

**Review: Kyallo Wadi Wamitila. 2003. *Kamusi ya Fasihi. Istilahi na Nadharia*. Nairobi: Focus Publications Ltd. 392 pp. ISBN 9966-882-79-6. Price: 600,= KSh (ca. € 5,70). Contact: focus@africaonline.co.ke.**

The 6<sup>th</sup> National Book Fair in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2003 saw a new publication in the field of Swahili literary studies that should draw the attention of Swahili scholars in and outside of East Africa: the first comprehensive literary dictionary in Swahili language. Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, who is currently Senior Lecturer for Swahili Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Nairobi, has committed more than a decade of meticulous research to compile this major work. It comprises roughly 1.300 entries, arranged alphabetically, ranging from *adhidadi* (antonym) to *muhakati* (mimesis), *tashtiti* (satire) and *zila* (tragic flaw).

As Mugyabuso M. Mulokozi states in the foreword to this first edition, serious Swahili literary criticism and analysis did not start before the 1960s with the efforts of Lyndon Harries' *Swahili Poetry* (1962) and Jan Knappert's *Traditional Swahili Poetry* (1967). The first works in literary criticism written in Swahili were the two volumes *Uchambuzi wa Maandishi ya Kiswahili* (1971/1977), a collection of essays on literature written by students of the University of Dar es Salaam and edited by Farouk Topan, who had started Swahili literary studies at the then University College of Dar es Salaam in 1968. Since then the emerging discipline has been in search of its own terminology, and involved in the efforts of creating it. The only official basis of literary terminology was a list of terms agreed on in 1980 by the *Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa Tanzania* (BAKITA 1985). This lack of officially approved terms led to the development of different terminologies by different scholars in today's more than ten East African universities. The diverging tendency of even some scholars teaching at the same university, but using different literary terminology, illustrates the urgent need for a comprehensive dictionary that has now been met. On the one hand it gathers and sometimes modifies the terminology used in the few works of literary criticism, which saw an increase in number in recent years (e.g. Njogu & Chimera 2002, Wamitila 2002, and Mbatiah 2002), and on the other hand it adds new terms, created by Wamitila himself or other scholars. In his introduction, Wamitila points out that the main rule for creating new terms was that the original words from which they are drawn should be understandable, like in *ushabihikweli* ('verisimilitude'), consisting of *ukweli* ('truth'; [Latin:] *veritas*) and *ushabihi* (or *mshabaha*: 'similitude'). In any case, these new terms are not meant to be the final point of terminological discussion. Instead, the author explicitly invites all Swahili literary scholars to discuss and create new terms.

On the whole, the author has meticulously enlisted about 1.300 entries, often with variants in one entry. As is stated in the subtitle of the dictionary, there are *termini technici* of literary studies (*istilahi*) as well as explanations about different literary theories (*nadharia*). As to literary terms,

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we find entries like *sadifa* (coincidence), *kihunzi cha maneno* (cryptic saying), *ukubalifu* (plausibility), and *kizindushi* (alienation effect). There is specialised poetry terminology like *tarbia* (quatrain), *takhimisa* (pentastich) and *tarsdisa / tasdisa* (hexastich), as well as rhetorical categories like *taniaba* (antonomasia), *tashifu* (metaplasm), *sitiari fifi / chakavu* (dead metaphor) and *kinyumbuzi / poliptotoni* (polyptoton). Another category are classificatory terms e.g. for novels with a list of 27 entries like *riwaya jirejelevu* (self-reflexive / involuted novel), *riwaya ya kima-jaribio* (experimental novel), *riwaya ya kitasnifu* (thesis novel) and *riwaya kinzani / riwaya geu* (anti-novel). In the domain of literary theory we find terms like *usasa / usasaleo* (modernism / postmodernism), *ufeministi* (feminism) with five subcategories, or *uhakiki wa ki(u)semezano* (dialogic criticism). These entries differ in length and depth. For example, the latter entry refers to *uhakiki wa Ki-Bakhtin* (Bakhtinian criticism) where we find a precise and detailed definition that even discusses current criticism of Ken Walibora's novel *Siku njema* (first published in 1996). However, the entry *usasa / usasaleo* is quite short and concentrates mainly on modernism.

The big advantage of Wamitila's dictionary is that it provides the reader with examples from Swahili literature. For instance if we have a look at the entry *riwaya ya kisiasa* (political novel), we find the examples of George Liwenga's *Nyota ya Huzuni* and Claude Mung'ong'o's *Njozi iliyopotea*. The entry *riwaya ya kitawasifu* (autobiographical novel) gives James Mbotela's *Uhuru wa Watumwa*. Mohamed Said Abdulla's Bwana Msa novels are listed under *riwaya ya kiupelelezi* (detective novel) (although in the latter case one might prefer the already established term *riwaya ya upelelezi*). Besides referring to whole literary works as examples by mentioning their titles, the author also provides excerpts from these works. In explaining *msimulizi dukizi / msimulizi penyezi* (authorial intrusion), we are given a text passage from Kezilahabi's *Rosa Mistika*: "Alijidai kwamba yeye alifahamu jinsi ya kulea binti zake – hasa alipokuwa amekunywa kidogo. Hakufahamu kwamba Rosa alikuwa katika rika baya, na kwamba ukali ulikuwa haufai; hakufahamu kwamba mabinti wanahitaji uhuru fulani kutoka kwa baba zao; hakufahamu kwamba kwa kumpiga bintiye alikuwa akiingilia utawala usio wake, na kwamba kuhusu maoni ya ndoa yeye alifaa kidogo sana; na hakufahamu kwamba Rosa alihitaji kuwajua wavulana." (Kezilahabi 1988 [1971]: 9) The phenomenon to be explained is underlined. Thus, the reader's learning is not limited to hitherto unknown terminology, but also includes a broadening of knowledge about many different literary works written in Swahili.

Terms used in explanations which have their own entry in the dictionary are always marked by capital letters and thus serve as an important guidance for the reader. Let us have a look at the entry *Msimuliwa*: "DHANA hii hutumiwa kuelezea anayesimuliwa SIMULIZI au HADITHI fulani, yaani mlengwa." (*Kamusi ya Fasihi*: 138).

These examples increase the practical benefit of this dictionary and the link between literary theory and its application in the Swahili literary field. The fact that Wamitila often refers to his

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own fictional works, some of them unpublished, might be a little irritating. In some cases, the author also gives examples from English literature. This serves as an important tool to interlink Swahili literature with English language literatures and to instigate comparative studies in that field.

It is also very laudable that the author provides the reader with a 28-pages glossary of most of the Swahili entries with their translation into English or sometimes other mainly European languages so that the reader while learning the new or unfamiliar Swahili terms can refer to terms she or he knows from other languages.

To sum up we cannot but congratulate Wamitila for undertaking this project of compiling and working through existing terminology as well as creating new terms in the field of Swahili literary theory. In many cases, it is the first time that current literary theories are accessible for the benefit of Swahili studies in Swahili language.

As soon as with its publication, *Kamusi ya Fasihi* can be considered a must for all institutions, scholars and students dealing with Swahili literature. Coming back to Mugyabuso M. Mulokozi's foreword, this first edition is a milestone and a very important starting point for terminological discussion that will hopefully take place under the commitment of Swahili scholars around the world and will be reflected in further editions.

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