

Reflections On The Detective Novel As A Moral Fable Of Contemporary Kenya

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Abstract

The detective novel has for a long time been seen as a popular genre, often supposedly read for entertainment as opposed to its concern with ‘serious’ issues about society. This paper reads two detective novels by Richard Crompton to examine what they seem to be suggesting about social reality in 21st century Kenya. Crompton’s *The Honey Guide* (2013) and *Hell’s Gate* (2014) appear to suggest that the Kenyan national body is ailing because of social turpitude. We argue that these two detective novels are profound commentaries, moral fables and critiques of given socio-economic, political and cultural realities in the 21st century Kenya; and that the corruption of the Kenyan body is partly a consequence of both local and international forces such as the circulation of what could be called ‘crimescapes.’

Keywords: *Detective Novel; Kenya; Crime; Moral Decay; Allegory; Ethnicity*

Introduction

This paper is a close reading of Richard Crompton’s two novels, *The Honey Guide* and *Hell’s Gate*. The critical task is to illustrate that the contemporary detective novel in Kenya is an entry point into appreciating social reality in contemporary Kenya, and that at the same time the crime

and detective fiction highlights the ills that permeate this society. We argue that just like the detectives in these novels meticulously burrow through different situations, events, different persons' lives, and information seeking answers and solution to specific incidents of crime, so does the Kenyan society need to examine itself if it is to transform itself. We note that the two novels can be read as literary representations of contemporary Kenya, and, thus, reading them closely should show why the detective or crime fiction is one of the most apt means of painting a portrait of a society, as Margie Orford argues,

Crime fiction, despite, or perhaps because of, its penny-dreadful origins, can be one of the most comfortingly moral forms of literature. The best of it... takes on the problems that lie at the heart of contemporary society, of globalised culture. True, it reflects a world that has been permanently fractured; it tells of beleaguered individuals disconnected from the ordering comfort of family and clan. It describes a dystopian world of crowded, dangerous cities filled with violent, if not murderous strangers. (186)

This paper is interested in Crompton's moral fable of contemporary Kenya as he offers a picture of Kenya on a broader historical canvas. Our argument is that the texts may have been written as light-hearted or entertaining stories, with an external audience in mind, but they could be read as significant narratives of contemporary Kenya – they are set in Kenya; they have Kenyan protagonists; they are largely told in a Kenyan idiom; they are concerned with issues that have concerned Kenyans for several decades since the end of colonialism, among other factors that suggest the 'Kenyaness' of the tales.

The argument in this paper is hinged on the ideas of narratology in the works of Mieke Bal (2009), Gerald Genette (1980), and Seymour Chatman (1978). Their arguments on narrative and discourse aid our reading and interpretation of the allegorical nature of the contemporary Kenyan

detective novel and the connotation it carries for modern Kenya. Fundamentally, narratology refers to the study of narrative and narrative structures, and is concerned with components of the narrative such as story, plot, themes, narrative voice, characters, and setting. Narratology investigates how the process of narration affects readers' perception of the text.

Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that the novel plays a significant role in the creation of a nation as an imagined community. In light of this argument, this paper contends that the detective novel in Kenya is an allegory of the Kenyan nation. James Ogude notes that "postcolonial allegory acquires a transformative capacity in its attempt to subvert or challenge the imperial myths and codes that make up the colonised people's notions of received history" (1999, p.44). Regarding allegories, Slemon observes that "allegory provides the postcolonial writer with a means for foregrounding such inherited notions and exposing them to the transformative powers of imagination; and in doing so, post-colonial allegory helps to produce new ways of seeing history, new ways of 'reading' the world (1988:164)". Thus, what Ogude and Slemon are suggesting is that postcolonial writers "re-appropriate" the allegory so that it is no longer simply a strategy of communicating for marginalised peoples or communities but also a stratagem for speaking about broader national issues.

Each of the two novels can be read independently even though *Hell's Gate* is a sequel to *The Honey Guide*. *The Honey Guide* is set in Nairobi in the period just before, during, and after the 2007 General Elections, specifically between Saturday 22nd December and Sunday 30th December 2007. The body of a young woman, a prostitute called Lucy, is discovered in Nairobi's Uhuru Park and investigations into her death take place on the sidelines of the preparation for and the actual general election.

