

Alec was born in Streatham, London, in January 1923. He was the youngest of three sons of Herbert and Marguerite Coppen. His father came from a humble working-class background, eventually rising to be a senior accountant/manager and trouble-shooter for the United Africa Corporation – the forerunner of Unilever.

Alec was married in 1952 to Gunhild (Gunny) Andersson, who came from Sweden where she was studying English Literature at Lund University. They met when she was attending a summer course in Bristol and accommodated in a student hostel in which Alec was resident as a medical student. As a married couple they were inseparable at conferences in Britain and overseas. The Coppens lived in Epsom and were members of the nearby RAC country club, where they hospitably lunched or dined many visitors. They had a wide circle of friends, including many from Sweden, and spent time every summer at Gunni's summer house in south-west Sweden.

Review

Stay With Me

By Ayobami Adebayo

Canongate. 2017. £14.99 (hb). 304 pp.

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From the mid-1980s till just before the turn of the 20th century, Nigeria was ruled by a succession of military dictators. This period has captured the imagination of a generation of young Nigerian writers. *Stay with Me*, a product of those times, adopts a novel writing formula that has been shown to yield great dividends – pick a period of political upheaval and set a love story against it. The ancient Yoruba myths of *The Tortoise* and *Olurombi*, which form the matrix for the novel, both centre on the lengths to which an African woman would go to have children.

A culture in which female barrenness is seen as a curse is ready fodder for psychopathologies, from mood disorders to anxiety and other illnesses. One such pathology, as seen in *Stay with Me*, is pseudocyesis. This concept (the name attributed to John Mason Good in 1823, from *pseudes*, meaning false, and *kyesis*, meaning pregnancy) has been known since antiquity. Pseudocyesis is the false belief of pregnancy that is associated with objective signs and reported symptoms of being pregnant. Physiological manifestations of pseudocyesis include irregular menstruation, abdominal distension, a subjective sensation of fetal movement, changes in breast size and shape, nausea and vomiting. All of these are experienced by Yejide, the novel's heroine.

The novel focuses on the psychosocial origins of pseudocyesis, emphasising the context of infertility, the

Alec was a short, genial, friendly and cultured man, and an opera lover. The Coppens were regular attenders at London's Covent Garden. He was both a friend and colleague of many leading psychiatrists and neuroscientists, including two Nobel Laureates, Arvid Carlson and Julius Axelrod.

Gunny died in 2007. They had one child, Michael, who is now a retired histopathologist.

Eugene Paykel

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personal grief of the protagonist, the feelings of insecurity, frustration and accompanying social stigma and the potential for infidelity as a remedy. There is some evidence that the early loss of a mother or polygamy may provide context for pseudocyesis; both of which are present in *Yejide*. Attribution to bewitchment and other cosmic forces often leads to seeking help from non-traditional (spiritual) sources, part of *Yejide's* pathway to care.

The theme of infidelity is illustrated by the protagonist's adultery with her brother-in-law. This aspect of the novel requires a degree of suspending disbelief, but it ultimately does not adversely affect our enjoyment of the passage in which all is revealed and 'the fires of hell overflowed their banks and spilled into [their] bedroom'.

Staying with the theme of false pregnancy, we are reminded of an excerpt from Plato's *Timaeus*: 'The womb is an animal which longs to generate children. When it remains barren for too long after puberty it is distressed and sorely disturbed, and straying about in the body...'. Despite the improbability of this statement and its obvious patriarchal sentiment, the sense of it continues to generate topics for fiction, as demonstrated by this novel.

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