

Title: The Fading Sun
Author: David Mungoshi
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(Reviewer: Memory Chirere) first published on
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David Mungoshi's latest novel, 'The Fading Sun' is about both living and dying. Very few novels from Zimbabwe will come close to it as regards exploring a miscellany of human emotions and experiences in one breath. Here is sadness, bottomless joy, puzzlement, memories, regrets, fear... the whirlpool goes on.

A woman in menopause stops in her tracks to take stock of her life. From the leeward side, Mary has more than her fair share of maladies. Mary's skin is wrinkled. Mary suffers from bouts of migraine and arthritis. Mary has had each of her three deliveries by caesarean section. Mary has lost one of her ovaries early in life. Mary has a thyroid problem which has led to thyroidectomy. Mary has lost one of her breasts through mastectomy and she wears the breast prosthesis.

Sadly, the surviving breast is also deteriorating and the pain is just unbearable. Mary's sun is slowly fading.

She makes you realize that much of living, and dying too, go on inside of the individual. Towards the end, she becomes very mystical like that woman who charms and is charmed in return by the spider in 'A Passage to India'.

You may contrast that with Mary's belching middle class husband, Moth. Mary and the children nickname him Moth, an abbreviation for 'Man of the house' and it is said 'he wore his dubious title like an invisible dog collar.' Mary thinks that Moth is a heavily stupid fellow. You see him playing golf endlessly in serene terrains. He spots trendy cross belts. He has too flat a tummy for a man his age and means and he has never seen the doctor in all his life!

You may want to think that from Mary's point, Mary this story is a tragedy but you may see that she has also had the best of times.

Mary has a solid countryside background. She has roasted maize cobs to brick red by the fireside. She has heard the hyena laugh. She has bathed in rivers amongst some of the most physically well endowed African women. She is one of the very few first black Rhodesian women to pursue education up to university level. Subsequently, she is the first woman to own and drive a car in her village. She ends up watching the sun rise and set, from a verandah of her house in a posh suburb. Above all, she feels deeply about who she is.

Midway, you realize that this is a novel that you cannot take all in, with a one off reading. The layers are many; history, geography, anthropology, politics... This novel must have taken David lots of meditation and when such a script was released, he must have felt like collapsing from the sudden release.

In addition, David Mungoshi uses rigorous language and you may suggest that this story must be sung with the accompaniment of an instrument. This book pitches much higher than what Mungoshi achieves with his debut novel, 'Stains On The Wall' (1992). It is the kind of English language with the rigor you can only associate with the other good non English writers writing in English, like Joseph Conrad and Ayi-Kwei Armah.

Maybe the more complex issues in this novel happen in the realm of the unsaid. Mary is certain that her Moth is fast becoming indifferent and contentedly growing away from her. Mary (unconsciously) envies and subsequently, loathes her husband for not ageing as fast as her.

But is Moth to blame for being able to move through life, eating and drinking and carrying on like the devil's machine is inimitable? Should he be condemned for failing to be attracted to the woman who is now very different from the woman he fell for many years ago?

This novel leaves you with the question: How much married are all married people?

The cover (designed by Ivor Hartmann) is multi dimensional. As you meet it, you think it crawls to life! And the eyes (of a woman?) glance back into

your soul from a far away place, near the setting sun beneath which two elephants move together (or towards each other). And you realize that nothing will ever beat an African countryside at sunset. Maybe that is why Mary thinks that ‘the world is most beautiful as you leave it.’

This book can be ordered through the Lion Press website, www.thelionpressltd.org or alternatively on Amazon.com. In Zimbabwe it will be sold through local bookshops.