



Baraza la Kiswahili la Berlin:

Kumbukumbuku na Kumwenzi Marehemu Euphrase Kezilahabi (1944 – 2020)

Eulogies in Memory of the late Euphrase Kezilahabi (1944-2020)

Workshop

11th January, 2021

Akitokea katika kijiji cha Namagondo kilichopo Kisiwa cha Ukerewe katika Ziwa la Nyanza, utaalumu wa fasihi wa Euphrase Kezilahabi ulimpa uprofesa. Mapenzi yake ya fasihi na mawazo ya kifalsafa yalianza alipokua akisoma seminari ya kikatoliki Nyegezi kwa masomo yake ya sekondari. Wakati huo huo alikuwa anaandika riwaya ya *Rosa Mistika*. Baadaye alijiunga na Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam akahitimu masomo ya shahada ya kwanza na ya pili alipoandika tasnifu juu ya “Baba wa fasihi ya Kiswahili ya kisasa”, Shaaban Robert. Umahiri na ueledi wake wa kisomi ulimfanya aajiriwe kama mhadhiri mwandamizi katika chuo hicho mpaka alipoanza shahada yake nyingine ya pili na baadaye shahada ya uzamivu katika Chuo Kikuu cha Wisconsin Madison. Ubobezi wake katika falsafa na fasihi za Kiafrika ulimwezesha kuhitimu masomo yake huko. Alirejea Tanzania akafundisha Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam mpaka mwaka 1995. Baadaye alihamia kufundisha katika Chuo Kikuu cha Botswana mpaka alipopatwa na mshtuko mwaka 2017. Miaka miwili baada ya kurejea Dar es Salaam, alifariki mnamo tarehe 8 Januari 2020. *Roho yake ilale mahali pema peponi.*

Utunzi wake wa kifasihi ulijumuisha mashairi, tamthilia, riwaya na hadithi fupi. *Rosa Mistika* (1971) inaelezea hali halisi ya maisha ya kielimu kwa watoto wa kike wa maeneo ya Ukerewe na Mwanza katika kipindi ambacho kitabu hicho kiliandikwa. Riwaya zake nyingine zilizodumu kwa muda mrefu ni *Kichwamaji* (1974), *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* (1975), *Gamba la Nyoka* (1979), *Nagona* ([1987/1990]) na *Mzingile* (1991). Japokuwa *Rosa Mistika* ni moja ya riwaya zake maarufu Zaidi (ikifuatiwa na *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*), *Nagona* na *Mzingile* ni changamano zaidi na zimesababisha majadiliano ya kina katika ulimwengu wa fasihi. Diwani zake za mashairi zilizochapishwa ni *Kichomi* (1974), *Karibu Ndani* (1988) na *Dhifa* (2008). Chaguo lake la kuandika mashairi huru lilikinana na kanuni za kimapokeo za uandishi wa mashairi likichochea mjadala mkali juu ya utunzi wa mashairi. Mchezo wake wa kuigiza uitwao *Kaptula la Marx* (1978) ulipata umaarufu ndani na nje ya Tanzania kwa sababu ulizungumzia siasa za Ujamaa na Kujitegemea ambazo zilikuwa ni siasa za Tanzania wakati huo. Hadithi zake fupi zilizochapishwa katika magazeti kama *Mwananchi* na baadaye kutolewa vitabuni pia, kama vile katika kitabu cha utangulizi wa hadithi fupi cha Mbunda Msokile (1992) na mikusanyiko ya hadithi fupi ya Kyallo Wamitila (2004, 2007, 2010).

Umahiri wa fikra za kifalsafa za Marehemu Kezilahabi ulimfanye ashughulikie masuala yasiyoweza kufikirika kirahisi. Alijikita katika maswali magumu kama vile kujiuliza kama Mungu yupo, pamoja na maswali mengine ya utu, ontolojia, maana ya maisha na uwepo kwa ujumla. Aliandika pia juu ya masuala nyeti ya jamii kama vile mila na desturi, mahusiano ya kijinsia na sera ya *Ujamaa* ya Tanzania

