

STAR LIT

How to offend in the US

Comedian can bone up on the US dream and its glorious obsessions

Kevin Bloom recommends some books that will help Trevor Noah prepare for his *The Daily Show* gig.

***The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* — George Packer**

Given his smash hit one-liner about African mothers telling their kids to eat up because “there are children starving in Mississippi,” we can assume that our boy Trevor is familiar with the empty promises of the American dream. Still, a comic can never know enough, so *The Unwinding* is essential reading. Winner of the 2013 National Book Award for non-fiction, Packer’s work is memorable for its rendering of characters that never made it into the top 1%. “Winning and losing are all-American games,” the

author informs us in the prologue, “and in the unwinding winners win bigger than ever, floating away like bloated dirigibles, and losers have a long way to fall before they hit bottom, and sometimes they never do”.

For a foreign comedian with a talent for choking Americans on their own myopia, sentences like these should serve as inspiration because we really are lucky down here in the developing world that the game of life is played for lower stakes.

***Freedom* — Jonathan Franzen**

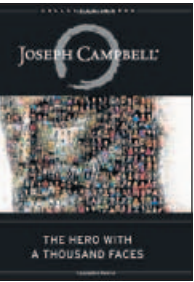
Jonathan Franzen’s 2010 *Freedom*, a sweeping work in the tradition of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, is a master class in the deconstruction of American neurosis. Trevor, if he can’t be bothered to read all 562 pages, would do well to read at least the back flap: “*Freedom* captures the temptations and burdens of too much liberty; the thrills of teenage lust; the heavy weight of empire.”

Deep in the land of the uncouth we have a two-word response to that: “Ag, shame”.



STARTER PACK: New host of *The Daily Show* Trevor Noah
Picture: AFP PHOTO

***The Hero With a Thousand Faces* — Joseph Campbell**



Christopher Vogler deemed “the most in-

But what, Trevor might be asking himself, is the ultimate source of this myopia? In what mythic pond is the collective American consciousness admiring the glory of its reflection? Here the new host of *The Daily Show* need look no further than the opening line of the book that iconic screenwriter

fluent of the 20th century”.

Written in 1949 by a young Joseph Campbell, the first sentence goes like this: “Whether we listen with aloof amusement to the dreamlike mumbo jumbo of some red-eyed witch doctor of the Congo, or read with cultivated rapture thin translations from the sonnets of the mystic Lao-tse ...”

And there you have it, the gospel according to one of America’s cultural patron saints, which is nothing for an African comic if not a call to shake his stick at those who purport to own his soul.

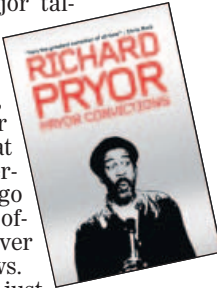
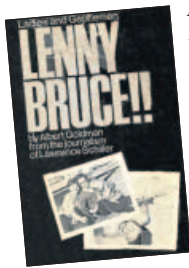
***Dear Andy Kaufman, I Hate Your Guts!* — Lynn Margulies and Bob Zmuda; *Ladies and Gentlemen, Lenny Bruce* — Albert Goldman & Lawrence Schiller; *Pryor Convictions and Other Life Sentences* — Richard Pryor and Todd Gold; *American Scream: The Bill Hicks Story* — Cynthia True**

The all-time greats of US comedy, the comedians’ comedians, the grand masters of transgression, are essentially four in number: Andy Kaufman, Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, and Bill Hicks.

In comedy, as in rock ‘n’ roll, there’s a line that separates the major talents from the immortal pioneers of the form.

Trevor, we assume, knows this. He has so far chosen not to cross that line. He has told interviewers that he doesn’t go too heavy on giving offence, that people never walk out of his live shows.

Here’s hoping he is just playing possum.



Q & A



THEBE IKHALAFENG

The book that had the greatest impact on me was ...

Makeba, My Story, by Miriam Makeba

At the time I read it ...

I’d recently moved to the US and many of South Africa’s greatest leaders in business, politics and the arts were living in exile somewhere or languishing in jail. Makeba’s heart-wrenching story gave me insight into our then-illegal state and the sacrifices made by many for a just cause.

It made me realise ...

That the struggle for a better world is not just for politicians but for everybody.

I still go back to it when ...

I need to feel inspired about creating a better Africa, for our common identity across African borders and the selflessness required to build a better society.

After the last page, my thoughts were ...

Leadership is not about a political seat but about using your talent as a platform to influence change.

At the moment I’m reading ...

Kenneth Kaunda’s *Zambia Shall Be Free* — the recently re-launched 1963 standard by Africa’s ultimate benevolent leader. — *Rea Khoabane*

BOOK BITES

50 — the number of authors on the long-lists for this year’s Alan Paton Award for Non-fiction and the Barry Ronge Fiction Prize. The short-lists for the R100 000 prizes will be announced next month.

Hillary Clinton, whose memoir *Hard Choices* is, according to a mathematical formula produced by a Wisconsin mathematics professor, the book that most people don’t reach the end of. Other books on the list



include David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* by EL James.

The Book Lounge

— where you can catch Raymond Suttner in conversation with Rebecca Davis at the Cape Town launch of his book *Recovering Democracy in South Africa* this Thursday at 6pm. — *Tymon Smith*

ONE-LINE REVIEW

The Runaway Horses, by Joyce Kotze (Jonathan Ball)

Opening Line — “The fact that he had British cousins, not ordinary English-speaking folk, but proper British cousins, had never troubled Martin de Winter.”

Review — The first line of this novel set during the Anglo-Boer War intrigued me about how British and Boer cousins would fare off the battlefield. — *Jackie May*

THE STORY OF ALICE: LEWIS CARROLL AND THE SECRET HISTORY OF WONDERLAND, BY ROBERT DOUGLAS-FAIRHURST R367.73



Beneath the fairytale lies the complex history of author Charles Dodgson, the quiet academic, and his second self — Lewis Carroll — storyteller, innovator and avid collector of “child friends”.

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