Hell's Gate is set in Naivasha at around the period after the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. The police are called to deal with the case of a flower farm worker in Naivasha, Jemimah Okallo, who is accused of stealing and selling fresh flowers. She is dismissed from her job but a few hours later her body is discovered in the waters of Lake Naivasha. The investigation into the cause of her death takes place alongside an undercover investigation of the operations of police officers at Hell Police Station who are suspected of bribery, extortion and extrajudicial killings, and the international criminal court's investigation into the post-election violence. At the center of investigations in both narratives is Mollel, a Maasai *moran* turned police officer/detective.

The Moral Fable

In both novels Crompton weaves a narrative around the murder of a woman who belongs to the lower socio-economic class – Lucy in *The Honey Guide* is a struggling prostitute in Nairobi while Jemimah Okallo in *Hell's Gate* is a lowly flower farm worker in Naivasha. Lucy and Jemimah are the human indices around which the elements of crime and detective stories revolve. The one central idea in crime and detective narratives is that there is destabilization of (social) order which involves human beings; in this case it is Lucy and Jemimah. Until the point of their deaths, nothing has happened in the novels that is seriously criminal.

The two women in the two stories are, first, symbols of how the society can and often does disempower women. But they also represent ordinary Kenyans who are often the most affected by the social rot in the system, which often marginalizes the poor. They symbolize a significant majority of Kenyans who are uprooted and displaced from their families and places of birth by the harsh economic realities – Lucy from her native Maasailand to Nairobi and Jemimah from

Western Kenya to Naivasha. Ironically, the places to which they move to seek economic well-being become the places of their death.

The murders of two relatively unknown women may seem insignificant in relation to the weightier matters affecting the country at the time the story is set. However, the detective's constant concern with the investigations into the murders throughout the narratives is the author's strategy of emphasizing the importance of protecting the lives and livelihoods of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin or social economic status. He seems to be suggesting that the seemingly 'big' issues, considered to be of national importance, can never be more important than the lives of the citizens who make the nation.

The investigations into both murders suggest the degenerate nature of the society in the story. The murder investigations are a metaphor that can be read as a suggestion to the society in question to interrogate its moral character. The protagonist in both novels is Mollel, a detective who is known among his colleagues in the police force as meticulous in his duties and incorruptible. Indeed, some of his colleagues do not trust him because he exposes the rot in the police force regardless of the rank of the offender. To unravel the murder mysteries, Mollel has to immerse himself fully into the world of the suspects. He has to travel and negotiate the crime landscape if he is to do his detective work effectively, sometimes risking his own life. Mollel is the kind of detective fiction hero that Orford describes as:

... the Aristotelian moralist, [who walks] the streets on our behalf, to investigate the darkness and put it to rights. In a sense, the hero(ine) of crime fiction is a prosthetic eye/I who can look at the medusa-head of crime, the psychic drive behind violence and fear, and not be turned to stone. (2010:189)

Mollet is, therefore, the kind of police officer who is not only interested in apprehending criminals but also in policing morality. The murders of the two women are what trigger the narratives and Mollet's role as a detective and police officer is not only to find the murderers but also to ensure that justice is served. In this role, he is a kind of advocate for the dead women. As Joanne Reardon Lloyd argues:

... the formal demands of crime fiction (as well as those of 'real-life' crime) do more often ask for exactly this kind of balancing act where justice is restored and the victim's voice is finally listened to, considered and laid to rest. Therefore, the structure of a conventional crime narrative has to consider the victim's voice, to form a kind of conversation with the dead where the writer uncovers the story in much the same way a real detective might join clues together to find the killer and this conversation can often form the structure of the novel itself. (103)

Crompton's novels are concerned with the idea of the remnants, remains, or residue of society: prostitutes like Honey and Lucy; poor workers like Jemimah; residents of poor neighborhoods in Nairobi such as Kibera, Mathare, and Kawangware; internally displaced persons; helpless children in the care of dubious adoption agencies; street children like Panya who does not even possess the dignity of having a proper name or Sammy the blind street boy who lives atop a drainage pipe; fetuses that are aborted and therefore have no chance at life or a say in how their lives would have turned out; gullible worshippers who are frequently preyed on by greedy preachers; marginalised communities like the Maasai; isolated security officers like Kibet and Mollet; and, in general, a Kenyan citizenry that is dispossessed of its democratic right to elect its

preferred leaders by greedy politicians who rig elections, but who may also be culpable in their own dispossession – all these are subjects who inhabit the two novels.

