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Book Review

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Title: *Dealing With Evils*
Sub-title: Essays on Writing from Africa
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Anne Gagiano's collection of essays on writing from Africa, titled "Dealing with Evils" evinces her profound interest in the varied body of literary work emanating from this continent. She hopes to give the readers a sense of the impressive range, variety and art of African authors. African English writing emerges from the complex translations of local realities into a language that articulates African visions. Gagiano has aptly titled her work as "Dealing with Evils" since it foregrounds the difficulty in comprehending and coping with the dreadful and morally taxing circumstances that contribute to the psychic and social realities. The texts described here originate from different periods and settings and were written over a number of years, but they do have underlying coherences.

The writer has maintained a lucid style that is meticulously used. Her vocabulary is erudite at the same time thought-provoking. Words used by the local people are also incorporated that enables her readers to become familiar with such words and comprehend them. Gagiano has provided us with appropriate contextualization of the stories that in turn help the readers gain a profound insight. The whole collection is succinctly written in two hundred and thirty six pages. However, the print could have been a little larger.

The title “Dealing with Evils” has been aptly given. The atrocities and bestial actions performed in the name of power, culture, religion, etc. are indeed “evils” that every society in the world has to combat against. The word “Dealing” signifies that the people (In Africa or Elsewhere) are expected to confront the abuse of power and all other forms of social evils. We may not find a panacea for such evils, but the least we can do is to face them head on. In this context, the use of the progressive tense “Dealing” is appropriate as it tells us that fighting against evils is arduous and a continuous process.

The sub-title ‘Essays on Writing from Africa’ shows that the essays presented in this collection are textually focused and various contextualizing strategies are used that provide the readers a better comprehension. Further, she does not present the essays in any particular chronological order as her perspective is not classificatory. Instead she offers the collection as pieces to read for those who want to develop an interest in ‘African Thought’ as one of “new literatures in English”. In order to achieve her aim, she draws on a range of theorists’ and fellow critics’ work, especially, the work of Frantz Fanon and Enrique Dussel. Additionally, she uses ideas and terminology of a number of post colonial theorists and feminist scholars and academics such as Harold Scheub and others.

The ‘readings’ presented in this collection is intended to contribute to the sorely needed wider and fuller recognition of African literature. Anne Gagiano hopes that this work would carve a niche of its own for African literature and it would henceforth be seen as organically connected to the imaginative life of the entire human world.

The first essay “Listening for the Mediated Voices of the Southern African Khoisan in Hendrik’s Dwaalstories: Ironies and Wonders”, Anne Gagiano enunciates the bleak scenario of the Khoisan peoples, their cultures and the dwindling and revivalist possibilities for their languages. These Khoisan people are mainly found in the four regions—Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Angola. The genetic make-up of these people relates them more closely to the peoples of Africa. The author tries to discover and expose the richness of this almost forgotten culture. The colonial disruption in the Cape region has witnessed the subjugation and enslavement of the Khoisan people. However, Gagiano has selected a group of four Khoisan tales that help the readers to gain an insight into the development and function of the Khoikhoi language and culture in South Africa. She focuses on ‘Dwaalstories’ that help

to reconfigure the past and present of South African society. These tales transcend time and contribute to present-day social realities. “Dwaalstories” means ‘meandering’ or ‘wanderers’ tales. In the words of Harold Scheub, these tales possess an epic dimension since they break the barriers between what is religious or historical and on the other hand between oral or literary.

Hendrik’s Dwaalstories were told by a venerable old man (100 years), a narrator identified as a ‘Bushman’. The tales have different themes. The first one deals with the severe punishment meted out to the braggart for betraying his social responsibility in a time of crisis. The second one depicts the non-violent overthrow of unearned power. The last two tales portray the unrecognized female excellence winning through. However, we notice that Gagiano has focused her attention on one of the tales “ The Song of the Rain”, that portrays a period of great suffering and near-starvation amongst the members of a small community, due to a terrible drought. In the midst of this calamitous situation, it is interesting to note the action of the character ‘Joggom Konterdans’ who with his innovative and inventive genius constructs a new musical instrument and performs the composition. “The Song of the Rain”. The performance by Joggom Konterdans (counterdance) exemplifies the transcendence of brute power by creativity. He seems to tell us that creative energy and vision are as socially necessary as rain is to the earth. This situation is highly ‘ironical’, but nonetheless ‘wonderful’ (“Ironies and Wonders” used in the title). Finally these tales have proved the vitality of a culture that is full of ‘joi-de-vivre’. Dwaalstories portrays the joy of survival in spite of tough social struggles and tensions.

