

refugees across the border, how was he able to hold meetings with North Korean officials in Pyongyang? Do North Koreans always distrust all foreigners, as they are said to do here? The last is simply untrue, as those of us who meet North Korean scholars and diplomats abroad, and those of us who have walked the streets of Pyongyang, know only too well. Again, when one refugee tells Kim how she witnessed the public execution of a returnee, it reinforces an account – substantiated by secret film footage – that has been widely circulated by journalists, but fails to prove the assertion made that such extreme punishment is commonplace.

None of this invalidates the personal stories, or the claims made by the author; I would, though, plead for a more closely argued exemplary ethnography focused on the testimonies of its subjects. There is, still, much ethnography. We hear about women refugees who suffer when sold as brides for rural Chinese farmers (a practice, incidentally, that involves many Chinese, not just Korean refugees, though this is not discussed), or who are sold into city brothels. We hear of children born to stateless North Korean mothers in China, who as a consequence are unable to attend school or obtain medical care. We hear that most refugees are sick when they cross the border. We gain insights into indoctrination and the mindset of North Koreans after six decades of socialist rule. We learn how refugees initially appear lifeless and rarely smile; that they are usually weak, thin, and malnourished; and so on. And it is here that the volume's strength resides.

**Keith Howard**

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## AFRICA

ELENA BERTONCINI ZÚBKOVÁ, MIKHAIL D. GROMOV, SAID A. M. KHAMIS and KYALLO WADI WAMITILA:

*Outline of Swahili Literature. Prose Fiction and Drama.*

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The first edition of Elena Bertoncini's *Outline of Swahili Literature* (1989) was the main manual for generations of students of Swahili literature and a standard reference work for scholars working on Swahili prose fiction and theatre. We have all the reasons to assume that the second, updated edition of this major work, appearing exactly twenty years later, will enjoy the same recognition and popularity. The turbulent developments in Swahili prose fiction in the past twenty years make this publication even more important.

The second edition has been thoroughly revised and contains new sections. The book is divided into several large parts. Following the introduction, the main text is an account of the history of Swahili literature. It contains three chapters: prose fiction in pre-colonial and colonial times (pp. 11–43), contemporary prose fiction (pp. 45–170) and drama (pp. 171–234). Chapters 2 and 3 are subdivided into three geographical areas: Kenya, the Tanzanian mainland and Zanzibar. Each of these six subsections includes two temporal divisions: from the 1960s to the 1980s and from the 1990s to the present.

The updated passages were written by Kyallo W. Wamitila (concentrating on Kenya), Mikhail D. Gromov (Tanzanian mainland), and Said A. M. Khamis (Zanzibar); two of these literary critics (Wamitila and Khamis) are also prominent Swahili writers. Although the three new authors have each focused on one geographical area, Gromov has also covered Wamitila's writing (i.e. from Kenya) and two Zanzibari plays, and Khamis discusses Kezilahabi's novels *Nagona* and *Mzingila* (in the passage on the Tanzanian mainland). Gromov has additionally co-authored with Bertocini the expanded introductory chapter.

Following the main text, the book contains two extensive appendixes which take up over a half the total volume of the text (248 pages). Appendix 1 is a "List of contemporary authors of novels, short stories and plays" (pp. 235–85) and Appendix 2 a "List of novels, short-story collections and plays" (pp. 287–482). It also contains a selected bibliography and an index.

The book's main merit is that it offers a reliable, almost exhaustive, and up-to-date factographical overview of Swahili prose fiction and drama. The two appendixes are extremely helpful for quick reference. It is also the only available work of this quality for Swahili prose fiction – and Swahili literature remains one of the few literatures in African languages for which such a meticulous description is available.

The updates of the first edition are generally very good. In the section on recent Kenyan prose, Wamitila hails "the coming of age of the Kenyan Swahili novel" (p. 54) – a statement attested by such outstanding authors as Katama Mkangi, with his sci-fi cum utopian novel *Walenisi* (1995), Ken Walibora, author of excellent novels, such as the latest *Ndoto ya Almasi* (2006), John Habwe, with *Paradiso* (2005), or Wamitila himself, author of both realistic and experimental novels, but also promising budding writers such as Omar Babu, with his novelistic debut of 2007, *Kala Tufaha* (included in the appendixes).

The section on prose in Tanzania is equally exciting: Euphrase Kezilahabi's novels *Nagona* (1990) and *Mzingile* (1991) pioneered experimental writing in Swahili and have, together with William Mkufya's "epic novel" *Ziraili na Zirani* (1999), opened up unfathomed dimensions of religious and philosophical thought. Tanzanian realistic novels such as Emmanuel Mbogo's *Vipuli vya Figo* (1996) or Mkufya's *Ua la Faraja* (2004) have dealt with such burning issues as illegal traffic with human body transplants or the scourge of AIDS. The detailed discussion of popular literature (as opposed to élite writing) is very enlightening. The section on Zanzibar hinges on the works of the doyens of Zanzibari literature, Shafi Adam Shafi and Said Ahmed Mohamed. The latter has also made highly interesting contributions to Swahili theatre (*Amezidi*, 1995).

On the critical side, we could say that the occasional comparisons with works of other literatures, such as Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Nagona* with Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* or Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (p. 126), or Shafi Adam Shafi's *Haini* with Solzhenitsyn's writings about the Gulag (p. 164), would be far more revealing with a lengthier explanation of their presumed similarities. The connections appear haphazard, even inappropriate: for example, it is difficult to see how Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* are close "in [their] thematic treatment" (p. 126).

The book contains some minor errors. For example, the date of publication of William Mkufya's novel *Ziraili na Zirani* is wrongly given as 2002 in the narrative (p. 128), but is correct in both the appendixes (1999). In the appendix of biographical and bibliographical information Mkufya's *Ua la Faraja* is dated incorrectly (2002 instead of 2004). Disturbing as these mistakes are in a major reference work, they are probably inevitable in a work of this scope.

This updated edition of *Outline of Swahili Literature* will doubtless be appreciated by all those interested in its topic. It remains the only available “textbook” for courses on modern Swahili literature. In this context it is regrettable that the price of the book is so high: most students and also many scholars, publishers of Swahili literature or Swahili writers themselves will hesitate to buy a copy. It would be highly desirable if the book could also be published in a cheaper paperback format.

**Alena Rettová**