

# NOBEL SYMPOSIA

**Nobel in Africa Nobel Symposium in Literature**

**RETRIEVING PASTS, IMAGINING FUTURES: CREATIVE FORMS IN AFRICAN WRITING**

**STIAS, Stellenbosch, 3-7 November 2025**

## **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

In the 21st Century African writing exists as a powerful creative force on the stage of world literature. This symposium invites writers and academics to consider the unique contribution African writing can make to reformulating the destructive narratives of the past and the present. Rather than thinking of Africa as ‘following after’ the developed world, we propose writing from Africa as the site for thinking of alternative paths to the future.

The 204<sup>th</sup> Nobel Symposium on *Retrieving Pasts, Imagining Futures: Creative Forms in African Writing* will be the fifth symposium in the *Nobel in Africa* series at STIAS. The invitation-only symposium will gather around 40 of the world’s leading scholars and writers, in the field of African writing, with lectures, discussions and an outreach programme.

Convenors: Abdulrazak Gurnah (University of Kent), Maria Olausson (University of Gothenburg), Tina Steiner (Stellenbosch University) and Louise Green (Stellenbosch University)

*The Nobel in Africa – NOBEL SYMPOSIA series is a STIAS Initiative in partnership with Stellenbosch University, under the auspices of the Nobel Foundation and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences with funding from the Knut & Alice Wallenberg Foundation and the Marcus & Amalia Wallenberg Foundation. The NOBEL SYMPOSIA mark is owned by the Nobel Foundation.*

## Draft programme (23 May 2025)

The motivating impulse for this symposium is to convene a series of open-ended conversations drawing on the rich collective experience of reading and writing African literature. All participants are invited to engage fully in every session. However, each participant has also been assigned a particular place in the programme. This might be on a panel, in a conversation or part of a reading. Most of the sessions will be closed to the public, unless indicated otherwise.

**PANEL:** The panels will consist of four presenters. If you are part of a panel, you will be allocated 10 minutes to present on your creative and/or scholarly work in relation to the panel's theme. Following the presentations, we will have a 50-minute discussion period for in-depth conversations.

**PUBLIC PANEL:** Each presenter is allocated 15 minutes for their intervention, because the Q & A will be shorter, given that this panel is open to the public.

**CONVERSATION:** A conversation between an author and a critic lasts for one hour: 30 minutes for the conversation and 30 minutes for open discussion. We imagine these conversations deepening and extending some of the themes of the panels.

**READINGS:** Readings will take place on most days from 15.30-16.30. If you have been assigned to a reading session, you are invited to select and read extracts from your work which relate in some ways to the theme of the day. Feel free to imagine this connection in any way that you would like. Each participant will read for 20 minutes, with the remaining 20 minutes for responses.

Day 0   Sunday, 2 Nov		
19:30- 21:30	<b>WELCOME DINNER</b> Welcome remarks by <b>Edward K Kirumira, STIAS Director</b> Opening remarks by <b>Abdulrazak Gurnah, Symposium Co-convenor</b>	

  

Day 1   Monday, 3 Nov: COUNTERHISTORY		
The theme of this day invites us to direct our gaze at the strange country that is the past. Narrative has a privileged relation to time. It can bring into focus pasts that have been elided, lost, suppressed, forgotten or transformed.		
<b>OPENING SESSION</b> (open to the public & media)		<b>MC/ PROGRAMME DIRECTOR:</b> tbc
08:00 – 09:00	<b>Registration</b>	
09:00 – 09:30	Welcome & Opening remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>STIAS Director, Edward K. Kirumira</li><li>Stellenbosch University Rector &amp; Vice-Chancellor, Deresh Ramjugernath</li><li>Symposium convenor (tbc)</li></ul>	
09:30 – 11:00	<b>PUBLIC PANEL: Retrieving Pasts</b> Aminatta Forna, Petina Gappah, Ato Quayson, Njabulo Ndebele	CHAIR:
11:00 – 11:15	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK   END OF OPENING SESSION</b>	
11:15 – 12:45	<b>PANEL: (Re)writing History</b> Jennifer Makumbi, Leila Aboulela, Maaza Mengiste, David Attwell	CHAIR:
12:45 – 14:00	<b>LUNCH</b>	
14:00 – 15:00	<b>CONVERSATION:</b> MG Vassanji & Dan Ojwang	

