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Booklover-Deciphering and Archiving History

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Reading in the future.

by Ngugi Wa Thiong’O

Eyes Gerd Mjoen Brantenberg, Egalia’s Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes gives equal recognition to works such as foreign examples of the genre. The book Wonderlands is that it introduces us to many image in the book shows a desert landscape with thing is what can’t be seen. And he dies to get hair and a scarf “tells the pilot “...the important sentences rich with graphic detail:

“The first thing Antoine noticed was the truck in front of her home. The doctor is sum-

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tion of physical life albeit sometimes brutal and microscopically dissecting his characters. A young girl is hit and run over by a delivery truck in front of her home. The doctor is sum-
momed to attend to her and must perform a life saving operation; lamp light, in a steamy living room, under the barometric tension of an impending thunderstorm, with the assistance of a young colleague, and the distraction of the inhabitants of the apartment.

The horrific scene is set for the reader in short sentences rich with graphic detail:

“The first thing Antoine noticed was the lamp which a woman in a pink dressing gown was lifting with both hands...”; “A young man wearing pince-nez, with his hat still on, was bending forward shifting up with a pair of scissors the blood-stained-garments of the little girl.” “...she was busy brushing off the flies that obstinately settled on her glowing cheeks.” “Only an immediate operation,” he said decisively, “can save her life. Let’s try.” “And with that we are led through the story with surgical precision.

Roger Martin du Gard graduated in 1906 from the École des Chartes in Paris, France with the degree of archivist-paleographer. This training provided Martin du Gard with an eye for detail and a passion for accurate documentation. Within seven years of graduation he found success as an author with the publication of Jean Barots. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1937: “for the artistic power and truth with which he has depicted human conflict as well as some fundamental aspects of contemporary life in his novel-cycle Les Thibault.”

Martin du Gard’s literary work gave new meaning to the phrase “The Devil is in the details.” Why he chose to execute his training through a literary channel is unclear; however the effects of the World Wars heavily influenced his themes. It is also of interest to note that André Gide, another Literature Laureate, was a long-term friend and mentor.

The Operation is a chapter from the third volume, La belle saison, of the roman-fleuve Les Thibault.

Sidebar: I confess I had to google roman-fleuve. The word is French for novel-stream or novel-cycle. Britannica.com defines it as a “series of novels, each one complete in itself, that deals with one central character, an era of national life, or successive generations of a family.”

The story is a gem for illustrating Martin du Gard’s fascination with detailing scenes of actions, interplay between characters, description of physical life albeit sometimes brutal and microscopically dissecting his characters. A young girl is hit and run over by a delivery truck in front of her home. The doctor is summoned to attend to her and must perform a life-saving operation; lamp light, in a steamy living room, under the barometric tension of an impending thunderstorm, with the assistance of a young colleague, and the distraction of the inhabitants of the apartment.

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“The first thing Antoine noticed was the lamp which a woman in a pink dressing gown was lifting with both hands...”; “A young man wearing pince-nez, with his hat still on, was bending forward shifting up with a pair of scissors the blood-stained-garments of the little girl.” “...she was busy brushing off the flies that obstinately settled on her glowing cheeks.” “Only an immediate operation,” he said decisively, “can save her life. Let’s try.” “And with that we are led through the story with surgical precision.

When Martin du Gard was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1937, he described himself “like an owl, suddenly roused from its nest and exposed to the daylight, whose eyes, used to the dark, are blinded by dazzling brightness.” He continued in his award speech during the banquet held in December of that year to speak of the influences of other authors upon his literary thought process and his development as an author:

“I was still very young when I encountered, in a novel by the English writer Thomas Hardy, this reflection on one of his characters: ‘The true value of life seemed to him to be not so much its beauty, as its tragic quality.’ It spoke to an intuition deep within me, closely allied to my literary vocation. Ever since that time I have thought that the prime purpose of the novel is to give voice to the tragic element in life. Today I would add: the tragic element in the life of an individual, the tragedy of a ‘destiny in the course of being fulfilled.’ At this point I can only return from referring to the immortal example of Tolstoy, whose books have had a determining influence on my development. The born novelist recognizes himself by his passion to penetrate ever more deeply into the knowledge of man and to lay bare in each of his characters that individual element of his life which makes each being unique. It seems to me that any chance of survival which a novelist’s work may have rests solely on the quantity and the quality of the individual lives that he has been able to create in his books. But that is not all. The novelist must also have a sense of life in general; his work must reveal a personal vision of the universe. Here again Tolstoy is the great master. Each of his creatures is more or less secretly haunted by a metaphysical obsession, and each of the human experiences that he has recorded implies, beyond an inquiry into man, an anxious question about the meaning of life. I admit that I take pleasure in the thought that, in crowning my work as a novelist, the members of the Swedish Academy wished to pay indirect homage to my devotion to that unapproachable model and to my efforts to profit from the instruction of his genius.”

Martin du Gard took his instruction well.