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Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana dos Santos [Pepetela]

The Return of the Water Spirit [O desejo de Kianda]

Portugal (1995)

TAGS: African Traditions



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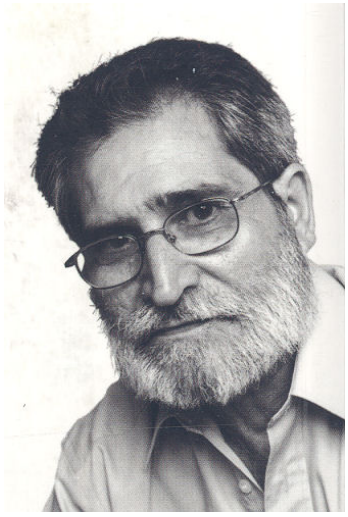
General information	
Title of the work	The Return of the Water Spirit [O desejo de Kianda]
Country of the First Edition	Portugal
Country/countries of popularity	Angola, Portugal, Finland, UK, Israel, Netherlands
Original Language	Portuguese
First Edition Date	1995
First Edition Details	Pepetela, *O desejo de Kianda*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1995, 119 pp.
ISBN	9722012487, 9789722012485
Genre	Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



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Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana dos Santos [Pepetela] , b. 1941 (Author)

Artur Carlos was born in Benguela, Portuguese Angola in 1941 (October 29) and writes under the pen name Pepetela. Pepetela later went to Paris and in 1963, he earned a scholarship to study Sociology in Algiers, where he was approached by Henrique Abranches from the MPLA. Pepetela served as vice minister in charge of education in 1975, under the presidency of Agostinho Neto. He has written plays among others like *A Corda* and *A Revolta da Casa dos Ídolos*, and has published several novels. Among them are *Lueji*, *The Return of the Water Spirit* and *Yaka* which won him the 1986 Angolan National Prize for Literature. In 1997, he was awarded the Camões Prize, the world's highest honour for Lusophone Literature. Since the 1980s, he has been a professor of sociology in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Angola, now known as the University of Agostinho Neto.

Source:

This biodata was written based on the information on the book cover.

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Additional information

Translation

Finnish: *Kiandan tahto*, trans. Virpi Peltola, Helsinki : Helsinki University Press, 2001.

English: *The Return of the Water Spirit*, trans. Luís R. Mitras, Oxford: Heinemann, 2002

Hebrew: □□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□ [ha-Mish'alah shel Ḳi'andah], trans. Rami Saari,□□□□□□ □□□□□□, Or Yehudah : Maḥbarot le-sifrut : Kineret, 2011

Dutch: *Het lied van de watergeest*, trans. Harrie Lemmens, Breda: De Geus, 2011.

Summary

The Return of the Water Spirit presents a fictitious version of the city of Luanda, Angola, wherein the population has been witnessing a series of buildings collapsing one after another. The very first building collapse happens at Kinaxixi square, after the wedding of Joao Evangelista, son of Mateus Evangelista and grandson of Rosario Evangelista, a surname that defines their religious background. Unlike his predecessors who were pastors in an Evangelical church at Huambo, Joao desired to be an engineer, but since he likes neither Mathematics nor Physics, coupled with the job he had at that time which stopped him from continuing his university studies, he quits the dream. It is at that very moment that he decides to settle down with Carmina, largely referred to as CAF (Carmina-Arse-Face). At fourteen, Carmina has joined the Y- the youth, the MPLA'S Youth and this keeps her so involved to the point that Joao hardly spends time with her and wonders if they will ever have time to have children. It is also rumoured that she contributed for the payment of her bride price, bought a car and decided when to bear children. This makes Mateus disappointed with his son, and as a result, choses to stay away from them.

As time goes by, the population forgets about the collapsed buildings, though the mystery surrounding them has not been revealed. Many government officials and the police have come by to investigate into the problem, and at the end attributed it to acts of terrorism. This disturbs Carmina a lot. She believes that the Americans are behind this phenomenon, and as such, she starts delivering rebellious

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speeches on TV, which makes her fall sick and keeps her husband worried. Though Carmina often seeks her husband's opinion, the later often wonders the role she plays, since at the end of every discussion, she adopts only her original ideas.

Joao, who finds himself relegated, decides to occupy his time at driving the car his wife bought and at playing computer games. It is during one of his game session that his house help, Joana, rushes in to inform him that another building has just collapsed, and when he looks through the window, he notices that it is the residence of colleague, Honorio. Later in the afternoon, he goes to help his friend and equally to find out what happened. While there, he sees the police who have come to find out the cause of the incident. As the inhabitants struggle to identify some of their belongings, a prophet emerges to reveal that god's anger is the root cause of the mishap. While the revelation is ongoing, Joao recalls the dream he had the previous night, where an old woman dies in his hands because he was unable to keep her warm.

As he leaves his friend residence that evening, passing through the area that harbours the market square of Kinaxixi, he recollects that some 30 years back, that area had a big sacred tree belonging to the water spirit of the lagoon that spilt blood for seven days, after it was cut down.

