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Introduction

2023 was a mixed year for literary and scholarly publication in East and Central Africa, with Kenya witnessing vibrant activity, while Malawi seemed somewhat quiet. It is to an extent unsurprising, as the correlation between dynamic economic flows and lively cultural production is widely recognized. There are a few highlights on this year's list. To start us off, since the Paris Olympics are currently underway as I finalise this essay, is Beaton Galafa's essay titled "The African Athlete and Contemporary Francophone Fiction: Doping in Jean-Marc Rigaux's *Kipjiru 42...195*" [see **General Studies: Regional**]. Galafa's chapter examines a francophone novel set in East Africa in the world of athletics and doping scandals. It is a remarkable reflection on the high-returns world of global sports competitions and the doping syndicates that appear to operate behind the scenes in the sports world. Galafa's chapter explores the use of fiction to comment on the challenge of doping and anti-doping initiatives in competitive athletics. With the thin historical francophone cultural imprint in the East African region, it is interesting to have a French novel set in the region's sports scene.

Elsewhere, Nienke Boer's essay, which appears in a special issue of the journal *Novel*, themed Genre Mutinies, proposes that analytic frameworks such as postcolonial historical fiction or metafiction stop short of grasping the interesting formal innovations at play in many contemporary novels from the Global South whose engagements with history exceed these paradigms [see **General Studies: Kenya**]. Instead, Boer makes a case for the category of the Global South novel, as a way of speaking to these texts' shared engagement with similar socio-political stimuli flowing from the shortfalls of the nation-state and globalization alike. Boer reads these novels as mapping a reconfigured transnational

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sensibility that is best apprehended not from without — in relation to the location of the authors — but from within the narrative form and content of these texts. This argument is demonstrated through a compelling reading of Peter Kimani's *Dance of the Jakaranda* (2017) and Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black* (2018).

British military misadventures in territories it colonised remain an active subject of fictional imaginaries, historical research and literary scholarship. This trend is represented on this year's list by Geraint Hughes' essay titled "Guerrillas in Our Midst: Reflections on the British Experience of Counter-Insurgency in Popular Fiction" [see **General Studies: Kenya**]. Here, Hughes demonstrates that British popular fiction, often written by authors with first-hand experience of these wars, depicts British use of coercion and excessive force against civilians and insurgents alike, despite the better-known rhetoric of minimum force in British counter-insurgency efforts. Hughes' essay will be of interest to literary scholars and historians alike, while it raises interesting questions about fiction — and more so, popular fiction — and its evidentiary status in aiding our understandings of historical phenomena, such as Britain's counter-insurgency efforts at the peak of colonial empire-building.

Theatre and performance studies is the subject of Linda Cimardi's *Performing Arts and Gender in Postcolonial Western Uganda* [see **General Studies: Uganda**]. The study zooms in on the intersections between gender and performance genres in this region; drawing on archival and field research to make a case for the complexity of local discourses on gender, embodiment and representation, noting the processes by which more textured gender identities were flattened during the colonial era into gender binaries that command gender logics today. A second title on drama, also focusing on Uganda, is George Bwanika Seremba's *Robert Serumaga and the Golden Age of Uganda's Theatre (1968–1978): Activism and Innovation* [see **Studies on Individual Writers**]. This is a welcome sustained exploration of celebrated playwright Robert Serumaga, whose drama remains foundational not only to Ugandan but broadly East African drama.

Unsurprisingly, Abdulrazak Gurnah accounts for the bulk of the scholarly outputs on Tanzanian literature this year and is likely to remain the primary focus of attention for a few years. This is in large part owing to his Nobel prize for literature, which has catalysed new waves of attention to both his work and Tanzanian histories. Two interesting strands of this work are explorations of translation and circulation of his work in China as exemplified by Xiong Hui and Liu Dan's "Recognition and Translation of Abdulrazak Gurnah's Works in China" [see **Studies on Individual Writers**] and the increasing interest in German colonialism in Tanzania, which is a subject Gurnah's fiction has explored extensively. An example of this latter strand in this year's list is Dirk Götsche's "German Colonialism in East Africa and its Aftermath in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Novels *Paradise* and *Afterlives* in Contemporary German Literature" [see **Studies on Individual Writers**].

Life writing continues to be a widely embraced genre in the region, as has been the case for the last decade or so of East and Central African writing, with key political figures continuing to dominate the list. This year's list sees an interesting cluster of biographical writings on the region's political figures: in Kenya Mzee Warsame's *Dr. William Ruto – The Journey from Kamagut Village to State House* [see **Auto/biographies: Kenya**] takes a look at the current Kenyan president's life story and political trajectory. As I am finalising this introduction, Kenyans, led by the youth, have been on the streets for the last two months, protesting Ruto's policies and his government's rampant

corruption; and demanding that he steps down from office. Uganda is represented in the political memoir cluster by an autobiography authored by the Buganda kingdom's current queen. Her book, *The Nnaabagereka – Queen Sylvia Nagginda Luswata: An Autobiography* [see **Auto/biographies: Uganda**] offers a glimpse into the life and institutions behind the Buganda kingdom, which, alongside a small handful of other African monarchies, has managed to navigate the transition to modern state rule without losing its political power and relevance. From Tanzania we have Aili Mari Tripp's biographical portrait titled *Joan Wicken: A Lifelong Collaboration with Mwalimu Nyerere* [see **Auto/biographies: Tanzania**] through which we get a close view of Nyerere's life and thought from his personal assistant, Joan Wicken, who worked with him for close to four decades, till his death in 1999. Collectively, these life writings paint a poignant portrait of East African political and cultural histories and the many institutions, individuals and agents that have shaped the region's contemporary realities.

Thandeka Cochrane's essay, "The Power of Stories: Oral Storytelling, Schooling and Onto-epistemologies in Rural Malawi" [see **General Studies: Malawi**] tables a refreshing perspective on the pedagogical function of storytelling in rural Malawi, as exceeding formal education systems' assumptions about the role of oral storytelling in schools. Here, Cochrane demonstrates what she identifies as the dissonances between literacy-oriented instrumentalization of stories as a means to an end and the rural communities' understandings of the power of oral tales to anchor children's ontological senses of themselves and what it means to be a human being. Although the discussion is not framed in the diction of decolonial pedagogies, it nonetheless models what meaningful epistemic plurality might look like.

2023 was, on the whole, a mixed year for the region's literary and scholarly production; with some remarkable trajectories, but overall, largely quiet. I must hasten to add that often what is visible from mainstream platforms and catalogues is far from representative; as the region boasts a lively small-scale publishing infrastructure that may not fully map onto the mainstream cataloguing, circulation and distribution platforms. Put differently, these lists are far from comprehensive, and it is important to acknowledge their incompleteness — which in itself says something about street-level circuits of literary production and circulation that continue to flourish parallel to the more mainstreamed players and infrastructures.

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Criticism

General Studies

Regional

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