

NOBEL SYMPOSIA

NOBEL SYMPOSIUM IN LITERATURE

Retrieving Pasts, Imagining Futures:
Creative Forms in African Writing

STIAS, 3-7 NOVEMBER 2025

NOBEL
IN AFRICA

A STIAS INITIATIVE



NOBEL SYMPOSIUM IN LITERATURE

RETRIEVING PASTS, IMAGINING FUTURES: CREATIVE FORMS IN AFRICAN WRITING

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 204th 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.

PROGRAMME

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 NOVEMBER	
PARTICIPANTS’ WELCOME RECEPTION	
18:00 – 18:30	Arrival and welcome drinks
18:30 – 21:00	Dinner with remarks by Edward K Kirumira, STIAS Director and Abdulrazak Gurnah, Symposium Co-convenor

DAY 1 | MONDAY, 3 NOVEMBER

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.

OPENING SESSION (Open to the Public and Media)

MC: Africa Melane

08:00 – 09:00 REGISTRATION WITH COFFEE AND TEA

09:00 – 09:45 **Welcome and Opening remarks**

- STIAS Director, Edward K Kirumira
- Nobel Foundation, Astrid Söderbergh Widding
- Stellenbosch University Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Deresh Ramjugernath
- Symposium Co-convenor, University of Gothenburg, Maria Olaussen

09:45 – 11:00 PUBLIC PANEL: **Retrieving Pasts**
Aminatta Forna, Jamal Mahjoub, Petina Gappah,
Njabulo S Ndebele

CHAIR: Sarah Nuttall

11:00 – 11:30 COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

SYMPOSIUM SESSIONS (participants only)

11:30 – 13:00 PANEL: **(Re)writing History**
Jennifer Makumbi, Leila Aboulela, Maaza Mengiste,
Jopi Nyman

CHAIR: Godwin Siundu

13:00 – 14:00 LUNCH AND GROUP PHOTO

14:00 – 15:00 CONVERSATION: MG Vassanji and Dan Ojwang

CHAIR: Maria Olaussen

15:00 – 15:30 COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

15:30 – 16:30 READING: Laila Lalami and Sefi Atta

CHAIR: Tina Steiner

FREE EVENING

DAY 2 | TUESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER

REINVENTION

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 AND TEA	
09:30 – 11:00	PANEL: Writing place: Remembering Zoë Dorothy Driver, David Attwell and Gabeba Baderoon	CHAIR: Maria Olaussen
11:00 – 11:30	COFFEE AND TEA BREAK	
11:30 – 13:00	PANEL: Publication and Circulation Mkuki Bgoya, Lola Shoneyin, Bhakti Shringarpure, Meg Arenberg	CHAIR: Lynda Spencer
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 15:00	CONVERSATION: Akachi Ezeigbo and Stephanie Newell	CHAIR: Tina Steiner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR'S PUBLIC LECTURE

Venue: Endler Hall, SU Conservatoire

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR: Katlego Letlonkane, Stellenbosch University

18:00	Welcoming	Deresh Ramjugernath Rector and Vice-Chancellor: Stellenbosch University
	Opening Remarks	Lesetja Kganyago Chancellor, Stellenbosch University and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank
	Introduction of guest speakers	Vasti Roodt Dean: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University
	Lecture: Africa Writes the World	Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee Nobel Laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah
	Conversation with the Nobel Laureates	Facilitator: Stefan Helgesson Dean: Faculty of Humanities and Vice Rector for Human Science Stockholm University
	Word of Thanks	Stella Viljoen Vice-Dean (Research): Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University
20:00	COCKTAIL RECEPTION	

DAY 3 | WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER

OUTREACH

Invited symposium participants to offer lectures, conversations, creative writing master classes at the three Western Cape universities

OUTREACH 1 Department of English Literary Studies, University of Cape Town

08:00 Transport from STIAS to UCT

10:30 – 14:30	From History to Story: Writing Afro-Muslim Encounters Panel discussion led by Gabeba Baderoon with Laila Lalami, Jamal Mahjoub and Leila Aboulela	Hosts: Hedley Twidle and Hassana Moosa
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OUTREACH 2 Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of the Western Cape

08:30 Transport from STIAS to UWC

09:30 – 15:00	Making African Literature Visible Panel discussion with Akachi Ezeigbo, Aminatta Forna and Maaza Mengiste	Hosts: F. Fiona Moolla and Hein Willemse
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OUTREACH 3 Department of English, Stellenbosch University

10:00 – 14:00	Located Imaginaries A Creative Writing Masterclass for students with Chris Abani, Dinaw Mengestu and Yvonne Owuor	Hosts: Megan Jones and Nwabisa Bangeni
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STIAS DIRECTOR'S RECEPTION

18:00 – 21:00	Venue: STIAS Wallenberg Research Centre Dress code: Smart casual
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DAY 4 | THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER

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 AND TEA	
09:30 – 11:00	PANEL: Oceanic Writing Rogaia Abusharaf, Ida Hadjivayanis, Clarissa Vierke, Jacky Kosgei	CHAIR: Dan Ojwang
11:00 - 11:30	COFFEE AND TEA BREAK	
11:30 – 13:00	PANEL: Intimacy Dinaw Mengestu, Chris Abani, Godwin Siundu, Susanne Gehrmann	CHAIR: Grace A Musila
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 15:00	CONVERSATION: Tsitsi Dangarembga and Grace A Musila	CHAIR: Tina Steiner
15:00 – 15:30	COFFEE AND TEA BREAK	
15:30 – 16:30	READING: Susan Kiguli and Gabeba Baderoon	CHAIR: Ashleigh Harris
18:00	Transport from the guest houses to the dinner venue	
18:30 – 21:00	SYMPOSIUM DINNER at Rykaart's Restaurant, Longridge Wine Estate	

DAY 5 | FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER

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 AND TEA	
09:30 – 11:00	PANEL: Inviting Forms Lynda Spencer, Ashleigh Harris, Suyi Okungbowa, Louise Green	CHAIR: Stephanie Newell
11:00 – 11:30	COFFEE AND TEA BREAK	
11:30 – 13:00	PANEL: More-than-human perspectives Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Maria Olaussen, Sarah Nuttall	CHAIR: Louise Green
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 15:00	CONVERSATION: Abdulrazak Gurnah and Tina Steiner	CHAIR: Louise Green
15:00 – 15:30	COFFEE AND TEA BREAK	
15:30 – 16:30	Closing Roundtable	CO-CHAIRS: Abdulrazak Gurnah, Maria Olaussen, Tina Steiner and Louise Green
16:30	REFRESHMENTS AND DEPARTURE	

PARTICIPANTS

First Name	Last name	Affiliation
Chris	Abani	Northwestern University
Leila	Aboulela	Writer
Meg	Arenberg	Smith College
Sefi	Atta	Writer
David	Attwell	University of York
Gabeba	Baderoon	The Pennsylvania State University
Mkuki	Bgoya	Mkuki na Nyota
John	Coetzee	University of Adelaide
Tsitsi	Dangarembga	Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa (ICAPA) Trust
Dorothy	Driver	University of Cape Town University of Adelaide
Akachi	Ezeigbo	Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike
Aminatta	Forna	Georgetown University
Petina	Gappah	Writer
Susanne	Gehrmann	Humboldt-Universität Berlin
Louise	Green	University of Stellenbosch
Abdulrazak	Gurnah	University of Kent
Ida	Hadjivayanis	SOAS University of London
Ashleigh	Harris	Uppsala University
Stefan	Helgesson	Stockholm University
Susan	Kiguli	Makerere University
Jacky	Kosgei	University of Tübingen
Laila	Lalami	Novelist UC Riverside
Jamal	Majhoub	
Jennifer	Makumbi	
Dinaw	Mengestu	Bard College
Maaza	Mengiste	Wesleyan University
Grace A	Musila	University of the Witwatersrand
Njabulo S	Ndebele	
Stephanie	Newell	Yale University
Sarah	Nuttall	University of the Witwatersrand
Jopi	Nyman	University of Eastern Finland
Dan	Ojwang	University of the Witwatersrand
Suyi	Okungbowa	Author University of Ottawa
Maria	Olaussen	University of Gothenburg
Yvonne Adhiambo	Owour	
Lola	Shoneyin	

First Name	Last name	Affiliation
Bhakti	Shringarpure	Radical Books Collective
Godwin	Siundu	University of Nairobi
Lynda Gichanda	Spencer	Rhodes University
Tina	Steiner	University of Stellenbosch
MG	Vassanji	
Clarissa	Vierke	Bayreuth University

LISTENERS

First Name	Last name	Affiliation
Elleke	Boehmer	University of Oxford University of Pretoria
Denise	DeCaires Narain	University of Sussex
Mats	Malm	Swedish Academy
Wamuwi	Mbao	Stellenbosch University
Asante	Mtenje	University of Malawi
Anna-Karin	Palm	The Swedish Academy
Aretha	Phiri	Rhodes University
Steve	Sem-Sandberg	The Swedish Academy
Astrid	Söderbergh Widding	Nobel Foundation & Wallenberg Foundations
Ingrid	Sundström	Wallenberg Foundations

SYMPOSIUM ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Maria Olaussen, University of Gothenburg

Louise Green, Stellenbosch University

Abdulrazak Gurnah, University of Kent

Tina Steiner, Stellenbosch University

Edward K Kirumira, STIAS

Sibusiso Moyo, Stellenbosch University

Vasti Roodt, Stellenbosch University

Christoff Pauw, STIAS

Georgina Humphreys, STIAS (Secretariat)

Nel-Mari Loock, STIAS (Secretariat)

Noloyiso Mtembu, STIAS (Secretariat)