<b>15:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b>
15:30 – 16:30	READING: Leila Lalami & Seffi Atta
Open evening	

<b>Day 2   Tuesday, 4 Nov: REINVENTION</b>		
Reinvention addresses the transformative power of creativity. On this day we will pay attention to the shifts and nuances of literary form that allow us to perceive our relation to language and place in new ways.		
08:30 – 09:30	Arrival coffee & tea	
09:30 – 11:00	PANEL: <b>Writing Place</b> Jamal Mahjoub, Zoë Wicomb, Dorothy Driver, Jopi Nyman	CHAIR:
<b>11:00 – 11:15</b>	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b>	
11:15 – 12:45	PANEL: <b>Publication and Circulation</b> Mkuki Gboya, Lola Shoneyin, Bhakti Shringarpure, Meg Arenberg	CHAIR:
<b>12:45 – 14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	
14:00 – 15:00	CONVERSATION: Akachi Ezeigbo & Steph Newell	
<b>STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR'S PUBLIC LECTURE, Adam Small Theatre</b>		<b>PROGRAMME DIRECTOR:</b> Dr Katlego Letlonkane, Stellenbosch University
<b>17:30</b>	<b>Transport to Adam Small Theatre</b>	
18:00	Welcoming and Opening remarks	<b>Lesetja Kganyago</b> Chancellor, Stellenbosch University and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank
	Introduction of guest speakers	<b>Prof Vasti Roodt</b> Dean: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University
	Lecture: <b>Africa Writes the World</b>	<b>Emeritus Professor J.M. Coetzee</b> <b>Emeritus Professor Abdulrazak Gurnah</b>
	Conversation with the Nobel Laureates	Facilitator: <b>Professor Stefan Helgesson</b> Dean: Faculty of Humanities and Vice Rector for Human Science Stockholm University
	Word of Thanks	<b>Prof Stella Viljoen</b> Vice-Dean (Research): Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University
<b>20:00</b>	<b>Cocktail reception</b>	

**Day 3 | Wednesday 5 Nov: OUTREACH**

A small number of invited participants to offer lectures, conversations, creative writing master classes at the three Western Cape universities

08:00	Transport from STIAS to outreach venues
	Outreach 1 (tbc)
	Outreach 2 (tbc)
	Outreach 3 (tbc)
<b>18:00 – 20:00</b>	<b>BRAAI at STIAS</b>

**Day 4 | Thursday 6 Nov: INCANTATION**

The theme for today is a little enigmatic. It directs attention to the musical, ritual aspect of language and the power it has to evoke, to disturb, and to rearrange the world. It invites consideration of the materiality and magic of language and the way it interacts with the materiality of the world.

08:30 – 09:30	Arrival coffee & tea	
09:30 – 11:00	PANEL: <b>Oceanic Writing</b> Rogaia Abusharaf, Ida Hadjivayanis, Clarissa Vierke, Jacky Kosgei	CHAIR:
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b>	
11:15 – 12:45	PANEL: <b>Intimacy</b> Dinaw Mengestu, Chris Abani, Godwin Siundu, Susanne Gehrmann	CHAIR:
<b>12:45 – 14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	
14:00 – 15:00	CONVERSATION: Abdulrazak Gurnah & Tina Steiner	
<b>15:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b>	
	READING: Susan Kiguli & Gabeba Baderoon	
<b>18:00</b>	<b>SYMPOSIUM DINNER (venue tbc)</b>	

**Day 5 | Friday 7 Nov: RECOGNITION**

Recognition represents a key mode through which readers connect with fiction, offering a sense of resonance with various aspects of the narrative. It invites us to consider both the possibilities and limitations of recognition, particularly in relation to the challenges posed by genre and the representation of more-than-human worlds.

08:30 – 09:30	Arrival coffee & tea	
09:30 – 11:00	PANEL: <b>Inviting Forms</b> Lynda Spencer, Ashleigh Harris, Suyi Okungbowa, Louise Green	CHAIR:
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b>	

<b>11:15 – 12:45</b>	PANEL: <b>More-than-human perspectives</b> Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Maria Olaussen, James Ogude, Sarah Nuttall	CHAIR:
<b>12:45 – 14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	
14:00 – 15:00	CONVERSATION: Tsitsi Dangarembga & Grace Musila	
<b>15:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b>	
15:30 – 16:30	Closing Roundtable	CHAIR: