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‘The Old Iron Cooking Pot of Europe’ Storytelling, Sleuthing and Neo-colonialism in the Botswana novels of Alexander McCall Smith

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Abstract

In this study I will interrogate some of the issues and contradictions raised by Alexander McCall Smith's Botswana novels. These texts feature a black African woman protagonist in a developing society, and have achieved huge popular and commercial success, but they are written by a white European man.

I will examine briefly whether the books can be considered as 'African Literature,' and how the author has negotiated the interface between history and literature to convince readers and critics in 'the West' that he is portraying 'the real Africa.' I will investigate the strategies used by the author to create this 'authentic', 'traditional' effect, how he writes convincingly as, about and on behalf of women, and the use he makes of the detective fiction mode.

Ultimately I will consider whether these novels represent a restorative 'writing back' or whether they constitute a continuing appropriation of African history, culture and identity, a further re-invention of Africa by and for 'the West'.