Goodrich Scholarship Faculty Publications

Summer 1996

Without a Name by Yvonne Vera

Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith
University of Nebraska at Omaha, pamelasmith@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/goodrichfacpub

Part of the African Languages and Societies Commons, and the Modern Literature Commons

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation
Smith, Pamela J. Olúbùnmi, "Without a Name by Yvonne Vera" (1996). Goodrich Scholarship Faculty Publications. 21.
https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/goodrichfacpub/21

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Goodrich Scholarship Program at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Goodrich Scholarship Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.
WORLD LITERATURE IN REVIEW: ZIMBABWE


A relative newcomer to the literary scene, Yvonne Vera joins the rising ranks of Zimbabwean writers and African women writers, earning her place with promising credentials, academic and literary. Vera is the author of two previous works, a volume of short stories, Why Don't You Carve Other Animals (1992), and a poetic novel, Nehanda (1993; see WLT 69:1, p. 212), which were shortlisted for the Regional Commonwealth Writers Award in 1993 and 1994 respectively. A third publication, Without a Name, followed in 1994, also shortlisted for a Regional Commonwealth Prize for best work of fiction in 1994 and named First-Prize Winner of the Zimbabwe Book Publishers Association annual literary awards. These achievements, all within a three-year period, indicate the artistic talent and the potential to prolificity of this rising young writer.

A gripping and compelling novel written in poetic prose, Without a Name is the story of one woman's endurance and survival in war-torn Zimbabwe. The year is 1977. Set in the historical context of preindependence Zimbabwe, against a backdrop of insensitive colonialism and the guerrilla warfare to unseat it, the novel paints the picture of the dispossession of native Zimbabweans and their struggle to maintain faith in the land, its dreams, and its inclusive histories of the people.

Mazvita, a strong, freedom-loving, but naive woman, seeks refuge in the city. Leaving her rural Mubaira and the security of Ndenyedzi's love became she no longer believes in the promise of the land, Marvita sets out on a journey of dreams, searching for liberation and new beginnings. The land, poisoned by acts of war, becomes maleficent. Instead of the freedom and refuge she seeks in the city, away from the land which seems to have forgotten its people because "it dreams new dreams for itself," Harare offers its own horrors and perils, its own warfare, unleashing false hope too readily, too soon.

The "journey" itself is portentous, fraught with the burden of fear--with the reality of rape and the dangerous search for "new dreams to replace . . . ancient claim(s)" in a city where one cannot even trust one's shadow, in a city where "death, properly executed, could be mistaken for progress." Pregnant upon arrival, burdened with motherhood and dreams unrealized seven months later, and her fate in disarray, Mazvita murders her
unnamed child—Ndényedzi's offspring—in a moment of despair and madness, mistaken her resolve for kindness. Sine "she knew about departures because she had mistaken them for beginnings," her passion for beginnings yields a sour harvest; her lack of patience and hope results in nightmarish dreams. Freedom becomes undefinable, unattainable, when new, shallow dreams are sought to replace ancient claims promised by the land which "defines . . . unifies." But it is 1977. Mavita returns to Mubaira, the place of her beginning, broken and brutalized, to bury her child.

Vera's style is terse, poetic, almost academic; her metaphorical language suggestive, suspenseful, compelling. Her audience is clearly restrictively Western-oriented in the sense that Without a Name does not readily show strains of the oral tradition. Thirty-three one- and two-page chapters--the longest runs five pages--of terse but dense, poetic, image-laden language depict rather than tell about anguish, poverty, and suffering. The repetition of the year 1977 looms large and is evocative. A fine work of fiction indeed.

~~~~~~

By Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith, University of Nebraska, Omaha

Copyright of World Literature Today is the property of World Literature Today and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.