The narratives reveal that the seeming success or wealth of the elite, both political and economic, is based not just on exploitation but on connivance too. Yet, Crompton demonstrates, that despite the rot in the Kenyan society there remains some degree of humanity and cultural pride in the lives of ordinary Kenyans as seen through the sub-narrative of the Maasai in the two novels. For instance, Kibet's idea of saving the rhino is based on the fact that while poachers may take away the horn, what remains of the animal should be bigger than what they take away. Even though rottenness of the nation is real, the two stories suggest that there is redemption. Redemption for Mollel, for instance, is anchored in sacrifice, in his detective work.

Crompton offers us Mollel as a complex subject with his own kind of conflicts, cultural complexity, and psychological instability, but who is quite committed to his work, hence symbolizing the need for perpetual vigilance against sources of individual depravity. Mollel becomes a voice of reason; the conscience that calls on the contemporary Kenyan society to examine its values. Yet the writer makes Mollel an ordinary Kenyan who is affected by the problems affecting the society too. He is a father who experienced tragic loss when his wife died during the 1998 bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi; he still suffers bouts of blackouts and erratic fits of rage such that he is permanently on anti-depression medication. Mollel is a remnant too because he has not recovered from his wife's death.

That Mollel is Maasai makes him a unique character because this community is largely underrepresented in many public sectors in Kenya. In a sense, his belonging to a 'marginalised' community makes it seem as if the writer is artistically reclaiming the Maasai community's

belonging to the Kenyan nation by writing them into Kenya's narrative of nationhood. Mollel's colleagues often refer to him as 'Maasai,' an act which could be seen as derogatory and discriminative since everyone else is referred to by their name and not their ethnicity, but which, nevertheless, singles him out as different from other law enforcement officers due to his assiduousness.

The novels are concerned with the idea of moral depravity versus moral credit and Mollel remains one of the few people in the stories with a moral credit. The conventional or classical role of the detective is to restore order. However, Mollel works in a situation where those charged with custody of law and order are the ones destabilizing that order through bribery, extrajudicial killings, and abetting crime. In *Hell's Gate*, he is an undercover detective who needs to reinstate order among his colleagues in the police force. The narrator constantly creates situations of suspense and tension to show the kind of uncertain, tense, and treacherous environment Mollel works in. His difficult experiences as a detective are aimed at communicating author's concern with the ethos of redemption.

The female characters in *Hell's Gate* are a kind of foil to those in *The Honey Guide*. Lucy, Honey, and Wanjiku Nalo in *The Honey Guide* are women with a moral deficit while Jemimah, Kibet, and Beatrice in *Hell's Gate* have a moral credit.

The stories are told from a realist mode and Crompton explicitly discusses the social ills generally known to afflict Kenya. Some of the concerns that cut across both novels include: violence, corruption, deception, betrayal, greed, ethnocentrism, economic hardships, impunity, electoral malpractices, land grabbing, poaching and smuggling, and police involvement in extrajudicial killings.

Violence

Both novels revolve around violence and murder since the detectives' investigations are instigated by the murders of Lucy in *The Honey Guide* and Jemimah in *Hell's Gate*. The choice of murder as the conflict around which the two narratives revolve is significant as it shows the writer's conviction that when a nation loses its moral compass, human life becomes worthless, and can be dispensed with effortlessly.

The writer addresses ethnic violence as a consequence of tensions between different ethnic communities before and after the 2007 General Elections in Kenya, interethnic violence which led to loss of lives and displacement of families. In *The Honey Guide*, the characters make direct reference to the Kikuyu as thieves and say that the Luo and Luhya feel that they should get a chance to be in power. Crompton's explicit mentioning of the specifics of interethnic tension and violence suggests the author's seeming conviction that the question of ethnicity in Kenya needs to be named as it is and addressed directly and urgently if the nation is to progress. In *Hell's Gate*, the narrator details the experiences of internally displaced persons in Naivasha: "... three families to a tent? Twenty people, or more in a space of [a] barrack room. No running water. Latrines? Two weeks before, the whole place had just been a field. They barely had time to knock down the termite mounds before they had to start pitching the tents" (80).