The next essay discusses Marecheran Postmodernism. In course of the discussion “modernity” is juxtaposed with “modernism” in the Third World. The readers are taken into the realm of cultural responses to the modernization process. Here, Gagiano takes a brief look at Joseph Conrad’s novella “Heart of Darkness” as an archetypal European modernist text and uses it as a link (hinge) to the writings of the Zimbabwean author Dmbudzo Marechera.

“Heart of Darkness” is a massive scornful critique of the Belgian colonial enterprise. It is also a text that expresses the “mythic fear”. The title ‘Heart of Darkness’ has become a representative of the social collapse, abuse of power and other disasters in African societies. The novel is a satire on modernity and the modernization process. This understanding leads us to differentiate

between modernism and post modernism. This difference is substantiated with the distinction drawn by Bauman where he writes that ‘modernism; is “available knowledge” that does not have a universally accepted narrative and on the other hand “post modernism” is that the narrative offered by this knowledge system is not the only or the best or the most reliable. Bauman’s distinction is perfectly exemplified in Conrad’s (modernist text) and Marechera’s writing (post-modernist text).

Marechera considered ‘identity’ as “an act of faith, impossible to verify”. His novel “Black Sunlight” has no particular plot and reminds us of James Joyce’s writing. In spite of being banned in Zimbabwe for its alleged “obscenity”, it is a novel that uses post modernity as both a political and a philosophical critique. The tone and theme in ‘Black Sunlight’ are well modulated. It is not only serious but also hilarious—for example the opening scene in which the nameless narrator is strung upside down by his African chief. Further, Marechera confronts the problem of development of social and national and international man in a post modern style.

Similarly, another text---“The Black Insider” is a different kind of postmodernist text. Marechera’s discussion in this text is philosophical and agonizingly intense. The narrator feels that –“the ability to read and write allows “endoparasites” such as “culture, tradition, history and civilization” into our minds. The global brainwashing process is lamented. The character ‘Otolith’ (black Hamlet) reveals how modernization has been detrimental to gifted Africans like Marechera with false promises of acceptance. African modernity enforces a bitter choice between a crude, fervently, nationalistic posturing or reflection and alienation from ones’ people. Marechera tried to write like Franz Kafka or James Joyce but this type of writing which explored the subconscious of the new society was unacceptable by the powers-to-be. On the contrary in “In Mindblast” his most popular text in Zimbabwe, Marechera attempted to give expression to the ‘many voices’ even the ‘contradictory’ ones. As we read through Gagiano’s essay on Marechera’s writing, we begin to feel that the ironies of African modernity and our notion of post modernism need to be more fully recognized.

Gagiano’s third essay “Anomy and Agony in a Nation in Crisis: Soyinka’s “Season of Anomy”, argues and refutes the ‘myth’ about Soyinka’s writings. Some of the major criticisms against him are about his erudite and complex English, his “substitution” of “myth” for “historic consciousness”. Some

critics describe him as “neoromanticist” since his writings display an emphasis on imagination and emotion that leads to irrationalism. However, we find an escapist response, an attempt to recapture tradition which is possible only in the realm of pure ‘consciousness’. Even other Nigerian radical writers like Femi Osofisan and Kole Omotoso, deplored Soyinka’s substitution of ‘mythic’ for ‘historic consciousness’, in spite of acknowledging his talent. Of all the comments passed on his work, the comment of Abdulrazak Gurnah’s seems to be the harshest. Hence, Anne Gagiano found it necessary to refute Gurnah’s comments on Soyinka’s writing. “Season of Anomy” does not possess any mythical consciousness. Here it is best to quote D.H. Lawrence—“Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.”

On close reading, we notice that Soyinka does not use myth in a “romantic” manner to suggest “solution” to social disaster. In fact, we see an “anti-romantic trend” in his writing and the novel gives no central role to myth, either European or African in origin. On the other hand, Soyinka’s writing has the kind of mythical dimension that probes and exposes and can be used as an instrument of assessment.

The portrayal of the character ‘Ofeyi’ in “Season of anomy” who attempts to put into action his scheme of political liberation of his country is appreciable. His trials to re-inspire the demoralized society and to instill new hope in the minds of countrymen make the tale an interesting and thought provoking one. But, the irony lies in the fact that the simple brutality of his oppressors proves more than a match for Ofeyi’s idealism. Moreover, Soyinka’s depiction of the caring, hurting, thinking observations of Ofeyi, partly responsible for the bloodshed—since it was his plan that unleashed the brutality and vengeance of the four tyrants. Ofeyi’s horrible discovery of the corpses of slaughtered workers jolts the readers out of their complacent attitude. It cruelly and ironically shows us the solidarity Ofeyi planned was manifested in the situation where the Ayiero men and the local co-workers were brutally slaughtered.

Gagiano continues her argument and says that Soyinka has used “myth” as an instrument of interrogation in the novel and it is not a ‘mindless apolitical escapism’. The genocide that was carried out was tainted by perversion and a vengeful outrage against humanity itself. Ofeyi considers this genocidal impulse as an evil and desperately tries to find the ‘cause’ which in turn leads

him to the 'source imagery'. Again this further leads him to take into consideration the subconscious condition of the minds of those people who perpetrate such brutal atrocities against humanity. The resistance made the situation worse and increased the devastation. Thus, Soyinka suggests that not only in Africa, but also in other parts of the world, there are humanly engineered patterns of behavior that result in dehumanized actions beyond the scope of political explanation or rectification. It is the idea that "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Achebe, "Mapping" 25). Soyinka's writings castigate the western and African worlds' hypocritical twisted racism in failing to realize the bloodthirstiness of tyrants like Idi Amin and others.

Considering all the above observations, Gagiano shows the readers that Soyinka's works actually consist of a 'profound ironic consciousness'. However, we see that a political vision may take on some "mythical dimensions" as a way of recognizing the existential irony of situations in which human beings are faced with their own ignorance and helplessness. Yet, we do notice attempts to oppose brutality in spite of the fact that they end in failure sometimes.

This realization takes us back to the 'sources' in Soyinka's universe which is an "escapist response"—an attempt to recapture tradition that takes place only in the realm of pure consciousness. Thus, Gagiano poignantly highlights the 'passion for justice' depicted in the Ofeyi role in the story.

Anne Gagiano continues the search for identity and elucidates and refutes the so-called "roughness" in the writings of Bessie Head. This writer was refused citizenship in South Africa because of her 'colored' status and also since she had been involved in the Pan Africanist Congress led by Robert Sobukwe. Head's mixed parentage caused her to be rejected by all her 'white relatives'. It was in such circumstances that her novel "The Cardinals" (1993) with South Africa for its setting was published. This 'roughness' is actually the strength of the novel and Gagiano's essay argues the point in "Finding Foundations for Change in Bessie Head's *The Cardinals*". Head's innermost desire was to see great leaders who would rise above racial hatred and formulate a common language of human love for all people and this became the central theme of her writings. It is this desire that Head uses to build up a case for story tellers and dreamers to be considered as freedom fighters instead of "romantic escapists". The encounters between the two main

characters Johnny and Mouse demonstrate that loving involves politics that reach the innermost recesses of the psyche. So, "The Cardinals" becomes a document depicting that "private" passion is one of the strongest forms of opposition to political control. This work is not just an unconscious biography or sociological portrayal of apartheid conditions, but like Head's other novels has the dimension of a parable.

