

The Romantic Detective in Two Kenyan Popular Novels

Abstract:

Fiction meant for light reading or writing that is ostensibly intended for entertainment can also be a vehicle for critical political, cultural and social commentary. Popular genres such as the thriller or romance indeed have the capacity to combine the elements of excitement and assessment of social life. For instance, a romance story that tells of a relationship between a man and a woman can also be read as an allegory of the relationship between citizens and their nations. This essay examines the ways in which David Gian Maillu's thriller novels, Benni Kamba 009 in the Equatorial Assignment and Benni Kamba in Operation DXT have used the canvas of the romantic detective to highlight social, political and cultural tensions in contemporary Kenya/Africa whilst at the same time suggesting possible means of (re)solving these instabilities and restoring order in society.