Meet Jacque Pauw

“A favourite form of entertainment was looking out for the weird scumbags, murderers or torturers whom Jacques Pauw brought to the office. He had a remarkable talent for getting these people to confess their evil deeds to him for publication. More policemen and soldiers spilled the beans to Jacque than to the Truth Commission years later.” – Max du Preez, Pale Native
Jacques Pauw is a South African investigative journalist who exposed the apartheid police death squad at Vlakplaas in November 1989.

Du Preez writes “on 17 November 1989, Vrye Weekblad published the most important story in its existence.” In Bloedspoor van die SAP (The SAP’s trail of blood) Captain Coetze, commander of the death squad, told “the full gruesome story of political assassinations, poisoned cocktails, bomb attacks and a letter bombs...the biggest story to break in South African journalism in many years, if not decades,” according to Du Preez.
About Jacques Pauw

Pauw spent another five years investigating state-sponsored death squads, and his reporting contributed to the prosecution of the death squad’s commander Eugene de Kock. Coetzee’s famous quote “Ek was in die hart van die hoer” (I was in the heart of the whore) later became the title of his later his book.

Pauw has also reported on wars and civil conflicts in Algeria, Burundi, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Sudan. He also made documentaries about the Rwandan Genocide, the War in Darfur.

Pauw is a member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), an exclusive association of the world’s best investigative journalists.
About Jacques Pauw

Started his journalist career in 1984 at Rapport.

Moved to Huisgenoot in 1987.

1988 co-founder and assistant editor of the Vrye Weekblad (a progressive, Afrikaans anti-apartheid national weekly newspaper).

1989 achieved international acclaim after exposing the apartheid death squad.

Briefly worked at The Star and Sunday Star as the chief investigations reporter after Vrye Weekblad’s bankruptcy.

1993 joined the SABC as a documentary filmmaker.

1996 Pauw was a founder member of the SABC’s Truth Commission Special Report.

1998 he was a founder member of Special Assignment.

1999 Pauw became the executive producer of Special Assignment, a position he held until 2007.

2009 Pauw was appointed as the Director of the Wits Justice Project, but shortly afterwards left to join Media24 as an investigative reporter.
Pauw’s books
Awards & Recognition

1. The Young African Leadership Award;
2. Premo Ilaria Alpi Award (2000);
3. The ICIJ (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists) Award.
4. 2 NTVA AVANTI Craft Awards (2001);
5. 2 CNN African Journalist of the Year Awards (2000 & 2001) & a CNN AJY sub-category (2006);
6. Vodacom Journalist of the Year Award in South Africa (2004);
7. John Manyarara Investigative Award from MISA (2004);
8. Nat Nakasa Award for Integrity and Bravery in Journalism (2007);
9. The Award for Outstanding International Investigative Reporting;
10. The Media Institute of Southern Africa’s Award for Investigative Journalism;
11. The International Foreign Correspondent Award.
“I have never considered myself to be an ‘author’. I am a journalist who happened to write a work of fiction. And I’m endlessly curious about the man [Ferdi Barnard]; curious about prisons,” said Pauw about his fiction work Little Ice Cream Boy.

Fiction as an alternative route for true stories
How Pauw does what he does

- Character choice and trust relationship with sources
- Voice & character voices
- Information – research & detail
- Subject matter
- Style – linear telling
- Suspense
- Style – Language
- Titles and introspections
Character choice and trust relationship with sources

Strong and interesting characters - Wouter Basson (Chemical and biological warfare programme), Dirk Coetzee & Eugene de Kock (Death squad commanders)
Ferdi Barnard (Gangster, murder), Bishop Samuel Musabyimana (Genocide bishop)

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Entertaining characters, but not only sensational value, rather as focalisers and because of their roles.
Voice & character voices

Direct quotes give insight and texture to story → showing not telling

Our drug investigation had started two weeks earlier, when I asked Alex: ‘How are we going to get into Little Colombia?’

‘Jimmy. We’re going to use Jimmy.’

‘Who’s he?’

‘A criminal. A housebreaker. Also uses drugs. Smokes anything. Knows Little Colombia well.’

Detail and other sharp observations.
Interesting information and attention to (revealing) detail – detail that tells us a lot about the source, or very interesting things about the source:

Very well researched and goes into stories prepared – the drug story took months to set up.

Transfer informs in an interesting and entertaining way.

Hard as it may be to fathom, one of modern Africa’s most bloodcurdling mortals had once been a wedding photographer. He was also the an illiterate, pot-bellied geriatric who chose a former hairdresser and nightclub dancer to command his army of child soldiers, who hacked and mutilated thousands of people in the name of freedom.

The erstwhile photographer and lowly army corporal adopted the title of Chairman Pappy, while the hairstylist chose the nom de guerre of General Mosquito. Together they headed a West Africa rebel movement called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and transformed it into a cult.
Subject matter

Find emotive, interesting and moving stories

→ Genocide, drug routes, death squads etc
Style – story line

*Dances with Devils* is a chronological autobiography. It’s impact lies in the simplicity with which the stories are told – but each story is highly compelling and an adventure in itself.

Exciting stories work well chronologically and don’t need to be stylised.
Form & Structure

Breaks a long story into many smaller parts which each have at least one element which make them interesting and intriguing, but also links them to the overall theme/story, and functions to contribute to keeping the tensions.

Suspense & intrigue – keeps readers intrigued by introducing new characters at interesting parts of his stories, or giving more interesting details/info (usually also relevant) about characters readers already encountered.

Comic relief - breaks heavy parts with comic relief, makes it manageable and easier to read, especially on serious and graphic topics like drug cartels.

I phoned one of the Scorpions. ‘You could have killed Alex!’ I said. ‘How could you?’
‘We were merely verifying his information,’ was the ludicrous response.
He launched into a stream of abuse. ‘We refuse to work with such a sleaze-ball! Do you know who this man is?’
‘Who do you get to infiltrate drug syndicates?’ I asked him. ‘Sunday school teachers and nun?’ (p319).
Pauw makes minimal use of metaphors. Now and then there are “pot-bellied clouds cuddled in the green hills” (p65), but for the most part it’s straightforward clean and clear sentences. - This could be because of the already very shocking nature of the events/actions that Pauw writes about that doesn’t need further enhancement for effect.

Understatement and subtlety gives just as much impact when the subject nature is already overwhelmingly shocking in itself. Small gestures become very telling.

Wrote Pauw about two drug addicts who sold everything they owned: “In fact, every article worth a dime had been ‘invested’ in Little Columbia.” (306)

Understatement that prompts that more is happening (or happened) , and makes you want to read on to fill in the blanks and see how crazy some of these stories really are – this also keeps the suspense throughout.
Titles & introductions

Interesting titles that lead onto each other: “Hoodlums, hookers and hooligans” or “Pappy and Captain Cut-Hand”

“Alex Stellianos was sold to me as a grubby and ‘mangy character who mingled with the underworld and was embroiled in the whore business. He’d been a confidential police informant at some stage, was some kind of private eye and spoke Portuguese, which made him the ideal operator for Mozambique.”