ya wakati ule. Pamoja na kuwa kazi zake za mwanzo zilijikita katika uhalisia, alianzisha nyanja mpya ama mikondo mipya ya fasihi ya Kiswahili ambayo imechambuliwa kama fasihi ya (ki)majaribio, fasihi ya (ki)uhalisia-baadaye ama fasihi ya (ki)usasaleo. Baadhi ya sifa za fasihi ya aina hii ni kuchanganya mandhari na nyakati tofauti, na kuunganisha fasihi simulizi na fasihi andishi za kutoka ndani na nje ya Tanzania. Nyinginezo ni matumizi ya vipandevipande kimaudhui na kimtindo (*fragmentation*), uchache wa kimtindo (*minimalism*) na matumizi mapana na ya kina ya jazanda (lugha ya picha) – zote zikichangia katika ajenda ya kiuajumi na ya kifalsafa ya aina yake. Marehemu Kezilahabi alikuwa balozi wa lugha na fasihi ya Kiswahili kwa kuandika kazi zake kwa Kiswahili na kuwahamasisha waandishi wenzake kuandika kwa lugha za Kiafrika na lugha za asili kwa ujumla.

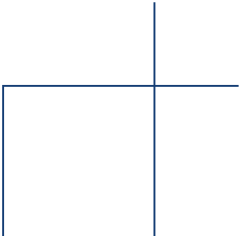
Marehemu anapopumzika kwa amani, ulimwengu wa wasomi wenzake na wasomaji wake wote kwa ujumla watamkumbuka kwa kazi zake za kipekee zilizokuwa na mchango usio na kifani katika fasihi na falsafa ya Kiswahili.

English

Eulogies in Memory of the late Euphrase Kezilahabi (1944-2020)

Hailing from Namagondo village, Ukerewe Island in Lake Nyanza, Euphrase Kezilahabi's literary wit scaled his career to professorship. His deep interest in literature and philosophical ideas already germinated when he was attending secondary school, the Catholic seminary Nyegezi. It was at this time when he wrote *Rosa Mistika*. Later, he joined the University of Dar es Salaam where he earned a BA and later a MA degree, with a thesis on the "father of modern Swahili literature", Shaaban Robert. His singular intellectual ability earned him a placement as Assistant Lecturer at the same University until he enrolled for a second MA degree and subsequently a PhD degree at the University of Wisconsin Madison. His specialty on African philosophy and literature allowed him to graduate and acquire professorship. He went back to teach at the University of Dar es Salaam, before in 1995, he moved to teach at the University of Botswana where he continued to teach until he suffered from a stroke in 2017. After having returned to Dar es Salaam for the last two years of his life, he passed away on January 8, 2020. *May his soul rest in peace.*

His literary composition comprised poetry, drama, novels and short stories. *Rosa Mistika* (1971) exposes realities of educational life for girls in the context of Ukerewe and Mwanza, at the time of its writing. His further long-lived novels are *Kichwamaji* (1974), *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* (1975), *Gamba la Nyoka* (1979), *Nagona* ([1987/]1990) and *Mzingile* (1991). While *Rosa Mistika* is perhaps still the most popular of his novels (followed by *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*), *Nagona* and *Mzingile* stand out as the most complex of his novels which have caused numerous debates in literary scholarship. His collections of poetry include *Kichomi* (1974), *Karibu Ndani* (1988) and *Dhifa* (2008). His choice of and advocacy for poems in free verse dismissed the traditionally structured approach in composition and gave way to an intense debate on the conventions of Swahili poetry. His drama *Kaptula la Marx* (1978) gained popularity across Tanzania and abroad since it talked about politics of socialism and self-reliance that was prominent in Tanzania at the time. His short stories appeared in newspapers such as *Mwananchi*



that were later adopted in several books such as Mbonde Msokile's guide on composing short stories (1992) and Kyallo Wamitila's collections of short stories (2004, 2007, 2010).

His philosophical wit creatively brought seemingly unimaginable abstract ideas to life. It delved into questions on God's existence, humanity, ontology, the meaning of life and existentialism. He also dealt with sensitive social and political issues such as the dichotomy of "tradition" and modernity, gender roles, and *Ujamaa*, the Tanzanian variant of African socialism. While Kezilahabi's earlier work is rooted in realism, he later started a new paradigm of writing in Swahili literature, variously analysed as experimentalism, post-realism and post-modernism. Some of its characteristics are a playful combination of different genres, a combination of oral and written literature from both Tanzania and across the world, fragmentation, minimalism and a sophisticated use of imagery informed by an aesthetic and philosophical agenda of its own kind. He remained an ambassador for Swahili language and literature by writing his work in Swahili, while advocating writing in African languages, and writing in indigenous languages in general.

As Marehemu Kezilahabi rests in peace, the world and his readers will miss his unique approach to literature and philosophy.