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A FAR CRY FROM MADAGASCAR: CRITICAL STUDY OF FLAVIEN RANAIVO'S POETIC ACHIEVEMENTS

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Abstract

Flavien Ranaivo is a name very few poetry lovers or scholars in that field have heard of, despite his supreme merit and virtuosity so far as lyric poetry is concerned. A Madagascan by origin, his works are mostly in French that do not hinder their essential local flavour. His approach is not very different from Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, the first modern African poet whose popularity rests on his skilful mingling of modernist, surrealist poetic forms and elements of traditional Malagasy rhetoric; though his works have highly been underrated so far. His poetic style, characterised by heavy use of metaphor is unequivocally influenced by Malagasy Ballads and songs particularly Hain-teny. This paper aims at reevaluating Ranaivo's poetic genius in the background of Malagasy poetic tradition. "The Common Lover's Song," "Old Merina Theme," "Song of a Young Girl," "Choice" and "Distress" are five characteristic poems taken for critical analysis; all of the poems were originally written in French. Even though translations likely invite the risk of cultural loss, the Malagasy subjectivity so finely achieved by the poet is hard to be overshadowed. What distinguishes Ranaivo's works is their deceptively simple nature. Most of his poems deal with apparently simple theme of love with layers of complexity to be unfolded gradually. The paper is an attempt to demystify the mystic nature of Ranaivo's poetic treasure and assess his contribution to the African and World literature with the hope of drawing the due critical attention it is yet to receive.

Keywords: Malagasy, Lyric, Hain-teny, Culture, Negritude, Folklore, Sensuality.

In the hegemonic discourse of African literary canon of lyric poetry, Flavien Ranaivo is a name lost in time even though bulk of his poetic achievements deserves serious scholarly attention. A poet of Malagasy origin, excelling in lyric poetry,

his works display influence of Malagasy Ballads and songs particularly Hain-teny, a traditional form of Malagasy oral poetry that chiefly involves poetic dialogue usually on the subject of love. Majority of his great work is originally in French though in later

life, he released himself from French influence. Concentrating on Malagasy tradition, Ranaivo followed Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo in adapting traditional Malagasy poetry into French. As observed in Encyclopaedia Britannica, "his crisp and sometimes impudent and slangy use of language reflects the vernacular tradition that inspired him." This paper mainly aims to assess the overall contribution of Ranaivo to African and World literature while focusing on five of his major poems i.e "The Common Lover's Song", "Old Merina Theme", "Song of a Young Girl", "Choice" and "Distress". As the poems are originally written in French and translated versions vary, I have chosen translations by Dorothy Blair appearing in *Bending The Bow: An Anthology of African Love Poetry* edited by Frank. M. Chipasila. The anthology typically encompasses the works of African lyric poets that were largely neglected and marginalized in the discourse of African literature that has the tendency to be dominated by overtly political texts. Nevertheless, Flavien Ranaivo is one of those undervalued African poets whose works deserve to be explored more than it has hitherto been. This paper is a sincere effort to contribute a little to this field with a hope that it will stir the interest of more researchers to come forward and further explore this rich area.

Madagascar, an island country in the Indian Ocean off the coast of East Africa, had been colonised by the French from 1895 to 1960. Even today French enjoys a special status in the country being one of the two official languages, other being Malagasy. Though literature of Madagascar encompasses both oral and written literary arts of Malagasy people, oral tradition is the earliest and most celebrated, oratory being island's foremost literary tradition. Elements of oral history and traditional oratory were being documented by British and French visitors to the island from the first half of nineteenth century. But it was only during the first part of twentieth century, as pointed out by Benedicte Mauguere, that Madagascar experienced an active literary life.

Jean Paulhan, professor of letters at Tananarive, was the first to carry out a serious study and translation of the Malagasy hain-teny into

French in 1913, with the subtitle *Poesies populaires malgaches recueillies et traduites par Jean Paulhan* (Popular Malagasy Poetry Collected and Translated by Jean Paulhan). With that publication, he initiated...the cardinal genre in francophone Malagasy literature: adaptation with French inflections of the traditional hain-teny. (Mauguiere 72)