The obvious reference to the clash between the Gikuyu and Kalenjin in the Rift Valley in *The Honey Guide* is the writer's attempt to name the crime, and, therefore, hope that this kind of ethnic violence can be banished forever. Some characters refer to others who belong to different ethnicities as cockroaches that need to be crushed (*The Honey Guide*), and jackals that prey on

their chicken [read resources] (*Hell's Gate*); animal imagery that shows the different ethnicities' hatred for each other; while others talk about grass that needs to be cut (*Hell's Gate* 81). These metaphors of tribal hatred and the consequent violence, in the author's imagination, are not healthy and are a disquieting reminiscence of the 1994 Rwanda genocide. The narrator in *Hell's Gate* reveals that the internally displaced persons who were living in despondent conditions faced even more problems when the women and young girls were raped in the camps. Rape here becomes not just a physical act but a metaphorical one of further stripping them of their dignity, which they had already lost due the violence that uprooted them from their homes and stable lives.

The police are shown to be involved in torture of suspects and extrajudicial killings. Crompton is highlighting the irony that the one institution that is charged with protecting citizens and maintaining law and order is the one that is breaking the same laws. The officers at Hell police station have no qualms about violently assaulting suspects in the wild. Although they are not convicted of extrajudicial killings in any court of law, the fact that they are openly violating suspects' rights and abusing them physically makes them guilty in the eyes of the public.

The writer alludes to the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi, and, therefore, makes a case for terrorist attacks as a symbol of the interconnectedness of international crime. The attack may have been meant to hurt America and Americans but it is ordinary Kenyans, such as detective Mollel, who suffered. Mollel lost his wife in the bomb blast and he has never recovered from the trauma, a condition that often affects his performance as a police officer. In this sense,

Mollel, his son, and mother-in-law, all become victims of violence by losing their wife, mother and daughter respectively.

Greed and the attendant corruption

Crompton presents greed among Kenyans as one of the causes of the decadence that afflicts the nation. He creates characters who symbolize greed and implies that unless such greed is addressed the society will suffer more social degeneration. For instance, in *The Honey Guide*, the narrator tells the story of fraudulent preachers, like George Nalo, who fake miracles to keep worshippers their churches. Crompton creates characters such as Nalo and his wife who thrive on deception. Nalo runs his church purely through deceiving gullible and desperate worshippers. Besieged by harsh economic conditions and other hardships, many flock to the Nalo Ministries hoping to receive a miracle only for the fake pastor to dupe them into what they believe is a spiritual healing. His is not a church but a business enterprise. Nalo depends on suspicious characters, like members of the proscribed *Mungiki* sect, to run the affairs of his 'church.' The writer reveals the presence of dubious faith-based initiatives whose mission is not to spread the gospel but to run suspicious businesses. The George Nalo Ministries runs a fake adoption agency, which is really a front for selling young children. The pastor's wife, a medical doctor, is, ironically, at the forefront of performing abortions on young, helpless women and possibly sells the children. The pastor has sexual relations with prostitutes. Crompton highlights the irony of the church being associated with suspicious businessmen.

In the same novel, Crompton presents politicians who do not want to let go of power; so they rig elections to remain in public office. Mollel and his partner, Kiunga, discover a vote rigging gang

at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre. The result of the politicians' greed is loss of lives, destruction of property, and displacement. This scene is reminiscent of the 2007 General Elections in Kenya, which were marred by vote-rigging, voter bribery and violence.

Greed leads to corruption in the police force and the judiciary. Senior police officers protect powerful and well-connected criminals such that the said criminals have the audacity to demand the transfer or dismissal of police officers who dare to arrest them. In *The Honey Guide*, King'ori, a businessman who leads in vote-rigging, has the nerve to threaten Mollel and his colleague for arresting him and demands that the two officers be taken off the force (125). In *Hell's Gate*, Gachui, who is known to have raped a displaced person after her husband failed to pay for his supplies, is released by the judge despite his crime. The police protect law breakers who give them a commission from their illegal businesses such as bars, brothels, and law breaking *matatu*. The police officers at Hell police post are so corrupt that when they suspect that Mollel has been posted among them to unearth their rotten ways, they conspire to kill him. The corrupt nature of Judge Singh and the police officers indicate that such corruption in the Kenyan society is an impediment to justice.

In addition, corruption contributes massively to impunity so that characters such as King'ori and Gachui will flout laws with abandon knowing only too well that the authorities cannot punish them. The behavior and actions of the police officers at Hell Police Station also reeks of impunity and it is this kind of behavior that Mollel seeks to bring to an end. Mollel seeks justice and honesty but these values seem to be quite elusive. In *Hell's Gate*, unscrupulous businessmen take advantage of displaced persons living in tented camps. They sell them basic necessities but

when the people's money runs out the businessmen offer them credit services at one hundred percent interest rates per week. One loan shark rapes a client's wife when the client, a displaced person, fails to pay for supplies.

