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***The Voice of the Text and its Body. The Continuous Reform of Euphrase Kezilahabi's Poetics.* Roberto Gaudio. 2019. Köln: Köppe, 306 pp., ISBN 978-3-89645-739-4.**

This monographic volume by Roberto Gaudio, the 39th contribution to the Rüdiger Köppe Verlag series “Verbal art and documentary literature in Africa”, edited by Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig, is a robust study of Euphrase Kezilahabi’s dynamic “thinking poetry” as expressed in his poetry collections. Kezilahabi (born on Ukerewe Island in 1944, died in Dar es Salaam in 2020) was an outstanding Tanzanian creative writer and thinker whose works have been the subject of critical studies by many scholars of Swahili literature (a.o. Elena Bertoncini Zúbková, Mikhail Gromov, Lutz Diegner, Said Ahmed Mohamed Khamis and Kyallo Wamitila), who have mostly devoted their attention to the prose of his novels, short stories and drama. In more recent times, a keen interest in analyzing Kezilahabi’s innovative poetry has come to the fore, as the work of Gaudio and other researchers (e.g. Natalya Frolova and Katriina Ranne) bear witness to.

This volume is, in effect, the author’s PhD thesis, written under the co-tutelle of the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and the University of Bayreuth, and is the product of in-depth research carried out throughout his academic studies, as well as extended periods of fieldwork in Tanzania and interviews with Kezilahabi (in Botswana).

The introductory section to the work is composed of a preface by Kai Kresse, specialist in African philosophy and intellectual history with a focus on the Swahili coast, a foreword by Annmarie Drury, a literary scholar who has translated Kezilahabi’s poems into English, and a comprehensive introduction by the author himself. The main body of the work is made up of five chapters and a conclusion, followed by a rich bibliography and an appendix presenting a poem by Kezilahabi, ‘*Kirudi kina shaka shuku na kero*’ (Doubt, suspicion and torment in the return; translation by Duncan Tarrant), which is not included in his published collections, but was released for the publication of the bilingual (Italian and Swahili) book *Ushairi na Uhuru. Poesie scelte di Abdilatif Abdalla e Euphrase Kezilahabi. Mkusanyo wa tungo za Abdilatif Abdalla na Euphrase Kezilahabi* (Poetry and Freedom. Selected Poems by Abdilatif Abdalla and Euphrase Kezilahabi; UniorPress, Naples 2017: 96), edited by Gaudio and the present writer.

The first chapter is composed of two sections. The first is devoted to the Tanzanian post-independence cultural and literary milieu, focusing in particular on the long and intense debate in East Africa, to some extent still ongoing, which was triggered by the introduction of free verse

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into Swahili poetry started by Ebrahim Hussein¹ and Kezilahabi, between the “traditionalists” (*wanamapokeo*) who condemned this poetic practice, and the “revolutionaries” (*wanamapinduzi*) who defended their innovations. Gaudioso fully investigates this dispute by analyzing the various cultural tensions and constructions of identity involved and by highlighting the heterogeneity of the positions within the “bloc” of innovators. The second section deals with the dialectics between two different aspects of Kezilahabi’s philosophy as identified by Gaudioso, i.e. emancipation and essentialism, a discussion which is based on a thorough investigation of Kezilahabi’s entire academic and creative production (including his prose, from his first novel *Rosa Mistika* on).

The second chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological approach which shapes Gaudioso’s analysis of Kezilahabi’s poetics in the following chapters, each one devoted to one of his three collections. The main point of the chapter is to develop a mode of analysis of literary texts which takes into account their experiential nature, their living, relational and bodily dimension. Gaudioso constructs this by placing Kezilahabi’s own philosophy in a dialogue with those of other thinkers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Enzo Melandri, George Steiner, Abraham Olivier and Paul Ricœur. Gaudioso continues by proposing a combination of different tools for textual interpretation, namely memorization and performance, relating to the sensorial dimension of language, together with comparison (here with texts by, among others, Ingeborg Bachmann, Giacomo Leopardi, Eugenio Montale, Rainer Maria Rilke) and translation (regularly practiced by Gaudioso, mainly from Swahili into Italian and vice-versa), which deal with the oblique, analogical nature of literature.

The third chapter is about Kezilahabi’s first collection of poems *Kichomi* (Tearing Pain, 1974) and focusses on the way the author shapes his poetry. Gaudioso dwells particularly on the presence of orality, which emerges in the wide range of vocalisms (from whispering to shouting) employed by the author, as well as on the concepts of pain, in its many forms, and fear. These two elements play a great role in Kezilahabi’s poetry and in his conception of literature as a hurting, provoking experience which pushes the reader to action. This is analogous to the concept of *tonicum* in Nietzsche, an author who had a great influence on Kezilahabi’s philosophical formation, as Gaudioso further shows in the fourth chapter, devoted to *Karibu Ndani* (Welcome Inside, 1988). In this chapter, Gaudioso analyses the more explicitly philosophical poems of the collection, like for instance, *Chai ya Jioni* (Evening Tea),

¹ Ebrahim Hussein (Kilwa 1943) performed his free-verse composition, *Ngoma na vailini* (Drum and violin) at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1968. Hussein has never published any poetry collections, as he has devoted himself to the publications of Swahili plays. However, he has continued to experiment with free verse in drama, especially in the works *Jogoo kijijini* (Rooster in the village) and *Ngao ya jadi* (Sghield of the ancestors), published together in 1976.

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Safari (The Journey), and *Nondo* (The Moth), as well as the novels *Nagona* (Nagona, 1990) and *Mzingile* (Labyrinth, 1991), all of them works which were composed by Kezilahabi during the period when he was writing his PhD thesis entitled *African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation* (1985). Moreover, by means of a comparison with the Italian poet Leopardi, also deeply influenced by Nietzsche, Gaudioso underlines how this philosopher, together with Heidegger, had a marked impact not only on Kezilahabi's thought, but also on his creative art, as Gaudioso underlined in his first translations and close-reading analysis of Kezilahabi's poems, even before he read Kezilahabi's PhD thesis.

The fifth chapter is devoted to Kezilahabi's last collection of poems, *Dhifa* (Banquet, 2008). The initial part looks at the sound and musical structure of this collection, where, as Gaudioso observes, Kezilahabi conspicuously elaborates on vocalism and singability. In line with Gaudioso's approach, this aspect of Kezilahabi's poetics has also been investigated through performance, specifically by putting two of Kezilahabi's compositions into music, namely *Wimbo wa Unyago* (Initiation Song) and *Bonde* (The Valley). This was done in collaboration with Tai Tandika and Pino Ruffo, respectively; these experiments, together with other songs recorded during Gaudioso's fieldwork in Ukerewe, have been made available on YouTube and listed at the end of the volume. In his analysis of the collection, Gaudioso identifies many Orphic elements, considering that music and dance are recurrently associated with sensuality and liberation, and the prominence of the theme of death. As Gaudioso emphasizes in the following part of the chapter, Kezilahabi rewrites some of the key terms and concepts in Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophy in *Dhifa*, in particular Heidegger's *Mitdasein* (Be-there-with) and *Unter-Schied* (Between-the rift), by poetically re-elaborating them in an original synthesis where death and existence coexist, as do knowledge and time, and civil engagement and poetry. Finally, the book is also enriched by some color photographs, mainly taken by the author in Ukerewe.

In conclusion, on the account of its well-informed theoretical grounding, original critical approach to Kezilahabi's poetry and close-reading textual analysis, this book represents valuable reading for literary researchers investigating the works of Euphrase Kezilahabi and for scholars interested in new critical approaches to Swahili poetry.

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