The relationship between Mouse and Johnny bears the mark of the failure of a system that has transcended the barriers of South African "Immorality" legislation (Immorality Act of 1927, amended in 1957). The two chief characters unaware of their biological relationship which is an incestuous one become taboo-breakers and this is the source of interest in the novel. Further the biographical element and the way Head links sex and politics makes the story intriguing. Head shows a tough and courageous attitude towards her politically created deprivation from her family. This theme of 'miscegenation' has been handled by many South African novelists but Bessie Head tackles the issue from 'within' herself in the portrayal of "Mouse". However, as we read the story, it does not rake up in us a feeling of "disgust" at the incestuous relationship because in Head's hands it becomes a metaphor for "recover", as well as a sign of the difficulty of such healing within the South African "mess". Thus, "The Cardinals" foregrounds the fact that despite "apartheid" being a crushing political system, it cannot stop people from "dreaming".

Bessie Head's experiences related to slavery, colonialism and exploitation, filled her mind with intense anguish and fear. She felt that monsters of power would only change roles, that black faces would simply replace white faces of cruelty, hate and greed and that the common man would continue to bleed. This realization manifested itself in the novel "A Question of Power". (Tenth essay). Gagiano once again helps the readers to comprehend this potent novel by saying that—"literature is functional in Southern Africa and bound inextricably to human suffering". And the second is that "Southern Africa is not like the rest of Africa and is never going to be. Here, we are going to have to make an extreme effort to find a deep faith to help us to live together." (Woman 31). These statements deromanticise the "victorious victim" image and Head tries to make us realize that it is not necessary to think that those who endure and survive the "terror of power" can be defined as 'strengthened, ennobled or triumphant. Thus Gagiano qualifies the healing-through-telling process. Further, the memory-effect is also depicted

in great detail through the various experiences of the character “Elizabeth”. Despite the agony of these memories—Bessie Head applies ‘self-censorship’ and simultaneously is self critical and thus produces a psycho-philosophically challenging document. The essayist exposes the social prevalence of racism that Head mentioned in her letters as a ‘psychic’ persistence. The different quotations cited throughout enable the reader to comprehend and contextualize Head’s “A Question of Power”. Moreover this essay helps identify the indelible discovery of the “universality of madness”—the capacity to inflict hurt—to abuse power *–even in victims*. Towards the end of our reading we are made to feel the intensified anguish in Bessie Head supposedly led to her addiction to alcohol and premature death. Her personal suffering envisioned the arduous transcendence as a testament to posterity.

The eleventh essay on “Patterns of Leadership in Bessie Head’s ‘Maru’ and A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga”, once again provides the readers with a closer look at Head’s writings even though her writings were considered the work of a ‘deranged mind’ and had its place but was not worthy of regard (qtd. in Nichols 18). Head possessed a rare capacity to investigate the nature of evil, injustice and prejudice, the denial of human status to another and the personal, psychic form of leadership through suffering. This in turn produces transformative energy, courage and vision appropriate to tackle the twisted stagnation of society. Gagiano talks about the issues of leadership as the natural perception of the worst qualities in human society (racial prejudice in ‘Maru’) and irresponsible land greed(in ‘Crossroad’) as depicted by Head in her two novels. Head’s imagination of ‘interpersonal’ nature of leadership is explicitly portrayed in “Maru” in the character of ‘Maru’ –a born leader of men—with a vision of a new world. The ‘interpersonal’ quality she says indicates ‘growth forces’ at work which are beyond human agency and they are waiting to be recognized so that they can become available to human beings. These energies are not only ‘impersonal but also interpersonal’.

Next in the historical novel “A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga (1984) another perspective of the issue of leadership is presented to the readers. Thus in the second part of her paper, Gagiano examines Head’s history of the preservation and emergence of the Botswana state as a type of testing ground or re-examination of ideas concerning leadership as earlier embodied in “Maru”. The central theme in “Crossroad” is “nation-building”.

This concept is reflected in the character 'Khama the Great' of Botswana. He is depicted as a man who naturally possessed leadership skills especially his capacity to negotiate. Conversely in "Crossroad", Head pays almost equal attention to "anti-leaders". But, it is ironic to note that Bessie Head excludes and subordinates women in both her novel even though women do profoundly matter in all situations ---'no woman is shown in a position of leadership'. This can be attributed to Head's own personal circumstances in which she lived and wrote. However, the pervasive presence of women is felt in her writings in the form of hidden energies that shaped her stories. Finally, we can look up-on Bessie Head as a woman warrior who through her poignant portrayals of the evils of racism and abuse of power has carved a niche for herself in African Literature.

