



Kumukanda

Kayombo Chingonyi

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

Kumukanda

Kayombo Chingonyi

Kumukanda Kayombo Chingonyi

Shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Prize 2017

Selected as a 2017 Book of the Year in the *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*

‘Urban and urbane, it’s a magnificent debut’ *Daily Telegraph*

‘A brilliant debut – a tender, nostalgic and at times darkly hilarious exploration of black boyhood, masculinity and grief – from one of my favourite writers’ – Warsan Shire

Translating as ‘initiation’, *kumukanda* is the name given to the rites a young boy from the Luvale tribe must pass through before he is considered a man. The poems of Kayo Chingonyi’s remarkable debut explore this passage: between two worlds, ancestral and contemporary; between the living and the dead; between the gulf of who he is and how he is perceived.

Underpinned by a love of music, language and literature, here is a powerful exploration of race, identity and masculinity, celebrating what it means to be British and not British, all at once.

Kumukanda Details

Date : Published June 1st 2017 by Chatto & Windus

ISBN : 9781784741396

Author : Kayombo Chingonyi

Format : Paperback 64 pages

Genre : Poetry, Literature, African Literature, Eastern Africa, Zambia

 [Download Kumukanda ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Kumukanda ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Kumukanda Kayombo Chingonyi

From Reader Review Kumukanda for online ebook

Jude Alford says

For those orphaned late in life

What if the wind blowing through
the french doors of your childhood
is the house's way of saying goodbye
and when you call out, answering
yourself, greeting the gone out of habit
you hear, for the first time, the timbre
of your voice how someone else might?

Danny Daley says

Chingonyi has caught a whirlwind, winning the Dylan Thomas Prize and reading at literary events. This collection is fascinating. The first 6 poems were relatable to anyone from a certain era. "Self-Portrait as a Garage Emcee" is my entire childhood, I could have written nearly every word. While reading those first 6 poems I was enthralled, and ready to proclaim this one of my favorite recent collections.

The middle of the book dipped for me a great deal. The poems were still well written, evocative, and full of flourishing language, but they began to tread on some cliched thematic territory, and lost a bit of their unique flavor.

The collection regained its momentum when Kayo began writing about his parents, and his grief. His thoughts on cultural displacement, again, were words I could have written myself.

Overall this was an excellent collection, making Chingonyi a writer I will pay close attention to.

Tom Hart says

The authenticity of KC's voice is hard to overstate in *Kumukanda*. To such great affect, KC's world is illuminated, exposing divides we're confronted with daily — race — yet wholly incapable of navigating. A great insight into a fascinating perspective.

Ieynes says

Some of the bare facts of Chingonyi's life can be glimpsed in *Kumukanda*. He was born in Zambia in 1987 and moved to the UK when he was six after his father died. He lived in Newcastle, London and Essex and his mother died when he was just 13. He was an avid collector of music on cassette and fancied himself as a rapper: "*K to the a to the y to the o, / lyrical G with a badboy flow*" as the teenage Chingonyi announces in "Self-Portrait as a Garage Emcee".

“But I resist the idea that the poems are my story in any authoritative way,” he says. “The poems are drawn from certain influences and experiences, but the act of creativity is to ask how can I move beyond that into sharing with someone a text or a poem that encourages them to reflect on certain things in their own life. And when I enter into that kind of conversation, with a reader or someone in an audience, then the poem really lives in that it has a life outside of my life.”

Translating as ‘initiation’, *kumukanda* is the name given to the rites a young boy from the Luvale tribe must pass through before he is considered a man. The poems of Kayo Chingonyi’s remarkable debut explore this passage: between two worlds, ancestral and contemporary; between the living and the dead; between the gulf of who he is and how he is perceived.

He says missing out on the ritual served as a metaphor for other things that he had missed from a culture which was part of his life, but was remote; this led him to consider the events that *had* moved him “across that threshold into the adult world”. This book approximates such rites of passage in the absence of his original culture.

Since I haven’t danced among my fellow initiates, following a looped procession from woods at the edge of a village, Tata’s people would think me unfinished – a child who never sloughed off the childish estate to cross the river boys of our tribe must cross in order to die and come back grown.

I was raised in a strange land, by small increments: when I bathed my mother the days she was too weak, when auntie broke the news and I chose a yellow suit and white shoes to dress my mother’s body, at the grave-side when the man I almost grew to call dad, though we both needed a hug, shook my hand.

If my alternate self, who never left, could see me what would he make of these literary pretensions, this need to speak with a tongue that isn’t mine? Would he be strange to me as I to him, frowning as he greets me in the language of my father and my father’s father and my father’s father’s father?

