

- **In your Oxford lecture you spoke about all sorts of magic in African literature. Unfortunately, the full video of the lecture is unavailable online. Could you possibly tell us more about it?**

So, in my Oxford lecture I spoke about the research I had done around some of the books featured in the African Writers Series – the series that ranged from the 1960s till 2003. And I had looked at the first 101 titles and looked at the genres that were featured in those works. And then, I looked at five specific books that I used in writing workshop. So, out of the 101 there were about 45 works that featured elements of traditional beliefs, magic, fantasy, folktales, folklore, mythology and other elements of African storytelling. And they're not just, you know, thrown in there as, you know, an aside or in the background. They feature quite heavily; they are intrinsic to the story.

So, the stories that I looked at were: Sol Plaatje – *Mhudi*, then Stanlake Samkange's *On Trial For My Country*. And that one in particular, was quite a revelation to me because it is set in the Afterlife. It is portrayed as this historical novel where he's analysed Rhodes and Lobengula, the reigning monarch at the time, and how the British took over the land. And, what Stanlake has done is he has put it into the Afterlife, where their respective ancestors are grilling them, and asking them to account for how they could allow certain things to happen. And it's all in this fantasy world.

Then Bessie Head's *Maru*, which is magical realism. But she takes it to another level where she's incorporated local Xam mythology, in terms the sun and the moon and what they represent to the people of the Botswana area. And the writing is beautiful, it's magical, and again, it's part of the story. It is magic in, you know, the fantasy sense from a Western point of view. But, with these writers, they put it in as if it's just part of everyday life.

And then, the other works included Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, as well as Cosmo Pieterse's *Anthology of Short African Plays* – which also, the elements, the three plays that I feature in that discussion have all got magical elements to them, fantasy elements to them, folktale elements to them. And the one in particular is featured in a really bizarre and a unique take on Hell. So I encourage anybody to read those works.

So, the lecture just really pointed out the magic that is quite blatant in those works – these works that everybody's regarded in this, in the terms of literary work rather than what I saw them as, is: those magical, fantastical, speculative themes and genres that they really are.

- **How in your vision old African myths and beliefs shape Afrofuturism?**

African myths serve a variety of purposes within each culture. So, I think for Africanfuturism, Afrofuturism, whatever you want to call it in speculative terms, those types of mythologies and folklores they really can assist a writer in building a world that is believable – if we're talking really nothing that's necessarily earthbound. But in terms of any cultures that we are representing that are alive today, we need to consider

their cosmologies in how we portray them. So, if you're talking about a society in the future, you can refer back to all this history, all this storytelling, to do them justice and to inform on how you then can tell a story, that you can infuse your story with the past ideas of who they are in the world.

So, something like the Woyengi myth – Woyengi is part of the Ijaw mythology – and she is the creator goddess. Not the wife of a male counterpart, but she is the creator goddess. And, if you look at that, in terms of who the society is around that, they have a very matriarchal society. So, that informs then how that society is in the past, is in the present and would be in the future. That myth holds quite strongly throughout time.

- Please describe one of your your current writing projects.

I'm currently working on the next book, Book 2 and Book 3, of *Bones and Runes*. So, *Bones and Runes* is coming out in paperback in the next couple of weeks, which is really exciting – so, if you want to see that. And, when I was about halfway through writing the first book I realised that it's definitely going to be a trilogy. And I've been just thinking about the character arcs, and I've got a kind of end point for book three. So, with the first book it focuses on Mlilo. He is our main protagonist – although we have Amira and Dan as secondary protagonists, they're going to be featured individually. So, if I can say Dan in Book 2 and Amira in Book 3. It's always going to be about the three of them and their individual storylines, but there's going to be a single character's focus for that story.

So, the research has always just carried on, and it's quite exciting just kind of adding to that world; looking at Book 1's world building and the kind of things that I've put in place there. It's quite fun revisiting that and then, you know, as soon as I get the paperback in my hands I'll be reading it as well and seeing what ideas spring from that.

So, ja, that's quite an exciting process, doing sequels.

**- What's the earliest science fiction you remember reading and/or being read?
When and how did you start writing science fiction?**

Essentially from about high school, in terms of reading, from high school I was really interested in more the fantasy genre. So, I got into reading the *Shannara* series. A friend who was reading *The Lord Of The Rings*, and I saw this is a really thick book. He says, no no, you're not going to be able to handle reading this. You should try the *Shannara* series. So, *Shannara* series really got me reading properly, and reading thicker books, not, you know, the thinnest book so I could do a book review.

So, that's kind of where I got into the reading side of it.

And then in my late twenties, I was like interested, I'd read *2001* – the book version – and I said to a friend of mine, who was a science fiction nut, I said, you know, I have no idea about what a phaser this is, and a hyperdrive this is. Is there some kind of

dictionary that all you science fiction readers have that I don't know about, because I don't know what these things are. And he said, no, no, you actually don't need to worry about what that is, you just make up what you think it is. And he said, here you go, here is a collection of Iain Banks' short stories. And that was really the start point. The one in particular, which was about the AI-driven space suit with the injured astronaut in it. That really showed me the power of the short story. But then, I read *Use of Weapons*. And *Use of Weapons* really changed it for me, in terms of what writing could do, because it was the late 90s, 1999, and to me, the way that it had been edited was like a Tarantino movie. And I thought, you know, this just really blew me away because it showed me that you can have a bit of fun with the writing structure itself.

So, ja, from there things just started brewing and 2006 was when I really had an idea for a science fiction story which was *Soul Searching*. So, Iain Banks really stood out as a writer that I just absolutely love and respect. Ja.

- How local or regional is your identity as a science fiction author, if geographically-based at all?

In terms of regional and local, geographically, in terms of where I write about and where I situate my stories: I do tend to like stories that, as a reader, that are based in a more real world setting. And that's not to say that even as a writer I don't imagine other worlds that aren't based on Earth. You know, *Journal of a DNA Pirate*, in AfroSF, that was set on Mars. But, you know, so for example *Soul Searching* is set in Durban, and that was quite exciting to actually represent a real world. You know, I work visually, and I've taken in that city for the majority of my life and to be able to put that on paper was quite an interesting process.

And then, similar to *Bones & Runes*, same thing with it being set in Durban and other places in southern Africa. But then, stepping into the fantasy world where I could then create whatever I wanted, build this world in whatever way I wanted. But still drawing on local landscapes and certain characteristics that you find in southern Africa, bringing that into it.

So, a fantasy story that I'm working on, and part of a shared world project, that's going to be really interesting, being able to create something from scratch, essentially, that isn't real world – secondary world. So, that's going to be quite interesting and see how that process works in terms of being able to build it for the reader, and something that isn't necessarily geographically based on our world.

So, ja, I think regional does influence me quite a bit but, ja, I think it makes it exciting trying something out of your comfort zone.