Another evil of Batswana culture is depicted in Unity Dow's novel, "The Screaming of the Innocent". It is a heart-rending story of the morbid, sexual predation of children that usually ended in murder of the victims. Gagiano highlights the cruelty and bestiality of the perpetrators of such evil acts in the name of ritual practices. Ironically, we see that such "ritual murders aren't committed by poor people." This abuse of children is a carcinogenic evil that has spread into the present century too. South African newspapers have confirmed the situation with their reports and analyses of such occurrences. All these are given to the readers in the essay on Dow's novel that exposes the social structures and practices that enable the realization of such atrocities. She even reveals that most of these evils are supported by the people in power. Dow demonstrates how deep rooted this evil ritual of child murder is and that it is always silenced throughout society by the people in power. Thus it is mythologized instead of being addressed. The so-called patriarchal system encourages this abuse of children—"the hairless lamb". Instead of nurturing the child, it is slaughtered, and the mutilators refer to the deed as "harvesting". These down-to-earth expressions used by Dow reveal the ghastliness of the act. She satirically points out that it is the "pillars of society" ---the four main conspirators ---that are responsible for the brutal act in her story. It is even more shocking to read that these "murders" were carried out for material benefits such as---the ambitious deputy minister who participates in this evil ritual wants to rise to a higher position in the government.

Dow's novel is not filled with gloom, horror and fury, but also portrays the opposition and resistance put up by a group of people, mainly women. The

character ‘Amantle’ and her two lawyer friends unashamedly fight for justice and truth. In their resistance, they gain the support of the victim’s mother, Neo. Together they echo and amplify the screaming of the innocent victim in contrast to those who can attempt to silence them. Finally the case was solved privately and the criminals “exposed” to an inner group—yet another “cover-up”. Hence we can conclude that evil prevails, crime succeeds, innocents’ screams are silenced and those who unearth the truth are unable to punish and openly proclaim the perpetrator’s guilt. The novel is profoundly thought-provoking and the readers’ minds are bound to be filled with pity at such diabolic practices that are a shame to humanity itself.

Literature is a reflection of society and there is no better way to educate the younger readers about earlier periods. Gagiano’s next essay “Two Late Apartheid –Era Novels: Balancing the Books in the South African Present” illustrates the deep-rootedness of racism in South African social structure since the early colonial times. The injustices and crimes of that period are reflected in various literary texts, yet there was relative shortage of accessible black voices’ in the literary writings that analyzed and depicted racism in South Africa. Even the few that were written were banned in the country which is one of the evils of the apartheid and so this article endeavors to argue for the educative value of individual experiences of large social patterns such as the apartheid. The two novels selected for this article help to understand the social edifice constructed by apartheid’s “architects”.

The two texts, Galgut’s and Langa’s depict the dreary, anguishing past, an undeniable presence and unpromising foundation on which the edifice of what is now called “new South Africa” had to be erected. These texts are understated in their literary merit, but in reality, they are works of considerable social relevance that were overshadowed at the time of their publication. Gagiano feels it is crucial to argue the usefulness of these texts in therapeutic assessment of cultural and racial identities “available” in South Africa then and now.

First let’s see Langa’s text which was termed as “counter hegemonic” yet “ideological” by Jabulani Mkhize in his 1995 article. Contrarily, Langa ‘deideologises’ the characters, while recognizing their contribution to a political and military struggle, as well as their failures. Gagiano’s essay refutes several such charges by providing information from the original text itself and this captures the attention of the readers. Langa’s novel is unusual

in South African literary context and it pays tribute to a rural community's resistance to apartheid. It is a broad spectrum encompassing social settings, political roles, armed peasant resistance, political vengeance squads, etc. Thus, we can say that Langa's socio-political and psychic portrait is credible and reliable. This portrayal mirrors the achievements and failures of the present dispensation.