The belief is that, the lagoon produces a soft sad song and only a little girl named Cassandra could hear the melody. Though Cassandra hears this sad melody from the water, she could hardly tell what the song meant. Beside this mystery, the government rather resort to eliminate all rebels. Consequently, Carmina's company is attributed a contract to import arms. When she informs her husband about it, he is rather scared, but is reassured that his wife has the power to guarantee their safety. With her new status as a parliamentarian, she further succeeds to get a better flat, which she employs a company represented by mister Ribeiro to refurnish it. Later, the melody from the water increases and Cassandra begins to understand its message. Finally, Cassandra comes to know that Kianda, the water spirit, is at the origin of the song. Faced with this crisis, now considered as "Luanda Syndrome", the Pope prays for peace and also wishes that the cause of the syndrome should be discovered. As a result, the American seismologist, and later experts in volcanology, shows up for investigation, but it yields nothing. The sound from the water persists

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and Cassandra wishes her sister, Janico, could hear what she hears from the depth of the lagoon.

Carmina and Joao succeed to finish fixing their flat but the fear of the building collapsing still looms since Kinaxixi is left with just three buildings. In order to avoid this worry, Carmina starts making plan of obtaining a new flat in the southern part of the country. The stress involved in house hunting takes her home one afternoon to find Joana and Mister Ribeiro in her kitchen kissing each other while Joao is in the living room playing his game. She is furious and dismisses them, after pronouncing a racist remark, which makes Joao shout at her for the first time. She, however, understands her mistakes, and decides to remain silent for her husband to handle the issue. Later, Joao visits his friend, Honorio, to find out how he is coping at his makeshift tent residence. There he discovers that Honorio has lost his properties, wife and job due to a fraudulent act he entangled himself in his company some years ago. Taking pity on him, Joao promises to talk to his wife about getting him another job. On his way home, he comes across other poor homeless people who ask him to assist them financially. Since he could not meet up with their request because he forgot his wallet, the people decide to attack him. He succeeds to escape, but at the end finds himself beside the lagoon where Cassandra is still listening to the melody from the dark water. Though Cassandra cannot make Joao believe the story from the dark water, she succeeds to find old Kalumba, a blind and toothless man, who equally hears and can better interpret the melody to her.

The next morning as Carmina is going out to make preparation for transfer when the radio broadcasts news about a possible solution to the collapse of buildings in Kinaxixi, though they do not say what it can be. As Joao leaves home to seek for other solutions to their plethora of problems in the street, he is shocked to meet naked people on strike against the government. As he returns home to sit at his game and free his thoughts from what he has seen, he finds Cassandra telling old Kalumbo of her knowledge of the wordings of the song from the dark water. She draws his attention to the fact that, the water spirit, Kianda, is responsible for the buildings. Honorio, the leader of the revolution against social injustice, comes in to inform Joao about the involvement of everybody in the revolution, particularly the women. When Carmina comes back that evening after seeing the naked people on the streets, she decides to ask some influential people in the government to send troops after the rebels, but her

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husband succeeds to influence her on the necessity of such a move, since the people have the right to protest against marginalisation. Feeling dissatisfied, Carmina decides to prepare dinner while Joao settles at his computer game. Suddenly, an odd musical sound is heard – a shake, and it is only later on when he sees objects flying in the air that he realises that their building has collapsed. However, he fails to see the building under construction disintegrating to the sound of a musical notes. Within the same moment, old blind Kalumbo is flying like a bird and Cassandra, feeling the call of the water, stretches out her arms and dives into sea and is gone forever. The water spirit, freed at last from the buildings, can now enjoy the high sea as it has been its wish.

Analysis

In order to present the horrific effects of colonisation on Angolans and their goddesses, Pepetela shows the destruction of the city by the water spirit. Luanda, as the author points out, comes under destruction because its buildings and other activities block the passage of the water spirit. The water spirit is angry because of the activities of the Luandans' on its path and the cutting of the big sacred tree. The blood of the Luandans is being spilled for seven years as their buildings collapse and they keep wandering.

Pepetela names one of his characters Cassandra after the ancient Greek figure Cassandra (daughter of King Priam and of Queen Hecuba of Troy). Cassandra of Greek mythology and that of *The Return of the Water Spirit* are both meant to give prophecies about the impeding danger of the cosmopolitan city. Conversely, their revelations are not believed by anyone. In this vein, Cassandra prophecises the fall of Troy, while another Cassandra prophecies project the collapse of cause of the fall of Luanda.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Traditions

Freedom Loss Revenge Water

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Atkin, Rhian and Ribeiro, Raquel, "Portuguese Studies: Literature, 1928 to the Present Day," *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* 72 (2012): 227–31.

Hamilton, Russell G. "Lusophone Literature in Africa: Lusofonia, Africa, and Matters of Languages and Letters," *Callaloo* 14, no. 2 (1991): 324–35.

Kandjimbo, Luís, "Angolan Literature in the Presence of an Incipient Canon of Literatures Written in Portuguese," *Research in African Literatures* 38, no. 1 (2007): 9–34.

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