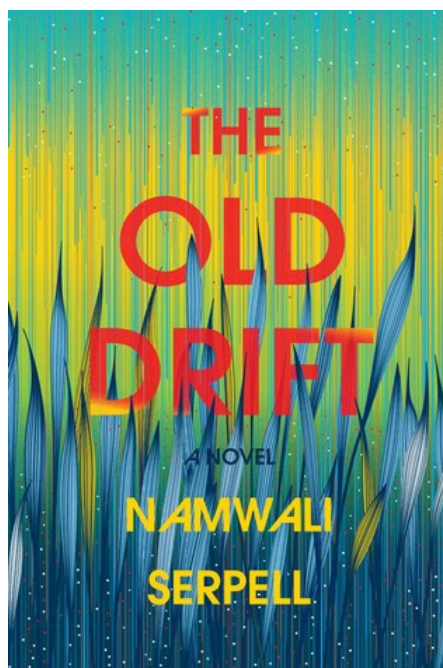




The Old Drift

Namwali Serpell

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An electrifying debut from the winner of the 2015 Caine Prize for African writing, *The Old Drift* is the Great Zambian Novel you didn't know you were waiting for

On the banks of the Zambezi River, a few miles from the majestic Victoria Falls, there was once a colonial settlement called The Old Drift. Here begins the epic story of a small African nation, told by a mysterious swarm-like chorus that calls itself man's greatest nemesis. The tale? A playful panorama of history, fairytale, romance and science fiction. The moral? To err is human.

In 1904, in a smoky room at the hotel across the river, an Old Drifter named Percy M. Clark, foggy with fever, makes a mistake that entangles the fates of an Italian hotelier and an African busboy. This sets off a cycle of unwitting retribution between three Zambian families (black, white, brown) as they collide and converge over the course of the century, into the present and beyond. As the generations pass, their lives - their triumphs, errors, losses and hopes - form a symphony about what it means to be human.

From a woman covered with hair and another plagued with endless tears, to forbidden love affairs and fiery political ones, to homegrown technological marvels like Afronauts, microdrones and viral vaccines - this gripping, unforgettable novel sweeps over the years and the globe, subverting expectations along the way. Exploding with color and energy, *The Old Drift* is a testament to our yearning to create and cross borders, and a meditation on the slow, grand passage of time.

The Old Drift Details

Date : Published March 26th 2019 by Hogarth Press (first published March 25th 2019)

ISBN : 9781101907146

Author : Namwali Serpell

Format : Hardcover 576 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, Africa, Eastern Africa, Zambia

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From Reader Review The Old Drift for online ebook

Barbara Senteney says

The descriptions of the african countryside is the only thing that this book has going for it, those were lovely. I am DNFing this book at page 17 I cannot read one more racist remark. I refuse to read a story where someone is bragging about shooting a Nig and it only cost him 10 bob, that is the 4th racial slur in 17 pages, I do not believe in censorship except for what I myself read, but this is going in the trash, that will be a first for me.

I received this book in exchange for a fair honest review, with no ill intent towards the writer or publisher, the opinions express are my own, and not influenced by anyone or anything other then my own views and moral values.

Roxanne says

It almost seems impossible to review a novel that's over 650 pages long.....I mean how to begin? The Old Drift caught me up immediately into a world of British explorers trying to tame the wilds of Africa. Namwali Serpell's Zambian novel surpasses visual equivalents. You are in Africa with these characters. Just when you've become enthralled, Serpell switches the scene to an equally enticing British tennis player with an affliction I'll let you discover. From there you'll be treated a chapter with a magical realism tint, a character to be envied by anyone follicle challenged. Serpell's world spins you around and then surprises you with genetic connections that will have you shaking your head at her ingenuity.

American references of He-Man cartoons to African food and dress make you feel at once at home and exotic. Having begun at the turn of the 20th Century, Serpell's epic finish hints at the dangers of our modern drone technology set in 2023.

Don't let the size of the book scare you away. Namwall's The Old Drift is worth every hour of your time.

Mary says

The Old Drift, by Namwali Serpell, is an ambitious, sprawling, epic story of four generations of three families—one white, one black, one brown—spanning the hundred years from early 20th century colonial life in what was then Rhodesia to the early 21st century in what becomes the African country of Zambia. Attempting a plot summary of such a sweeping book is unwieldy and unnecessary, since its themes are the important element in Serpell's book, as she unites the stories of each of the generations by unifying ideas: disenfranchisement, whether because of race, sex or economic status, and sometimes all three; the push/pull of the traditional with the modern; and the idea of the “butterfly effect,” which a character in the last generation evokes to describe the immune system but which also describes the overall structure of the book, as each of the three families are inextricably connected over time through a series of random, seemingly unimportant interactions.