Greed also leads cartels to exploit Kenya's natural resources. Avaricious locals and foreigners pose as legitimate businessmen, but in actual fact they are engaged in poaching and smuggling of ivory. The poachers have sophisticated weapons and have no qualms about hiring someone to kill a Kenya Wildlife Services officer who interferes with their poaching. Kibet, the dedicated Kenya Wildlife Services officer in *Hell's Gate*, is targeted by foreign poachers who want her out of their way. She is so committed to protecting the rhino that she visits the animal in the middle of the night to ensure that it is safe. That the rhino has a name, Esme, is symbolic of the importance of such animals and a statement on the need to protect them from poachers. Mollel notices the helplessness of the big animal in the face of poachers and Kibet's commitment somewhat rubs off on him too:

For some reason, the thought of that gentle, powerful animal locked away in its lonely compound fills him with immense sadness. He understands Kibet's compulsion to protect it at all costs. And realises that he, now, is compelled to protect her. (171)

The close relationship between Kibet and Esme symbolises the need for coexistence between human beings and animals. The author appears to imply that this coexistence is threatened by criminals who will stop at nothing to kill the animals and sell the products locally and abroad. Unfortunately, the authorities seem to be losing the war against poaching and smuggling because, as Mollel notices, "the poachers were like a small army. They had machine guns. Grenades" (170).

In a twist of irony, Mollel discovers that one of the powerful poachers is his brother, Lendeve. This turn of events, very shocking to Mollel, indicates the ever-present contest between good and evil. In addition, Mollel's discovery of his brother's criminal connections shows that criminals are known people but corruption in the system ensures that they stay protected. Despite Mollel's commitment to fighting crime, he does not report or arrest his brother, a sign that not even Mollel is flawless; or is caught in a moral dilemma. The author seems to be saying that the rot in the country can create blemishes even among the most faithful or seemingly clean person.

Politics of ethnicity, land and resources

Both novels tell a narrative of constant concern with the politics of language, ethnicity, and land. The author presents 'ethnicity' and its related concepts as one of the major problems in 21st century Kenya. He draws his characters from different Kenyan communities to paint a picture of Kenya as a nation made up of diverse people, and to underscore the importance of national cohesion. For instance, Mollel is Maasai; his deceased wife, Chiku, is Kikuyu; his detective partner, Kiunga, is Kikuyu; the murdered prostitute in *The Honey Guide* is Maasai; the murdered flower farm worker in *Hell's Gate* is Luo; the police boss, Otieno, is Luo; the corrupt judge in Naivasha, Singh, is Asian; the Kenya Wildlife Officer, Kibet, is Kalenjin; and the group of police officers in Hell come from different communities. Yet, while such diversity is supposed to make the nation culturally richer, it is somehow the source of untold pain and causes inter-tribal tensions that may take a long time to dissipate. These tensions were the sources the tribal clashes after the 2007 general elections.

Crompton demonstrates that prejudicial language against people of an ethnic community different from that of the speaker can lead and has often led to unfathomable consequences. When Mollel and Kiunga go to Kawangware to visit Adam, Mollel's son, they find a number of young men loitering outside the gate and some of the young men make statements such as, "Looks like the old *Kikuyu* [italics for emphasis] woman has visitors for Christmas lunch" ... "Ask those thieving Kikuyus!" "Us Luos always get a bad deal...these Kikuyus come here, pushing up the rent" (*The Honey Guide* 140). Inside the house, Faith, Mollel's mother-in-law, says, "You saw those no-good *wamera* [a derogatory reference to Luo men] outside, then?" (141). When Mollel protests her tribalist tone and language she responds, "What's wrong with that? They're Luos, aren't they? So they must be uncircumcised. It's simply a statement of fact... They're trying to drive us out, me and the other Kikuyus. They want to make this a Luo-only zone" (140-141). Mollel and Kiunga chastise Faith and the young men for speaking in pejorative terms, with Mollel warning Faith against influencing his young son to hate people from other ethnicities. Crompton's message seems to be that when Kenyans stop viewing one another as human beings and opt to treat one another with suspicion and look at each other through tribal lenses, there is bound to be chaos. Indeed, when violence breaks out after the disputed presidential elections, the young men attack Faith and Adam, and the two are only saved by Mollel. It is the same call for ethnic cohesion that Nalo makes in his church in spite of his duplicity. Asking the congregants to shake each other's hands, Nalo says:

We greet each other in the name of the Lord, because we have come together in defiance of ethnic division. When you shook your neighbours' hands just then, did you think: I am

shaking hands with a Kikuyu, with a Luo, with a Kamba, with a Kisii? Did a Luhya shake hands with a Kalenjin, a Maasai with an Embu? (69)

The narrator in *Hell's Gate* describes the period after the 2007 as a “time of death [involving] a lynching here, a panga attack there. Whole families, whole communities, facing the fallout of a stolen election. Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin. Tribe against tribe, neighbour against neighbour” (9). The novel reveals that the violence was not spontaneous but a carefully organized plan by merchants of war. Talking about the violence in Naivasha, for example, the narrator says,

But then, in January, the attacks started. They were systematic and well planned. Groups of young men, organized by shadowy backers. They were Kikuyu; their targets, any Luo workers they could find. The Luo, to them, were foreigners, opportunists, incomers with no links in the area. (41)

The Naivasha case was witnessed in many parts of the country. In Eldoret, the narrator explains:

When the incumbent President, Mwai Kibaki, had been declared winner in the polls, the Kalenjin majority in Rift Valley had turned on his Kikuyu tribespeople. Two hundred had sought sanctuary in a church; they had been burned along with the building, those fleeing the flames brought down by youths with *pangas*. Men, women, children, babies. (*Hell's Gate* 81)

Crompton's allusion to real events as they happened in Kenya is his way of provoking the reader to strongly condemn the interethnic violence that rocked the country and warn them against allowing such occurrences to recur.

Explaining the situation in Rift Valley during this period, Shadrack notes the metaphors of violent language that one ethnicity used to incite attacks against another: “cut the grass that

grows under our feet. Kill the jackal that preys on our chickens” (81). In an attempt to justify his violence and involvement in killing rhinos and elephants, Lendeve tells Mollel categorically that the land in Naivasha and everything in it belongs to the Maasai and that “Maasailand will be restored, one way or another” (233). Here the writer is concerned with the deployment of the idea of ‘otherness’, where one ethnicity sees the other as foreigners and, therefore, having no right to inhabit certain parts of the country or benefit from the resources in those parts.

Mollel is the voice of reason in the narratives and his thoughts capture Crompton’s conviction about the nature the politics that dominate the Kenyan discourse. He wonders, “... is this what we’ve become? Is this what it means to be Kenyan today? To constantly squabble over language and tribe and land?” (81). Mollel’s string of thoughts, presented in a series of rhetorical questions, indicate the writer’s belief that the Kenyan society would only progress if it shuns the politics of ethnicity and suspicion.

Conclusion

That Mollel is able to resolve the two murder cases and unravel many other underhand dealings in the process shows that contemporary Kenya has not degenerated beyond redemption. His reunion with his son is a symbol of hope that there is a better tomorrow; that there is hope for restoration of order, justice, and morality. In the process of solving the murders of Lucy and Jemimah, Mollel becomes some kind of advocate for the victims; a voice for the voiceless. In some sense, the detective process allows Mollel and his partner to have a kind of conversation with the dead victims since their deaths occur before the stories begin and, therefore, readers do not get to interact with them or hear their voices. This process is important because, as Lloyd

says, “the victims in the story often speak out louder than any other narrative voices in the work” (100). The reader only becomes part of and benefits from this process by appreciating that, “there is a transaction in crime fiction between the victim and detective which creates the kind of intimacy that we are always craving as readers, an effect that is often achieved through the reader following the investigator on his trail of discovery in which he has an ongoing conversation with the dead” (Lloyd 103-104).

Crompton’s novels reveal that what really ails Kenya is not necessarily corruption, greed, police brutality, poaching or other such problems, but the absence of men and women with a moral pith. The author seems to be suggesting that there is a shortage of patriotic Kenyans. Unfortunately, patriotism is clichéd considering that the public discourse of belonging in Kenya is yet to define patriotism in terms that are socially and culturally accessible and acceptable for the different ethnic and social groups in the country. What the country appears to lack significantly are men and women with the capacity to love Kenya in a manner the reader sees in the metaphor of the intimacy between Kibet and Esmé the rhino.

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