Second we come to Galgut's text that effectively dramatizes the perplexity of the white male homosexual in South Africa, who cannot allow himself the luxury of a struggle for his own liberation. Galgut's central character and focal point is 'Patrick' a young white South African, a former conscript in the apartheid army who served in "South West Africa "against Namibian freedom fighters. He is shown as a self-conscious, timid and vulnerable child who had faced brutalizing conditions, both domestically and socio-politically. The strangeness and symbolic value of the "Beautiful" is a camouflage that hides the hideous crimes committed. Initially the main character 'Patrick' is passive but towards the end of the novel he becomes morally and emotionally stronger and decides to start a new life on his own terms. Thus the novel renders accessible something of the "agony" of young white alienation during the late apartheid era.

Langa's text, like Galgut's gives prominent recognition to the formative socializing influences of family life. The two texts have a 'youth focus'. There are many comparable contrasts that enable contemporary readers to trace the contours of apartheid's divisive socializations and the way these resulted in black and white South Africans 'seeing' their country. Gagiano analyzes in depth the links and differences in racial visions, psychic and social identifications etc. These texts prove invaluable in that, they help to mitigate the difficult task that South Africans face in accommodating one another not only politically, but also socially and personally. The texts reject both attitudes such a 'simplistic demonization of white and contemptuous dismissal of blacks'. To quote Achebe, "art is [...] an alternate in the imagination to the reality all around us". In other words, we can vicariously participate in and assess ways and kinds of life different from our own, which enhances the horizon of our vision and improves comprehensibility towards others.

The next essay discusses Mongane Serote's novel "To Every Birth Its Blood" (1981): *Painting the True Colors of Apartheid*". This is yet another complex,

magisterial rendering of South Africa under ‘apartheid’. It is written in three sections and an adequate literary examination of the deleterious effects of apartheid in South Africa. Such literature enunciated the oppression of apartheid through those who lived within the bruised heart of the country.

The first section posits the fact that South African writers have begun to feel a “gesture of belonging” in their work. They felt the urgent need to render public expression to those forms of experience which are the hardest to acknowledge—that is the ‘dragon’s teeth of apartheid’—feelings of shame, impotent hatred, despair, etc. This insight threw the writers into a dilemma—how to contribute to such brutal conditions without resorting to pamphleteering. Hence this essay tries to show how Serote successfully addressed these issues, and demonstrates the subtlety and power of his art. Serote’s novel probes into the humiliation of the victims of the apartheid. It was as if they were in the grip of the tentacles of an Octopus with no way of escape. The characters created in the novel are “ordinary” people who possessed “extra-ordinary sensitivity”. Serote probes into their “private” feelings that lay the foundation for the power and range of the public social phenomenon that the apartheid is known to be.

The emotions of the main victims of apartheid are considered and analyzed throughout the novel. Serote’s personal feelings are mirrored in his characters. He refers to the “Black Consciousness era” in his life and says that the history of the actual struggle was not considered properly; rather they had to search for a history of struggle. In other words, they understood the necessity to die for freedom and also to kill for freedom. The dislocated meanderings of the character ‘Tsi’ is the novel’s main ‘metaphor’ and symbolizes the detrimental effect of the brutal system on the black South Africans, ironically, making them ‘homeless’ in the land of their birth. Here we notice the author’s “private feelings” are transformed into an act of social solidarity. This finds an echo in Achebe’s “Anthills” wherein he says that their struggle will be re-incarnated in this newly found utterance. Finally, we perceive the subtle art that Serote uses to show us the link between the “inner recesses” of experience and “social action”.

The second section addresses the issue in John Povey’s quotation—“this dichotomy between the political and the aesthetic”. Here, Serote elucidates in the brutal and unimaginable torture of the character “Oupa”. His head is “hooded” causing suffocation—this symbolizes that his screams were being

choked. He was stripped naked and his body was subjected to the worst outrage that can ever be meted out to any human being. He was degraded so horribly that at the end, unable to bear the torture, Oupa stands up in his naked condition and says “Yes, I am a member of the Movement”. Literally and symbolically, he rose above his torturer. The depiction of this incident illustrates the political force and forthrightness of Serote’s writing that combines with aesthetic delicacy and clarity.