In the first half of twentieth century, French journals took a great interest in Malagasy culture and literature. French poets and intellectuals like Pierre Camo, Robert Boudry promoted literary career of young Malagasy writers including Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo who is considered to be Africa's first modern poet and greatest literary artist of Madagascar till date. Flavien Ranaivo was indeed greatly influenced by Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo. As a matter of fact, Rabearivelo and Flavien Ranaivo were the most successful in transcribing the hain-teny into French. The hain-teny, literally meaning 'science and power of words', was already becoming popular in French with its unique characteristic of choosing enigma or the riddle as a means of expression. Poets like Rabearivelo or Ranaivo used hain-teny to blend the traditional and modern, while consciously experimenting with these oral poetic forms as base for modern poetry, thus giving African poetry a new dimension. Rabearivelo, Ranaivo and Jacques Rabemananjara were three major figures who dominated the literary scene of pre-independent Madagascar. They were introduced to public by Leopold Senghor with the publication of *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malgache de langue francaise* (1948) that devoted a good deal of attention to the Malagasy poets. Jean Paul Sartre wrote a celebrated preface to this anthology for its 1949 edition. Though many of those writers write in French, their works are surprisingly rooted in the culture they know the best. Whereas authors like Charlotte Arisona Rafenomanjato focus on Malagasy issues as changing society, foreign settlers on Madagascar, the disappearance of human values in modern times, poets like Regis Rajemisa-Raolison draw heavily upon Malagasy cultural tradition with a tone that is highly nostalgic. There are also poets like Elie-Charles Abraham whose poetry "exalts the beauties of Madagascar and depicts the island as a

bucolic place free from political, economic and social difficulties" drawing upon the elements of history and ethnography specific to Madagascar. All these literary artists have put great emphasis on promoting and celebrating beauty and versatility of the Malagasy language and the richness of Malagasy oral traditions. Flavien Ranaivo undoubtedly has a very special place among these poets by the virtue of his most important contribution to Franco-Malagasy literature with his interpretative translations of hain-teny. "Using the French language to translate an oral tradition and express Malagasy subjectivity" as suggested in Encyclopaedia of African Literature, "his style is densely metaphoric as it draws upon Malagasy symbols, proverbs and rhythms." Traditional Merina themes find its finest expressions in Ranaivo's lyric poems.

Ranaivo, much like Rabearivelo, was indeed a predictable product of French assimilation policy. He has been accurately referred to as "l'incarnation meme du metis culturel" (the true incarnation of the cultural hybrid) by Senghor. "Born in 1914 in the traditional Merina nobility of Tananarive (now Antananarivo), the modern capital city of Madagascar, he had a sheltered childhood and grew up in a relatively affluent and open environment where the hostility and even the ambiguity of a divided and pluralistic world was not apparent to him" (Makward 211) Ranaivo was educated at Lycee Galleiri in Tananarive, and worked in the information service until 1945. After that he turned to Journalism and worked as a famed journalist for almost seven years. Then he returned to government work where he held a position in the Ministry of Education. His first volume of verse *L'Ombre et le vent* (Shadow and Wind) was published in 1947, then appeared *Mes Chansons de toujours* (My Lifelong Songs) in 1955. *Le Rotour an ber cail* (Return to the Fold) was published in 1962. They were issued in a combined translation, *Poetic Works of Flavien Ranaivo* (1970) introducing his poetic achievements to a larger international audience. While his contemporary Rabemananjara had been much closer to the Paris group of Black poets both ideologically and poetically, Ranaivo is also associated with that group, though not an active member of Black literary and intellectual circles of

poets. In the era of political disturbance as well as in post-independence period when literature and art was generally perceived as functional and committed, Ranaivo wrote apparently without any affection or regret, in an art for art's sake vein. He avoided extremist forms of anticolonial struggle and Negritude movement. Throughout his life, he had put ceaseless effort to uphold Malagasy culture and traditional forms to the larger world. This was one of the several causes behind his translations of many old Malagasy poems into French. But his poetry amounts to more than simple translation. His perceptions together with his mastery of French poetic technique have informed his oeuvre leading to an enriched body of literature.

