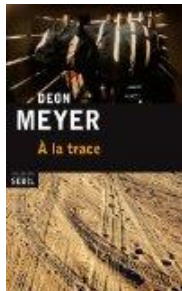


Interview intégrale de Deon Meyer pour Babelio à propos de son roman "A la trace" (Trackers) et de ses lectures.

"A la trace"



How did the idea of writing "Trackers" come?

The starting point for Trackers was the fact that I have been fascinated by the tyranny of the traditional crime and thriller structure ever since I started writing – and very aware of this dictatorship during the writing process. And I've been pondering the possibilities of bending – even breaking – the usual structural rules. And if one does that, how do you manage not to infuriate or lose the reader? So, my intention was to experiment with this structure, to do something different, and to challenge myself. (I am always terrified that I will stagnate as an author, and I try to attempt something new with each book.)

In "Trackers", we are confronted to protagonists with flaws and weaknesses: a naïve mother who chucks everything, a hot-blooded "bodyguard", a depressed cop. Why did you choose these almost anti-heroes?

Two reasons, perhaps. The first is purely practical: Conflict is the mother of suspense, and internal character conflict is one of the best ways to generate that suspense. (Perfect, flawless people are very boring in terms of the genre ...)

The second reason is my own view that we are all flawed human beings, so it is an effort to be honest and truthful.

These characters all seem to be really different from each other, and draw a large picture of South Africa through several dissimilar points of view. Precisely, they often seem to look on the dark side of South Africa, with a critical view of gangs' war, political skullduggeries... Are you as worried about your country's fate as your protagonists are?

If books are windows on the world, crime fiction mostly provides a view to the back alleys and underbelly's of cities and countries. And that is my only genuine regret as an author in this genre.

Because the real South Africa, the one that I love so passionately, is very different to the narrow and dim view my books probably allow. It is also quite unlike the one you see in those pessimistic fifteen second television news reports in Europe.

I am extremely positive about South Africa, and my country's future. Of course, we have problems to solve (just like the rest of the world). Poverty is definitely our biggest challenge – and eradicating it is perhaps the key to our success. But I am delighted to report that we

are making great progress. Because people in Europe mostly get just the bad news from South Africa, let me give you a few snippets of good news:

- According to the Open Budget Index, South Africa has the most transparent budget in the world.
- South Africa is the only African country that is a member of the G20.
- In the Economist Intelligence Unit's Survey of Democratic Freedom, South Africa ranks 31st out of 184 countries.
- According to the Global Competitiveness Report 2010/11, South Africa has the 34th most efficient government out of the 139 countries ranked.
- WorldAudit.org ranks South Africa as the 40th least corrupt nation out of 150 nations surveyed, ahead of Italy, Turkey, Brazil and Mexico. Transparency International ranks South Africa at 52 out of 150 countries.
- WorldAudit.org ranks South Africa as the 43rd most democratic country, out of the 150 countries surveyed. The Freedom Institute places us 29th.
- South Africa ranks as the 61st strongest state out of 177 countries in the Fund for Peace's Failed State Index 2010. The index measures state vulnerability based on 12 social, economic, political and military indicators.
- In terms of the Global Competitiveness Report 2012, South Africa's biggest improvements over the past year have been Reliability of police services (we moved from 104 to 95); Brain drain (we moved from 62 to 48); Intensity of local competition (we moved from 63 to 49), Availability of latest technologies (we moved from 51 to 39) and Gross national savings as a % of GDP (we moved from 98 to 72).
- South Africa ranks 52 out of 150 countries on the Transparency International corruption list where 1 is the least corrupt. (Economist)
- The number of tourists visiting South Africa has grown from 3.9million in 1994 to 11.3 million in 2010. South Africa is ranked among the top 5 countries in the world in respect of tourism growth (growing at 3 times the global average).
- SA ranks 24th in terms of tourist arrivals at 11.3 million (France 79 million, UK 28 million, Switzerland 8.5 million, India 5.2 million). (Economist)
- SA has 30,000 schools (7,000 secondary, 23,000 primary). In 1994 only 12,000 had electricity. Now 24,000 have access to electricity.
- The percentage of the South African population with access to clean drinking water has increased from 62% in 1994, to 93% in 2011. Access to electricity has increased from 34% in 1994, to 84% in 2011.
- In 2010, 13.5 million South Africans benefited from access to social grants, 8.5 million of which were children, 3.5 million pensioners and 1.5 million with disabilities. In 1994, only 2.5 million people had access to social grants, the majority of which were pensioners.
- Since 1994, 435 houses have been built each day for the poor.
- Two South African cities were voted amongst the world's top 100 Most Liveable Cities in the 2010 study conducted by Mercer Human Resource Consulting. Cape Town was ranked in 86th place and Johannesburg 90th
- SA ranks 8th out of 142 countries on the Legal Rights index, (Global Competitiveness Report 2011/12).
- SA ranks 30th out of 142 countries on property rights (Global Competitiveness Report 2011/12).
- The University of South Africa (UNISA) is a pioneer of tertiary distance education and is the largest correspondence university in the world with approximately 300,000 students.