The third section of this novel narrates the “story of the land” in Achebe’s brief quotation in “Anthills of the Savannah”. The social function of art that Achebe talks of finds its expression in this section of Serote’s novel. It reveals the two “sides” involved in the liberation struggle. Both the white and black South Africans are depicted in his characters in the story. They are bestowed with solid humanness, showing Serote’s broad ‘vision’. The scope of his narrative is colossal and envelops all aspects of personal and public life. The novel concentrates on the inward “digestion” of events and political circumstances. Hence, this portrayal becomes a microcosm and is truly representative. His spirituality and forward looking quality confirms its communal function. The novel, thus, becomes both documentary and commemorative since not only the tragedy and degradation, but also the grandeur of South African land and peoples are portrayed vividly.

Cultural-racial tensions and sexualisation of racism is another demon in African societies. The fragility of human subjectivity is highlighted in the two texts of—Shakespeare’s “Titus Andronicus” and Fanon’s “Black Skin, White Masks”. The texts express the horror and mourning of failed sex and race relationships without silencing the deep human yearning for their healthy adjustment. The sub-title for this essay “Can the Black Man Love the White Woman? Can the White woman Love the Black Man?” is an unconscious echo of a Fanonian question: “can the white man behave healthily towards the black man and can the black man behave healthily towards the white man?”(Black 120). Fanon himself replies to his question saying that it is going to a very long and tedious journey before such recognitions can become a reality since White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro (Masks 12).

In spite of being set centuries apart, we perceive Shakespeare’s interest in black subjectivity being manifested in his early play “Titus Andronicus”. He ironizes ideas of barbarity in his play through the characterization of Aaron,

the black slave who had implanted his own child on the Roman throne. These vengeful power structures are no less barbarous, unnatural and unkind than the cultures of the Romans themselves. In the next essay on “Barbarism and “Civilization” we see a replication of the idea that the ‘roman empire’ symbolizes “civilization”. Additionally in Shakespeare’s “Othello”. Othello’s (Black) fractured subjectivity allows Iago’s (White) poison to enter his mind and finally crushes his marriage that ended in the brutal murder of Desdemona, his wife—“Venetian”. These two Shakespearean plays portray the so-called “civilization” in the form of ‘white people’ which seems to be ironic.

The second text creates a legend around “Mustafa Sa’eed in the Sudanese novel. It traces the intimate and intricate connections between the international phenomenon of colonialism and the local “traditional” destructive patriarchal system. In short, the novel is a brilliant study of the intertwining of racism and sexism. “Mustafa Sa’eed” reminds the reader of Shakespeare’s “Iago” who is demonic in his behavior, especially towards the white women he was involved with. Thus, these two texts project the recognition of racial and sexual victimization as associated diseases that are carcinogenic to human society as a whole. Both Shakespeare and Salih point out that if racism finds an apotheosis in situations of sexual insecurity, then sexism is aggravated to extremity by “racial” hatred and anxiety. These are important contributions to what Fanon calls “the world wide struggle of mankind for his freedom”, especially by its incorporation of the female dimension into the struggle.

Continuing with her experimental writing of “relational reading”, Gagiano juxtaposes Shakespeare’s ‘Titus Andronicus’ and Marechera’s ‘Black Sunlight’. In this article, she foregrounds “Barbarism” and “Civilization” and examines how these notions function within the texts so widely separated in time. In doing so, she presents a case for a planned redirection of Shakespearean studies that would help lead on to newer realities –such as contemporary Africa and its literature. This welding of the two texts (Shakespearean and Marecheran) illustrate that ‘barbarism and civilization’ are perennial elements of humanity and help to see both racial and literary classifications as social and mental traps. Thus the two texts complement each other instead being contradictory.

“Titus Andronicus” claims that the Roman Empire stood for “civilization”, yet there were many “barbarous” acts committed as we read the play. This understanding tells us that as a nation’s power expands and swallows other cultures, it requires the myth of “civilization” to justify its brutal dominance. At this juncture, we can recall Marechera’s reference (in a 1980 essay) to the Rhodesian “record of humiliation and atrocities” which the people in power changed into acceptable dimensions of “responsibility”, “civilization”, “frontier building” and so on. The subjugated nations were considered “barbarous”. Both the texts do not portray civilization “arising” from barbarism, but both depict forms of “civilization” barbarizing people through brutal and bestial oppression and degradation.

