. Despite its parlous state the City of Cape Town Library and Information Services still had a presence and Nazeem Hardy, marketing and research librarian, manning the stand said he had received numerous queries. For Nazeem it was also a great learning experience that generated lots of ideas for future fairs and emphasised the importance of partnerships.

The décor of the Centre for the Book stand attracted attention by its vibrancy and appeal - a truly imaginative rendering of an intangible service provider making its services immediate and visible. It was good to catch up with veteran library supplier Maureen Hargraves at her stand.

The publishers' stands ranged from huge international conglomerates like Random House to

...a truly memorable experience for anybody connected with the book or, more appropriately, the word world

Right and below: Striking large lifesize collages showing figure shapes covered with text and relevant headings were part of the decor of the very special exhibition put on by Centre for the Book. All age groups were catered for. Shown here are the adult male and young school girl





Alexander McCall Smith

one-man bands like Don Nelson - yes he is still going strong - with small and medium enterprises in between. Many of the stands had sweets, sandwiches and drinks and the odd give-away.

The writers were out in full force and our local authors held their own with international luminaries. If I had any complaints it would be of excess! Because of the parallel sessions one had to make choices - not always the most satisfying one - so that one morning I found myself hopping between a colloquium to hear Vincent Kolbe talk on 'Working as a librarian under apartheid' and a panel on 'The role of reading in facilitating sustainable democracy' while missing Richard E Grant and Philippa Gregory talking about their books. Some of the more popular attractions were repeated and if one missed hearing authors talk one could meet them at their publishers' stands where they valiantly signed copies of their work.

But I did not miss Alexander McCall Smith talking about his writing. The organisers underestimated his appeal and I quite frankly think he could have filled the vast exhibition area easily by himself. But he did repeat sessions so hopefully all his fans were able to hear him. A delightful, gentle raconteur with a wicked sense of humour. He said he was always receiving comments about what he should be writing about in his books (no doubt referring to the fact that the massive incidence of AIDS in Botswana does not feature in his books) but he said he preferred to write about pleasant things and good people. His literary output is impressive - he confessed to suffering from serial novelism and simply has to continue writing.

Queuing was the order of the day for some of the panels and even then, as for the panel on *Fiction bordering fact*,

fact bordering fiction with Antjie Krog, Ivan Vladislavic and Fred Khumalo, one did not always get in. What struck me very strongly after attending a number of panel sessions is the skill required to be a good moderator and just how important a good moderator is. One who can ask the right kind of questions to elicit the most revealing answers, who can keep the questions from the floor (and the panellists themselves) in check, who can keep the threads together and above all can give everybody a fair chance. I am afraid that not all the moderators were successful.

Publishers used the Fair to launch their new books and what a variety of launch styles - ranging from presentations at the Mount Nelson and breakfasts at the Metropole Hotel courtesy Random House to plates of sushi and wine served at the stands of smaller publishers to launches in bookshops and poetry readings in cafes.

Marketing books is a craft in its own right - I am sorry that I missed Evelyn Holtzhausen on *Literary PR-Publicity and the author* and the session on plagiarism. What was very obvious to me was that the author's job is no longer finished once the book is on the shelves. They now have to market



Antjie Krog



Ivan Vladislavic

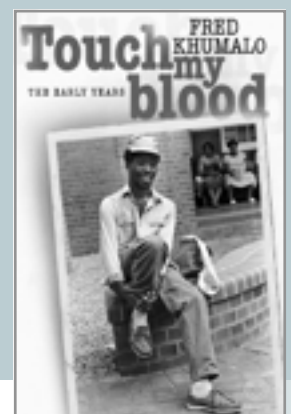
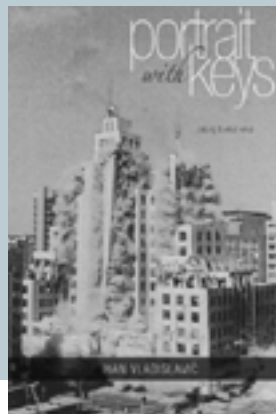


Fred Khumalo

Right: Antjie Krog's new novel titled **Body bereft**. Krog is the recipient of the Alan Paton Award for **Country of my skull**

Right centre: **Portrait with keys** - Ivan Vladislavic's latest novel about Johannesburg. Born in Pretoria he is the winner of several awards, such as the 1993 CNA Award and the 2002 Sunday Times Fiction Award

Far right: **Sunday Times' Insight and Opinion** editor Fred Khumalo, joint winner of the 2006 EU Literary Award. His latest novel is **Touch my blood**





CAPE TOWN BOOK FAIR

their creations. It must be difficult for writers whose medium is the solitary and often lonely craft of writing to metamorphose into public speakers expected to deliver witty, urbane and entertaining speeches. To their credit they did - whether to directly launch their books or to entertain their fans.

A determined effort was made to cater for children and the Exclusive Books Kids Zone was a roaring success. Story-telling alternated with interactive sessions and story-tellers, musicians and illustrators provided the hundreds of children who attended with a memorable book experience.

The visitors came from all over and Capetonians were there in full force - including librarians. Expecting maybe 10 000 visitors overall, the director Vanessa Badroodien reported that more than 15 200 came through the doors on the weekend alone. The Fair, a joint venture between the Publishers' Association of South Africa and the Frankfurt Book Fair was a first experience for Cape Town and a number of lessons were learnt - the most obvious one being that the public who come to see and hear authors and buy books and the trade representatives dealing with rights, licences and materials

do not cohabit easily. There were three bookshops represented at which the public could buy books, but of course there were books that appeared only on the exhibition stands.

What is most frustrating for me is that on checking through the programme for this piece I find that, despite careful reading and diligent application both before and during the Fair, I now notice names and events that I would have loved to have gone to hear or see - Sandile Dikeni, Jonathan Kaplan, Fred Khumalo. I was also struck by the number of authors we have living in and around Cape Town - do we necessarily have to wait for their books to be launched or Book Fairs to hear and meet them? I somehow do not think so.

But let the last word be given to others. Vanessa Davidson of the Centre for the Book probably summed up the overall impression with her comments that the Fair was absolutely fantastic in terms of the numbers of people they met, the contacts they made and the information they were able to provide and she is convinced that their presence at the Fair will have positive outcomes. And according to Thomas Minkus, marketing director of the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Cape Town Book Fair held its own with any comparable Book Fair overseas.



Lewis Nkosi



Rayda Jacobs



K Sello Duiker

Mandela's ego - a bitter-sweet look at South Africa's recent past by Lewis Nkosi. Nkosi, who started his career at *Drum* magazine, is the author of two novels, three literary criticisms and has taught at universities in the UK, USA, Africa and Europe

Rayda Jacobs, winner of both the Sunday Times Fiction Award and the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for her *Confessions of a gambler*, has published her latest novel, *My father's orchid*

A critique of *The hidden star* in *The Star* reads: 'Like children, we sometimes need stories that fill us with awe and make us forget just for a while that we are grown-ups.' Considered one of the most promising black South African authors, K Sello Duiker's untimely death in 2005 is a loss to the literary world. Duiker received the Commonwealth Prize for best First Book, Africa Region and the Herman Charles Bosman Prize

