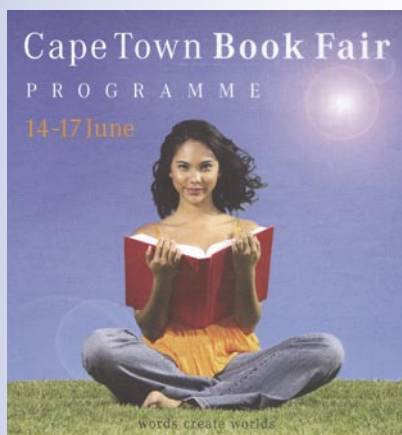


The fairest fair of them all!

Cape Town

BOOK FAIR 2008



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Correspondent

The third Cape Town Book Fair, with the slogan *Words create worlds* held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre on 14-17 June, again did not disappoint. The Cape Town Book Fair is held under the auspices of the South African Publishers Association (PASA) in co-operation with the Frankfurter Buchmesse - the biggest book fair in the world.

Those who flocked there in droves (over 50 000) visited the stalls, listened

to authors speaking about their work, heard differing views in panel discussions, were entertained by consummate raconteurs and story-tellers and were able to buy books with their authors present to sign them.

For many the Book Fair was an opportunity to mix with like-minded people who shared similar interests - everybody there brought some kind of energy that created the vibrant excitement that permeated the vast exhibition hall. For me personally the bumping into friends, acquaintances, fellow librarians or other book people is one of the major attractions.

Exhibitors were as exotic as the Russian stand with books in Russian and the Chinese stand with Chinese children's books. What was particularly noticeable was the number of exhibitors from India. There were the regular national and international publishers' stands enlivened by signing sessions or author's stories such as Sam Cowen of *Great expectations*, the programme for parents on e.tv, and author of *Good enough mother*, who shared her experiences as mother of two.

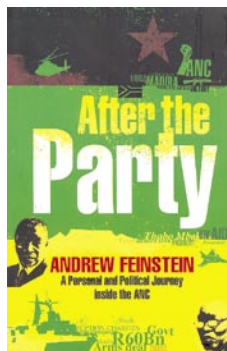
Not only were there more than 450 publishing companies (including multimedia and electronic publishers) exhibiting, but everybody in the book chain besides authors was represented - either at stands or in the talks and discussions: literary agents, editors, designers, printers, bookbinders and packagers. Non-governmental organisations were there as well as the National Library of South Africa with an impressive stand, and public libraries under the generic title of Public Libraries. The attractive book bags at the library stall were a great hit.



Most talks took place either in the Literary Forum, where I heard Barry Ronge enthuse about whom he considered the greats - among them Charles Dickens, EM Forster, Scott Fitzgerald and Raymond Chandler; or in the smaller venues in the Centre. Ronge also told us about the downloading of whole novels onto an iPod-type device - a new medium for talking books.

A splendid innovation this year was being able to book for specific sessions. The tickets were still free but it did guarantee a place particularly for the more popular speakers. Another innovation was the wider aisles - just as well in view of the increased attendance from previous years.

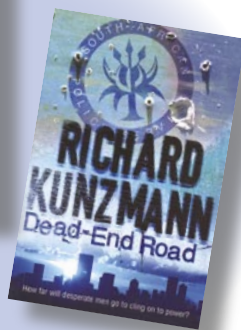
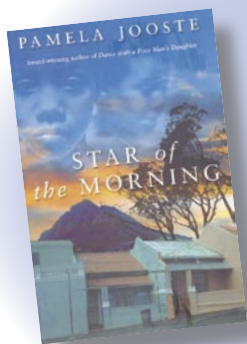
This year again there was the continual frustration of having to choose between equally attractive options. One was really spoilt for choice. For example, I had to choose between a conversation on the arms deal between Terry Crawford-Browne and Andrew Feinstein with Martin Welz of *Noseweek*; or listening to Alexander McCall Smith reading from his work and talking about his writing. I chose the extremely enlightening arms deal conversation, not only because I had read Feinstein's *After the party* but also because I had heard McCall Smith the previous Friday evening at the Benefit Banquet - the opening function of the Fair. As guest speaker he kept his audience in fits of



laughter with his wit, his humour, and his very special perspective on the different situations in which he found himself - all of which added up to a most entertaining experience. And friends who did go to hear him found his account of the filming of his book in Botswana and his plans for staging operas equally entertaining. No wonder he was the darling of the Book Fair.

The opening Benefit Banquet was in aid of Project Literacy (South Africa's premier non-profit provider of adult education) and the Run Home to Read programme and, again attesting to the appeal of McCall Smith, an autographed collection of his *No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* series was silently auctioned off for R20 000. This prompted another bidder to immediately offer another R20 000 for a similar collection.