These emerging connections are part of the fun of reading this book, as the seemingly freestanding opening section told by an English colonial settler slowly reveals itself to be the lynchpin on which the three families'

future fortunes turn. There are a lot of other things to like about this book, primarily the writing, which is lush and beautiful. (A typical scene: “The fire shuddered in its stone cave and the cigars puffed like chimneys and the glasses of cognac cast copper on the walls.”) There is so much history about early Rhodesia and the birth of Zambia which was fascinating and largely unknown to me. And the book viscerally conveys—more than any book I’ve read since *All the Beautiful Forever*—the experience of living in a slum compound, in this case Kalingalinga, particularly in its depictions of the marginalized women living there and their very limited and sometimes horrific options for survival. (I loved the line, “She stepped from the trashy bedlam of the road into the cool cave of the shop, relieved to escape the experience of walking outside while female.”)

There’s so much stuffed into this book, in fact—the fight for independence; the dire AIDS crisis; the dehumanizing and potentially punitive uses of technology; magical realism; science fiction—that *The Old Drift* can at times feel like a big, unwieldy mishmash of ideas. But it’s never not compelling, and it’s never not smart—even when it occasionally sagged a bit for me during some of the characters’ stories. It’s hard to believe this is Namwali Serpell’s first book; I look forward to more.

Many thanks to NetGalley and Hogarth/Penguin Random House for providing me with an ARC of this book in return for my honest review.

Elena L. says

DNF @ 20%. The premise of *The Old Drift* by Namwali Serpell was very interesting - this book follows three generations of families set in Zambia. While the opening had some mystery, it took me too long to connect with the story and I felt the plot quite disjointed. In addition, I didn't feel attached to the characters, in spite of their uniqueness. There are some magical realism and cultural aspect and the writing is completely vivid. Also the cover is gorgeous.

This book is unique in many aspects and rich in culture, however I felt that it just wasn't for me.

[I received an ARC from Hogarth books in exchange for an honest review]

morgan says

(Follow @morganreadsalot on Instagram for more reviews)

Thanks for the free book @crownpublishing, and Happy Pub Day!

I thought this was a 3.5 star read for me, but the more distance I get from it, the more layers unfold because it keeps springing to mind! The scope alone is outstanding. This is an epic that spans 1939 to 2023 in Zambia, from white colonialism to a not-so-distant future full of technological advances that threaten and empower, with the effects and spread of HIV and AIDS blanketing almost all the way throughout. Reading the colonialist rhetoric in the beginning was disturbing, even more-so for it’s probable accuracy.

In *The Old Drift* Namwali Serpell has created an imaginative, almost 600 page ride full of magical realism, historical fiction, science fiction, and literary tools and themes. If I had to make a comparison for you so you have even an inkling of what to expect, I would say that this is kind of like *Homegoing* meets *Tsar of Love* and *Techno* meets *The Southern Reach* trilogy. Or just take it at this; reading this sucker for bed kept giving

me the weirdest dang dreams! It really works its way in there!

The only thing that made this tough for me to read was that I kept losing track of how the different characters were connected through the generations. I kept wishing there was a bracket of connections, and then as I finished, I realized that there is one, right in the front of the book. ????

Sue Blanchard says

Thankyou to NetGalley, Random House UK, Vintage Publishing, Hogarth and the author, Namwali Serpell, for the opportunity to read an advanced readers copy of The Old Drift in exchange for an honest, unbiased opinion.

I have been a bit slow in writin this review regarding this debut novel. I actually read this story a week ago, and found it difficult to put into words what I thought about it..

I was captivated. It was a well written story spanning three generations. I thought it was an incredible read. well worth a read.

Sonja Arlow says

The book is full of juxtapositions.

British colonialism vs African revolutionaries, 3rd world poverty vs high tech drones, beautiful powerful writing vs meaningless ramblings.

I really enjoyed some of the true historic events the author weaved into the story. I travelled to Zambia about 5 years ago and read up about its history but nowhere was it stated that Zambia had its own space program in the 1960's. A revolutionary, Edward Nkolose headed up the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy.

The below link is an interview BBC had with Edward Nkolose. I am still not sure if it was deliberately done to get the world's attention on Zambia or if they truly believed in the program.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9Do3...>

The story itself is a multi-generational tale starting with 3 women, all so vastly different.

Silliba originates from Italy and was born with massive amount of hair. Hair that covers her whole body. No matter how many times she cuts it, the next day its back.

Agnes is a young English rose, an upcoming tennis star but when she slowly goes blind her dreams of glory fades with her.