- South Africa's learner to teacher ratio has improved from 1:50 in 1994 to 1:31 in 2010.
- According to the Global Competitiveness Report 2011/12, South Africa is ranked 13th out of 142 countries for its quality of management schools.
- 61% of South African primary school children and 30% of high school children receive free food as part of the school feeding scheme.
- The first MBA programme outside of the United States was started by the University of Pretoria in 1949.
- Stellenbosch University was the first African university in the world to design and launch a microsatellite
- 297 new ECD (Early Childhood Development) centres have been set up and registered in the first quarter of 2011.
- 14.7 million South Africans have been tested for HIV, 13 million in public health facilities and 1.7 million in private health care facilities, as part of the HIV counselling and testing (HCT) campaign
- South Africa has 1 doctor per 1000 population and 3 beds per 1000 population (Spain 3 doctors per 1000 population and 3.4 beds, UK 2 doctors per 1000 population and 4 beds, South Korea 1.4 doctors per 1000 population and 7.1 beds, USA 2.7 doctors per 1000 population and 3 beds). (Economist)

As an allusion to the novel's title, all characters leave tracks behind them. Milla, one of the main characters, points out immaterial tracks left by people: phone calls, internet researches... Are you afraid by those new technologies, leading us to "leave tracks" everywhere?

Yes, it both troubles and fascinates me. Privacy is dying, and it will be dead soon enough, unless we become digital recluses – something I often seriously consider.

For the crime fiction author, it is also creating a different set of problems. Law enforcement is relying more and more on technology to apprehend criminals, which is limiting to creating an exciting story ...

We also meet some former novels' characters again, such as Lemmer, who was in "Blood Safari", Mat Joubert, from "Dead Before Dying". When writing, do you choose your story in order to include them? Why do you use former characters?

For me, story always comes first, and determines the cast of my novels. And if someone I created in an earlier work is perfect for a specific role, I happily bring them back. It saves a lot of time, because I already know them, I don't have to do all the extra development and research work ... And, I have to admit, characters become old friends over the years. I miss them, I worry about them, and when I put them in a book, I at least know how they are doing.

Will we meet them again, in some next novel?

If a future story allows it.

In her diary, Milla wonders if writing a book is a good way to leave a tangible track on Earth, to say "I was here". What do you think of it?

I think Milla is right. Of course, we write for many – and interesting – reasons, but wanting to make our small mark on the world is probably one of them.

Deon Meyer et ses Lectures

Which book made you want to become a writer?

Somewhere between ages 9 and 12, I read every one of Enid Blyton's Famous Five and Secret Seven series, and, although I can't remember any of the specific stories or titles now, any one of them could qualify as the one that made me want to be a writer.

Which author made you want to stop writing (because he had too many remarkable qualities)?

J.M. Coetzee.

What was your first great literary discovery?

Boyhood by J.M. Coetzee.

Which book have you read the most?

The Evil That Men Do by Brian Masters

Which book are you ashamed you haven't read yet?

Ulysses by James Joyce

Which neglected treasure of literature would you like to introduce our members to?

Agaat by the superlative Afrikaans author Marlene Van Niekerk.

Which classic book is overrated, according to you?

Tess of the d'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy

What is your favorite quote from literature?

Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men and such as sleep a-nights.
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
He thinks too much; such men are dangerous.
-Julius Cesar (Shakespeare).

Which book are you currently reading?

The Better Angels of our Nature by Steven Pinker.