Besides McCall Smith the only other overseas author was Marina Lewycka, author of *A short history of tractors in Ukrainian*, whom I heard being interviewed by Michelle Magwood. Possibly for the publishers of overseas authors there was the constraint of money, time and distance but for me it was a pity as many of the other authors at the Book Fair I had already heard at local launches of their books.



So having heard them before I did not go to hear Rayda Jacobs on **Masquerade**, Pamela Jooste on **Star of the morning/Mörester**, Riaan Manser on **Round Africa on my bicycle**, Michiel Heyns on **Bodies politic**, Patrick Cullinan on his latest volume of poetry **Escarpmnts** or Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain on **The Jews in South Africa: an illustrated history**.

However, I did attend a panel discussion on crime writing in South Africa with Deon Meyer (**Devil's Peak**), Margie Orford (**Blood rose**), Richard Kunzman (**Dead-end road**) and Mike Nicol (**Payback**). Though all had something to say the synergy between these very clever and accomplished writers was missing - such a pity!

I was struck by the diversity of those attending but more particularly by the numbers of families with children. A far larger area was allocated to the Children's Zone this year and divided into two sections - an activities area for the older children and a story-telling area for the younger ones. There were also a dedicated children's bookshop and an eating area. My most enjoyable experience at the Fair was watching Sharon Geffen, formerly a children's librarian at the Kloof Street branch of Cape Town City Libraries and now a school librarian, telling stories using puppets and, accompanied by her 10-year-old daughter Hayli, singing activity songs in which the children joined with gusto. Her talent for holding the attention of a disparate group of children despite the ambient noise and bustle was impressive. Throughout the Fair much emphasis was placed on reading and books for children starting from a very early age. This is real forward planning - not only for the country but also for the survival and continuance of book fairs.

Re-reading the programme after the Book Fair is not a good idea as one notices events and speakers one had missed on earlier readings, simply compounding the frustration. I am sorry I missed Mark Gevisser (**Thabo Mbeki: the dream deferred**), Robin Malan chairing a discussion on writing about violence against women, and the poets Isobel Dixon, James Matthews, Jeremy Cronin and Tyrone Appollis, artist and musician launching his first book of poetry, **Train to Mitchells Plain**.

I also unfortunately missed many of the sessions on the Monday as I attended a conference entitled *Information for change 2 beyond the book: integrating alternative media into your publishing strategy*, under the auspices of Oxfam, the World Bank and other development agencies.

I had attended the Information for change conference last year and had come away stimulated and enthusiastic. Denis Beckett was again the moderator with some excellent speakers. The discussions provided a number of new and exciting insights into the world of alternative media - read electronic - with its liberating potential. But we were warned that technology can also amplify the gap between the haves and the have-nots. We also learnt that, despite the widespread use of e-mail and the Internet, users of the material disseminated still prefer to work with hard copy. Cell phones and text messaging are an integral part of tertiary education being used extensively by students for their studies. Eve Gray, a publishing consultant and a passionate proponent of open access and the Creative Commons where knowledge and research is



The Western Cape Provincial Library Service and the City of Cape Town Libraries' stand was a hive of activity during the Fair. The backdrop of the stand depicted four pages in a book, with some larger than life bookmarks sporting the slogans **Local and global @ your library** and **Book friends @ your library**. On the pages starting from the left, the names of all the libraries in the Western Cape appeared, names of cities and towns around the globe, authors and book titles. Here we have Book Selector Stanley Jonck and Szerena Knapp from the Publication Section at Head Office assisting some of the many visitors to our stand

made freely accessible, pleaded that knowledge be released and made available to the developing world.

In the programme for the conference much emphasis was placed on networking. I always state categorically that I do not network, I socialise - so socialise I did and met some interesting people.

My book-bellied weekend finished with the launch on, appropriately, Youth Day of **Die agterhuis** at the Cape Town Holocaust Centre - the first translation into Afrikaans of the **Diary of Anne Frank**, translated by Dr Lina Spies, (a renowned poet and lecturer) and published by Protea Boekhuis. From the pages of the most famous diary of World War 2 emerges a Dutch-Jewish girl with a dream to become a writer; a girl who could not realise her ideals because as a Jewess she was condemned to death.

Bookshops and book launches

I am not sure whether it is written into their contracts or not but it seems that authors now have a responsibility (as I have mentioned in previous write-ups) to actively promote their books. Many bookshops in town such as the Wordsworth and Exclusive branches have regular book launches with the author present, usually in the late afternoon. Kalk Bay Books usually hosts its authors over weekends. Both Kalk Bay Books and the newest kid on the block, The Book Lounge at the corner of Roeland and Buitenkant Streets in Cape Town are going full tilt featuring as many as two authors a week. The launches are open to all and invitations extended by e-mail. E-mail the following book shops to be added to their mailing lists for book launches and newsletters:

The Book Lounge <Booklounge@gmail.com>
 Exclusive Books <Waterfront@exclusivebooks.co.za>
 <Cavendish@exclusivebooks.co.za>
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