

# MORE THAN WORDS



The art of handwriting creates a bond between writer and reader. The choice of writing instrument is part of the journey.

WORDS **DEBBIE HATHWAY**

**M**y mother was left-handed and, self-conscious about her slanted scrawl, used to struggle to express herself on paper. To encourage me to craft my script, she bought me a fountain pen when I was in primary school and urged me to learn the art of calligraphy – something similar to what South African lawyer and linguist Deryck Uys taught himself in 1955 to improve his own illegible handwriting.

Although Uys was classified legally blind at the time I interviewed him in 2010, when he was 83, I still have a perfectly legible nine-page handwritten letter from him prompted by a discussion about Montblanc writing instruments.

Uys had just completed the translation into Afrikaans of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets using a magnifying glass that

enabled him to see three letters at a time. He did it with passion, pride and precision, his choice of words as measured as his thoughts.

Handwriting, he explained, can be considered from two aspects: the writer and the reader. As far as the writer is concerned, it involves emotional processes and thought. 'The Japanese write with a paintbrush and find the process therapeutic. It is art, and not a mechanical chore,' wrote Uys. 'In the same way, I find writing italic therapeutic. Italic is also far less fatiguing.'

Yet the interesting part comes with thought processes, he said. 'One of the most senior advocates in South Africa told me that his thoughts developed with the act of writing. I find the same.'

'As regards the recipient of the writing, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

Do you feel in closer touch with me than if this appeared on your normal email?' he asked. The answer is obvious.

## OF AUTHORS AND PENS

Stephen King wrote *Dreamcatcher* with a fountain pen, mentioning in his author's note that to 'write the first draft of such a long book by hand put me in touch with the language as I haven't been in years. I even wrote one night (during a power outage) by candlelight. One rarely finds such opportunities in the 21st century, and they are to be savoured.'

Award-winning novelist Richard Mason wrote *History of a Pleasure Seeker* by hand too. After *The Lighted Rooms*, the first in his collection of stories that focus on South Africa, Mason decided to free up his creative process and write only when he felt like it. He wrote *History of a Pleasure Seeker* the fastest out of any of his books, albeit with a ballpoint pen, in a specially commissioned leather-bound notebook, because he is 'very against Microsoft Word as a tool for creative writing'.

He no doubt would have enjoyed comparing notes with Uys, who said one of the 'scariest' words he ever learnt from his sculpture teacher, who used to work in the dairy industry, was 'homogenisation'. 'In my youth, milk was delivered in bottles and the cream rose to the top. Now it is all the same. Are we not all being homogenised today?'

This links to the question of how the art of handwriting is being affected by the digital age. It is said that those born after 1979 have no other frame of reference than the electronic world (interestingly, Mason was born in 1978). Pioneers such as Montblanc remain resolute in their pursuit of innovation, constantly pushing boundaries in the expression of fine craftsmanship that has been their trademark for more than a century. And it's that appreciation for craftsmanship and artistry that forms a common bond among collectors worldwide.

## DRAWINGS AND PROTOTYPES

At a recent launch in Johannesburg of Great Characters The Beatles, Montblanc's latest collection of writing instruments,

a select group of aficionados gathered to admire not only the new range but a display of treasured collector's items never before displayed in this country.

Franck Juhel, Montblanc president for Middle East, India and Africa, explained that the design of writing instruments, in line with the Maison's theme of craftsmanship, takes months of drawings and prototypes before a new creation can be revealed. 'The Great Characters The Beatles collection was at least two years in the making... That was the first time I saw a drawing,' he said. 'Also, when you do a Great Characters edition you have to have all the legal rights to use the names...' Miles Davis and Andy Warhol have been honoured through such collections too.

So why The Beatles? 'The link is very easy,' said Juhel. 'The Beatles did their first public concert in Hamburg and Montblanc was founded in the city.'

Attention to detail is an integral part of the story of each creation. The colours of the uniforms worn on the album cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* are the design inspiration for the Great Characters The Beatles Special Edition, with its psychedelic striped cap and barrel. The shape of the cap top evokes a microphone and the cone resembles a button on a mixing console. The clip is adorned with four moustaches, referencing those sported by each Beatle in some of their most famous portraits.

The Beatles Limited Edition 1969 incorporates symbols associated with the album 'Abbey Road' on the lacquered cap and barrel, whereas the Great Characters The Beatles Limited Edition 88 (opposite) features a solid gold skeletonised cap and barrel with several metal inlays enhanced with lacquer. It is described as a 'feat of technical virtuosity' because the inlays had to be worked separately with filigree detail before they were assembled to create the skeleton. The Montblanc emblem on the cap top is made from Au 750 solid gold, as is the nib on all the editions.

The Montblanc tribute to The Beatles includes a special ink in a new psychedelic purple, as well as a notebook. ■

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