“The death of parents is something that makes people grow up sooner than they otherwise would expect,” he says. “But there are other ways. Black men are particularly racialised and some of the ways they are viewed prejudicially prompt moments of having to grow up quickly. As a kid I was never in trouble with the police, but certain interactions with them were fraught because of stereotypical notions held on both sides. Those were moments where I had to learn to carry myself in a certain way, which was not the way a child should be learning to carry himself. There have been many things that stood in for that singular moment of initiation.”

The enthusiasm that most obviously animates *Kumukanda* is music, specifically garage, grime and hip-hop. Chingonyi thrillingly integrates their rhythms and rhymes with more conventional poetic metrics – there is even a sonnet – in a collection that tackles race, identity, masculinity, migration, bereavement and longing, not to mention literary tradition, with a rare energy, intelligence and sophistication. The influence of Eminem is probed alongside that of Pinter and Lowell, as *Kumukanda* cuts through sterile delineations of page or stage by simply privileging excellence in language and literature, whatever its source.

He is particularly moved by those forms which unite story with song. “My work is always trying to achieve a balance between the written and oral traditions of literature, and so it makes sense to bring together traditional canonical poetic forms with forms which are a part of their own canon, to create a canon of my own.” One of my favorite poems of this collection showcases his love and care for music, it is entitled “Guide to Proper Mixtape Assembly”:

The silence between songs can't be modulated by anything other than held breath. You have to sit and wait, time the release of the pause button to the last tenth of a second so that the gap between each track is a smooth purr, a TDK or Memorex your masterwork. Don't talk to me about your MP3 player, how, given the limitless choice, you hardly ever listen to one song for more than two minutes at a time. Do you know about stealing double As from the TV remote so you can listen to last night's clandestine effort on the walk to school? You say you love music. Have you suffered the loss of a cassette so gnarled by a tape deck's teeth it refuses to play the beat you've come to recognise by sound and not name? Have you carried that theme in your head these years in the faint hope you might know it when it finds you, in a far-flung café, as you stand to pay, frozen, and the barista has to ask if you're okay?

Kumukanda is a very personal collection. If I had to sum it up in one sentence, it would be: What is lost is lost, never to be found again. Kayo traces the loss of his original culture, the loss of his parents (first his dad, then his mum), the loss of boyhood and innocence, the loss of language which now doesn't permit him to communicate with "his people" in a tongue natural to them.

Kayo tries to reclaim a part of his original culture, and mix it with the one he found in the UK. He is trying to "*Dance for the times / you've been stalked by store detectives / for a lady on a bus, for the look of disgust / on the face of a boy too young to understand / why he hates but only that he must.*" He tries to find his place in the world by defining his own identity, by writing about it, and not letting other people's perception of him stand in his way. I wish him all the best.

Garry Allen says

This really is a transcending collection of poems, in that, although the title alludes to a theme of Zambian tribal rites and the initiation a boy in said country endures to reach adulthood, they can be applied to pretty much any caste or social group rituals. If you can remember sneaking a Walkman into class, and secretly listening to music with the headphone cord winding, hidden up your blazer arm, for example, you will be hit by nostalgia on many occasions throughout.

Chingonyi has a fascinating style - he is casual, yet occasionally hits on deeper subjects, which makes these sudden outbursts of surliness, all the more shocking and effective.

"Eminem ruined everything. I had to learn the words to 'Stan', borrow the nasal whine, slide into a drawl midway between London and New York and nowhere near Detroit. In time I could rattle off The Slim Shady LP line for line, though no amount of practise could conjure the pale skin and blue eyes that made Marshall a 'poet' and me just another brother who could rhyme"

His musical roots and subject matter knowledge, are evident throughout - indeed, you could imagine a lot of this material, being spat out as bars in a rap, which is ironic as very little of his prose actually rhymes.

Maia says

i liked it but i didn't love it. It had quite a bit 'when i was young' nostalgia for teenagehood, and quite a bit 'racist things that happened to me' which is good for me to read but i would criticise because he sets it up like

'look at this bad thing that happened to me' not speaking first-person accusatory 'this bad thing happened to me and i'm angry', which reminded me of how i whinge, i always go 'this happened' trying to get the other person to say 'that's terrible', which is to do with my bullying when i was a child, recreating the situation over and over again trying to get the other person to 'rescue' me, which is annoying and maddening, so i hated that. He can write and a few poems are really good but too many didn't have enough substance for me. I'm kind of hard to please too, plus Plath/Mandelstam isn't how people write anymore, different topics presented differently, but i'm stuck in the mud. I'd say get it from the library and watch out for his next one. I'm glad i bought it, because it's worth funding.