Marechera’s novel is intriguing and filled with tenderness and sadness. Human susceptibility is pitted against ruthless social efficiency throughout “Black Sunlight”. Hence we can say that Marechera re-defines “post-colonialism” as a perpetually, existential condition.”

Jordan’s tales commemorate and celebrate a proud and complex African civilization and also dispel the blind condescending attitude of European racists. Simultaneously, they emphasize that these peoples must re-discover and re-gain their own rites of passage towards mutual recognition. The socially pertinent themes of the stories calls for interesting reading since cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation’s literature (Toni Morrison 39). In this essay Gagiano argues that Jordan’s “Tales from Southern Africa” can be read as a composite portrait of societies that are capable to adjust themselves to a variety of challenges.

To cite a few examples, “Parliament of Fowls” satirizes the power hungry, pompous and cunning individuals who can upset and organized situation into a nightmare of competing political groups. “The Turban” is another poignant tale of marital love gone wrong. The husband who murders his wife continues with life as if nothing had happened and this adds the brutal element to it. All the tales thus narrate situations that the common people can identify with and as we read through the brief summaries given by Gagiano we gain insight into the different traditional customs and the atrocities committed in the name of culture. The preponderance of female protagonists whose roles are heroic and transgressive is praiseworthy. All the tales validate and interrogate some of the customary practices that are practiced dogmatically without consideration for human feelings. These tales enhance our acceptance of human frailties and follies and they display the hard-won

achievements of communities that are encompassed by threats from outside as well as from within while redefining “humanness”.

Finally these tales remind the readers of the invigorating effect of traditional folklore that never stops being didactic in all aspects to our humanity that is losing its sense of “humanity”.

Gagiano ends her various arguments on the writings of different African writers with her introduction to “Appreciating Nuruddin Farah’s Secrets”. Farah is one more African writer who has had the indomitable courage to comment on the moral and political dilemmas affecting African societies. “Secrets” is Farah’s eighth novel. Born in Somalia, he grew up in the midst of diversity of culture and tradition. He graduated from Punjab University in India in Philosophy and Literature. The breadth and experience that he gained is manifested in his novels.

In most of his novels, Farah took up the issue of the oppression of women by men. The female characters that he created represented a free spirit in search of freedom and exhibited courageous attitude in spite of the social challenges that they had to face. Farah was a keen observer and he depicted the fear on the people’s faces. His first trilogy was on African dictatorship and he portrayed the atrocities perpetrated in the patriarchal system. He opined that stories are not just about characters but they represent the ‘whole nation’. His second trilogy includes “Secrets” which is the main focus in Gagiano’s essay. The central theme of this trilogy is that “society is an orphaned baby, parentless, with no wise elder to guide it”.

“Secrets” is full of dream, myth, and metaphor. The ‘secrets we preserve provide a key to who we are, deep down. Farah uses this theme to speak about the collapse of the Somalia society. He depicts the havoc caused by rival clan-based militias who pushed society towards criminal anarchy. A variety of dreams, folk tales and baroque metaphors are woven into his text and this is exemplified from the quotations given to us in Gagiano’s writing. Farah’s style of writing is lucid and his work is colossal and pervades the awareness of the readers. His capacity to show emotional intricacies is emphasized by the essayist.

In conclusion, we notice that Anne Gagiano is absolutely intrigued by the way these texts combine with the political and racial forces that are deleterious and threaten the quality of life in various African contexts. With

her conscientiously styled analyses, she immortalizes the political courage and social concern that African writers displayed despite the risk to their lives.

The various discussions serve as eye-openers to readers who have so far been unaware of the potency of African writers and their writing to touch the depths of understanding. Moreover, they motivate and urge readers to understand that these evils of African societies are not only related to them, but they are universal issues that need to be urgently addresses by writers all around the globe. This book rouses the interest of ordinary people and prepares them to accept cultures and peoples who are different from them in certain ways and yet similar, since we all belong to the human race and our humanity needs to be the same. Hence, this book can be suggested for academic purposes, wherein students of World Literature and contemporary literature can widen the horizon of their information. Further, the book proves to be an inspiration for those other readers who wish to know other cultures and read for both pleasure and knowledge.

About the Reviewer:

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