Martha is the only native Zambian of the 3 women. During her time training to be an Afronaut with the Zambia space program she meets her sweetheart. When he leaves her pregnant and destitute, she starts crying, never to stop for many decades.

The story follows these 3 women, their daughters and grandchildren and how their lives run parallel, crosses over and finally collides.

There are a lot of characters to keep track of, all with African names that gets stuck in your throat when you try to pronounce it. There are also a lot of genres mashed into the tale. From historical fiction and sci fi to magical realism.

The tone has a playful seriousness to it and the boundaries the author pushes is admirable, but the experimental writing made the book hard work at times.

I don't regret reading this book as it most definitely was a unique experience, but it is not something to go into lightly.

Netgalley ARC: Expected publish date 21 March 2019

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

See more of my book reviews on my blog, [Literary Flits](#)

The Old Drift is the first Zambian-authored novel I have read and, now enthused by Serpell's inventiveness and vision, I can't wait to discover more! This certainly won't be a novel to appeal to all readers, but if, as I did, you loved *One Hundred Years Of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez or *Where The Bird Sings Best* by Alejandro Jodorowsky, you will probably adore *The Old Drift*. Serpell tells the story of a nation from 1904 until the 2020s through the interweaving lives of numerous people. Her tale begins as historical fiction, slides into magical realism, plays around with notions of ancient Greek choruses, and finishes with a science fiction flourish. And I thought it all melded together brilliantly!

It is sometimes difficult to keep track of the characters' varying connections and relationships, but I didn't feel this was necessarily a problem because I appreciated my 'aha' moments when I would suddenly realise how the current protagonist warranted their focus. Perhaps a sibling, or an aunt, or a lover to someone we met twenty years ago (in the previous chapter!) Characters such as Sibilla, who is swathed in her own hair, or former afonaut Matha, who has cried constantly for decades, are vividly drawn and I am sure will be memorable. Serpell's women lead the way through this story in a very real way. I actually loved reading as much about their occasional menstrual mishaps as about the world-changing events in which they participate. For a literary fiction author to present her women in such an authentic way felt wonderfully liberating and inspiring to me. In fact, had I got the call to a SOTP rally today, I'd have run all the way there!

Serpell's blending of genres felt fresh. I am in awe of her storytelling talent and the clarity she achieves in what is a complicated narrative. I thought the inclusion of the Chorus was an interesting idea. It allows the reader a moment to relax every now and then, but also provides a framework for both the stories and their underlying philosophy. This was especially effective for me because the Chorus' message felt like it resounded so well with my own lifestyle: don't stagnate, but don't rush around either. Take the time to drift!

Evelina | AvalinahsBooks says

DNF @ 10%

The story unfortunately didn't hook me. Magical realism doesn't always go down well for me, and the story of the first woman is definitely pretty sad. Couldn't bring myself to go back to the book because of that.

I thank the publisher for a free review copy in exchange for an honest review.

Book Blog | Bookstagram | Bookish Twitter

Charlott says

Review coming

Laura says

DNF @ 25%. The brief opening section of this book was a wonderful first-person piece of ventriloquism, as Namwali Serpell totally inhabits the mindset of a racist colonist man in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) at the turn of the twentieth century. I was immediately convinced that Serpell is an exciting and versatile writer. However, I found the two long third-person sections that followed didn't live up to this promise; both felt so pedestrian. There was a nice touch of magical realism in the incessantly growing hair of our first narrator, Sibilla, but the second section, which focused on Agnes, a blind girl from England who marries a Rhodesian man just before the country wins its independence as Zambia, lost all the momentum the book had gathered. A shame - I hope Serpell goes on to write something more cohesive.

I received a free proof copy of this novel from the publisher for review.

Annie says

Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift* is a blend of genres I have never seen before. On the one hand, it is very much a family saga. There is even a sprawling family tree included at the beginning of the book. But, by the end, it is an Afrofuturist revolutionary story. The various segments of the book combine to create a conclusive ending, but the plot meanders as much as the Zambesi River that appears to book end the whole tale...

Read the rest of my review at A Bookish Type. I received a free copy of this book from the publishers via NetGalley, for review consideration.

Barred Owl Books says

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Gautam Bhatia says

A very rich and emotionally satisfying read. Like Marquez, sometimes it becomes a little difficult to keep track of who is related to whom in this generational multi-family saga, but the threads come together often enough, and the beginning and the ending are both brilliantly climactic. Reminds me of another novel I read recently, Jennifer Makumbi's 'Kintu.' Recommended.

Talia Smart says

DNF @ 13%

Just not feeling it after several perspectives. The writing is absolutely GORGEOUS and I've even done some underlining, but I haven't been able to connect with the characters.