Sophie says

Casting

*My agent says I have to use my street voice.
Though my talent is for rakes and fops I'll drop
the necessary octaves, stifle a laugh
at the playwright's misplaced get me blud and safe.
If I get it they'll ask how long it takes me
to grow cornrows without the small screen's knowing
wink. Three years RADA, two years rep and I'm sick
of playing lean dark men who may have guns.
I have a book of poems in my rucksack,
blank pad, two pens, tattered A-Z, headphones
that know Prokofiev as well as Prince Paul.*

Review

Simon says

I've been craving poetry of late, so headed to Kumukanda, Kayo's debut collection. It's a fascinating look at culture clashes, being British and not British and is also incredibly poignant when it looks at racism and grief. I look forward to his next.

Rebecca says

(3.5) This would have been my choice for this past year's Costa Poetry Prize (I have now read all four shortlisted titles). Chingonyi, who moved to the UK from Gambia when he was six years old, writes about rap music, losing his mother to illness, the African initiation rites he's missed out on, being a grown-up orphan, and what it's like to be typecast in black roles. Although he's younger than me, we have some of the same memories of using a Walkman and making mix tapes (can you believe what counts as retro nowadays?!).

I especially liked "Some Bright Elegance," which encourages the reader to dance with abandon ("Imagine / a

packed Savoy Ballroom and slide across / the dusty floor as your zoot-suited Twenties / self, the feather in your hat from an ostrich, / the swagger in your step from the ochre dust of a West African village.”); “Alterity,” about being one of two colored kids in class and therefore inevitably cast as Melchior in the nativity play, and “Casting” (“Three years RADA, two years rep and I’m sick / of playing *lean dark men who may have guns.*”).

Angela says

I had the pleasure of hearing Kayo read and speaking to him when I was abroad in London. I have to say that the sonic qualities of his poetry are incredible (She speeds up by Londis/ past friends pressed against shutters// huddled, from the cold, round a zoot/ two-sed then snuffed by a scuffed shoe). He covers a wide range of topics in very few pages (race, music, grieving, growing) but it's all with same attention to rhythm and elegant assessment of his place in the world. The collection reads like a mixtape; it's infused with such musicality but each word is chosen with such care. Kayo writes in one of his poems "no amount of practise could conjure the pale skin/ and blue eyes that made Marshall a poet and me/ just another brother who could rhyme." But doubtlessly, this collection is rife with fierce intelligence and a deep want for the world to belong to itself.

Johanna says

2,5 ? Jag är ovan att läsa poesi så därför är mitt omdöme av denna poesisamling inte något att ta på för stort allvar. Flera vackra och gripande dikter om att växa upp som svart man och att hantera sitt kulturella arv.

Lena says

Groovy...

Mary Adeson says

The opening poems made me chuckle, they filled me with "me too" moments, and were reminders from my childhood. Every boy during the 2000's became an Emcee and they all became sweet boy's with wavy hair or cornrows.

The next selection of poems focus on racism, Chingonyi from his school memories describes within "The Cricket Test" the changing room as "a shrine to apartheid. When I crossed the threshold, Danny asked me why I'd stand here when I could be there, with my kind." He further illustrates this in "Casting" and "Callbacks" with his struggles to find work as an actor.

The collection includes a selection of touching poems dealing with the death of Chingonyi's mother and father. I was particularly moved by "A Proud Blemish", where Chingonyi details how he copes with the realisation of his mother becoming sick and refusing to call her dead.

Loved the varied selection of poems.

Jenny Mackinlay says

How political correctness can make you a coward. I liked this a lot, I hope mostly because the poems are good ones, vivid, evocative, clever in ways that don't make you go 'oh, look he's being *clever*', they jerk you around the way poetry is supposed to, jerk you out of your comfy seat. Some of them are funny too-- funny serious poetry, what a concept. But part of what I liked is also that the author presents his life as normal, ordinary, as anyone's life (that is, anyone who is a poet), it might be yours or mine, except that I'm a late-middle-age white woman and he's a young black man, and as any good knee-jerk wet liberal like me knows, there's an abyss between any such two lives, and anything I say from my vantage risks being hurtfully the wrong thing. Books like this, I feel, hopefully, might go to close that abyss?--a little?? I had a similar feeling about THE HATE U GIVE which is another 5 star book, because it is amazingly good, but also for that 'anyone's life' quality--that all us humans are more alike than we are different, our families and our worlds are *more alike* than they are different. We can recognise and empathise and get alongside other humans, no matter how *spectacularly* different their lives are (or seem to be, or are by our respective societies bounded and guarded as 'different'. There is, I am discouragedly aware, a whole gibbering host of discussion about what a member of a non-central or non-mainstream or non-ruling society may 'pay' to use a common language in a way that the central, mainstream and/or ruling classes can relate to. I'm not going there today. I just want to celebrate what a good book this is). So, hey. We're all human. Make a note . . .

Melanie (Mel's Bookland Adventures) says

so very poignant. the one on being orphaned late in life really haunts me, as well as the cricket match.
