

REVIEW

THE MEMORY ADDRESS IN *PÁTIO DAS SOMBRAS*, BY MIA COUTO



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The book *Pátio das sombras* (KAPULANA, 2018) is written by mozambican writer António Emílio Leite Couto, known internationally by the pseudonym Mia Couto, and the illustrator, also Mozambican, Malangatana Valente Ngwenha. The work is part of the set of 10 titles integrated to the project "Tales and Stories of Mozambique", which arises from the collaboration between the Portuguese School of Maputo Center for Teaching and Language Portuguese (EPM-CELP) and fundació Contes Pel Món, from Barcelona, and has as main objective to disseminate, through tales of tradition, the rich source of mozambican popular imagination and present them to children.

The collection received editorial coordination from Teresa Noronha (EPM-CELP) and Ruth Banón Méndez (Foundation) and was published in

Maputo/Mozambique between 2009 and 2014. The title *The Courtyard of shadows* was the first to be published in Mozambique in 2009. In Brazil, the collection was named "Contos de Moçambique" by Kapulana publishing house, which published between 2016 and 2018. Here, Mia Couto's book was one of the last to be released in 2018, winning the award for best book for childhood literature in Portuguese, by the National Youth Children's Book Foundation (FNLIJ).

The printed book, like all the others in the Collection, measures 21 cm high by 21 cm wide and 32 pages. In Mozambique, it has two printed formats: hardcover and brochure; in Brazil, the edition is in brochure. As a paratext, there is a brief comment by the writer, who exposes his reading experience on the source text (original narrative) and shares the explanation of why a traditional story is to be selected to work it as a rereading, preserving or altering some aspect present in the starting text. In addition, the biography of the illustrator and the writing is presented. The book presents to the reader, in addition to the new version, the tale in its original form. On the back cover, information about the project that gave rise to the realization of the collection appears.

The writer of the narrative, Mia Couto, was born in 1955, in the city of Beira, provincial capital of Sofala, in central Mozambique. He claims to have inherited from his father, the Portuguese-Mozambican writer Fernando Leite Couto, the poetic vein and his mother's taste for storytelling. He graduated in Biology and worked for a time as a journalist in various information agencies in the years following Mozambique's independence in June 1975, assuming in many of them the role of director. He debuts in the world of literature with the work of poems *The root of dew* in the year 1983. However, it is emphasized that it is as a storyteller and novelist that stands out the most.

Mia Couto is one of the most emblematic writers of Mozambican literature, along with José Craveirinha, Noémia de Sousa, Paulina Chiziane, Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, among others. His vast work led to the opportunity to win the following awards: Virgílio Ferreira Prize in 1999; Mário António Award in 2001; Latin Union of Romanesque Literature and Passo Fund Zaffari and Bourbon Literature Awards in 2007; Eduardo Lourenço Award, 2011; Camões Award, 2013; and Neustadt International Literary Prize in 2014. In his country of origin he was awarded the José Craveirinha Award and received the Award for Best Novel in 2004 from the

Association of Mozambican Writers (AEMO). It is noteworthy, from its vast collection, the novel *Sleepwalking Land* (1992) was considered one of the 12 best African novels of the twentieth century.

Malangantana Ngwenya, an icon of Mozambican fine arts, was born in Matalana, Marracuene district, Maputo province, Southern Mozambique, in 1936. He worked as a servant and *gandula* before being encouraged to design and paint by biologist Augusto Cabral and later by architect Pancho Miranda Guedes. He had his first work exhibited in 1959, in the salon of Fine Arts of, then, Lourenço Marques (Maputo), and his first exhibition in 1961. It is an eclectic personality with recognition in various activities: drawing, watercolor, tapestry, ceramics, engraving, monumental sculpture in iron and cement, in murals, poetry, singing, dramaturgy and dance. It was part of the creation of the National Museum of Art, the National School of Visual Arts, Matalane Cultural Center, among other institutions. He was awarded the painting award "Comemorações de Lourenço Marques" in 1962; Medal of Merit diploma from the Tommasco Campanella Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1970; Nachingwea medal in 1984; Portuguese Section award of *the Association Internacional des Critiques d'Art* in 1989; Eduardo Mondlane First Degree Order in 2006; Honorary Doctorate from the Polytechnic University of Mozambique in 2007 and the Évora University in 2010.

Brought to know a little of the authors (writer and illustrator), we return to the title *Pátio das Sombras*, bringing the information that the narrative is based on an original tale of the Maconde ethnic group, located in the northern region of the African country, Mozambique, and constitutes the range of groups that embody the ethnic mosaic of the country. Thus, in a fictionalized way, a subject related to the daily life of a people, the Mozambican, stressing aspects that refer us to the religiosity and treatment of the elderly in the social context, represented by the grandmother.

In the narrative, the grandmother and grandson who live in a village that was in the harvest phase of production play as protagonists. In this context, the grandmother felt unable to accompany the rest of the family group in the harvest process, which led the grandson to offer to keep the grandmother company, a fact that had the disapproval by the others, claiming that he should go learn to work the

land. However, once in the countryside, voices of rejoicing were heard from the direction of the village.

The event alluded led the other to send the grandson to check what was happening. Chagado at home, the boy found his grandmother by the well, sitting on the elevated side of the entrance to the excavation from where they pulled the water. The boy inquired his grandmother about the voices and she replied that there was nothing there. The fact happened the next day and the boy was sent again. Unlike the day before, the grandmother decided to tell her grandson about the ministry that was taking place. However, she asked him to keep it a secret, since she could be condemned as a sorceress and could take her life.

The dilemma of the secret and punishment of the original tale, with the death of the old one, was reorganized by Mia Couto (2018, p. 27), as he himself explains:

[...] it seemed to me that this story fits into the widespread belief of rural societies that widowed and old women become sorceress. It is this reason that leads to the elderly woman being killed at the end of the story. These values should be questioned today and it is necessary to reconvert this story by changing its outcome. This from the point of view of ethics that the tale suggests. (COUTO, 2018, p. 27).

All the titles of the Collection, such as *O Pátio das Sombras* (COUTO, 2018), bring to the scene of literature a new look at the tale, which traditionally circulated by orality, with characteristics of its own regarding the moralistic and exemplary tone. According to Silva (2012, p. 29), the retelling:

Open to countless possibilities of paraphrase, parody and updating, the universe of retellingism is wide, as it turns out. If in the evening sessions of storytelling the word of the popular accountant kept the audience captive, stuck to the sortilégio the enchantment or fear, in the reading of literary retales this is no different, the reader continues to manipulate the emotions of the reader.

Although sometimes this practice of rereading the tale and its updated version for contemporaneity is questioned by some scholars, since they "belong to the great cultural heritage of humanity" (SILVA, 2012, p. 30), it has been a constant practice in narratives for childhood, particularly in European tales. In the case of the "Contos de Moçambique" Collection, the choice is justified by each author.

The illustrations of master Malangatana Ngwenya, in the subtlety that characterizes his work, give life and color to the imaginary world woven by the words of Mia Couto (2018), using as a resource the colored pages, including the cover,

each with its own unique color, which makes the book more attractive and, consequently, more pleasant to its reading.

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