Five poems of Flavien Ranaivo have been chosen for discussion- "The Common Lover's Song", "Old Merina Theme", "Song of a Young Girl", "Choice" and "Distress". The first three of the poems are monologue. "Choice" and "Distress" are in dialogue forms like traditional hain-teny. The poetic dialogues make the poems structurally interesting. "The Common Lover's Song" practically is a poem about do's and don'ts! The poem consists of only two sentences with a number of lines joined with the conjunction 'or'. The first sentence suggests how not to love and why and the last one explains how to love. The language is rather very simple and straightforward suggestive of simplicity of pure love. What is the striking feature of the poems in terms of figure of speech is the excessive use of similes. In each line, the speaker compares love with an object and cites reason for is argument why love should or should not be like this. Though each object presents a different idea, each concludes that love should be an ever-lasting experience knowing no boundary. After each conjunction, there is a pause that gives the poem a certain slow pace keeping with the mood. The single stanza induces certain compactness. Besides ample amount of visual imagery creating picturesque effects, the poet effectively uses gustatory imagery like pepper, honey, where pepper has been rejected for reducing appetite, honey is rejected for being too common. Such contrastive use of imagery enriches the thematic complexity of the poem and adds to the overall effect. The poet does not use rhyme and it is

more like casual conversation in which the lover keeps on saying and the beloved plays the role of the silent listener much like Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. The tone is informal keeping with the theme. Use of alliteration combined with the slow rhythm produces a melody, appropriate for love lyrics.

"Old Merina Theme", as the name suggests, is a characteristic Malagasy love lyric, Merina being the 'highlander' Malagasy ethnic group of Madagascar. The poem is one of finest hain-teny poems, the form in which Ranaivo excels. The poem consists of twenty short stanzas of irregular line number. The language is pretty metaphoric. The movement of the poem is from simple to complex experience. The speaker compares his intense love for his beloved with natural objects highlighting the simplicity and purity of love. Gradually the difficulties of love are revealed. But the poem ends with an optimistic note that love can overcome all hurdles. The sentences are very short and consist mostly of monosyllabic words that add to the force of the poem. The tone is informal and conversational. But the readers are not the direct audience; the lines are addressed to the beloved, the silent listener of the monologue like "The Common Lover's Song". The imagery of the poem is mostly from the natural world and very picturesque. The image of birds returning to the nests, cascades of Farahantsana tumbling; water disappearing in the sand have kinaesthetic effect and add to the movement of the poetry. Mist disappearing in the pond, dark night overtaking the earth carry an ominous tone and apparently suggests a doomed love. Though the 'eternal moonlight' will guide the lovers, the implication of perpetual night cannot be overlooked. There is a growing sense of gloom in the poem. The speaker is caught between certainty and uncertainty. The repeated use of the subordinating conjunction 'but' underscores the dilemma, while the careful use of epanaphora suggests desperation on the part of the speaker. Punctuation marks are used very carefully. Comma in every line and pauses that follow make the reader move slow and sets the proper mood keeping with the theme. The pauses increase as the poem progresses and intensify the atmosphere of the poem. Almost in every sentence the speaker

addresses the beloved with 'my dear', 'my darling', 'my love'. Excessive use of apostrophe subtly suggests perhaps the silent listener is reluctant to hear. Thus the speaker constantly seeks her attention. Towards the end, the speaker tries to persuade the beloved to 'open up' which may carry a sexual implication. The speaker assures his love for her through repetitive proclamations. The poem that began with the speaker's declaration of his unconditional love, pure as nature itself, ends with a plea for reciprocation.

"Song of a Young Girl" is one of complex lyric poems of Flavien Ranaivo. As the name suggests, the poem is from the perspective of a young girl. With the progress of the poem, the complexity of idea also increases. Like most other poems of Ranaivo, the language is highly metaphoric. The central theme is the young girl's unfulfilled love for her self-proclaimed lover who is perhaps unable or unwilling to reciprocate her love. The rush of thoughts in the mind of the young girl is implied through enjambment. The poet carefully uses images to convey the state of mind of the failed lover. Images of natural disasters like storm, flood, fire carry a sense of doom; the restlessness on part of the girl is effectively conveyed through the image of 'threshing floor for rice'. Though the girl claims the young man to be her lover, it sounds unconvincing. The coral, a well known metaphor for love, decorates the attire of the Mistress, not the girl's. The young man's bravery makes him 'blue-bull' in the lover's eye. The alliteration along with the implication of blue, the colour of sky and ocean suggests the intensity of desire. 'The sterile rock' is a transferred epithet used with heightened effect, for it is not the rock but the Young girl's love that suffers from sterility not being reciprocated. The fire crackling the bad grains symbolises the fire in the heart of the failed lover. The image of blade having two edges is suggestive of the two sides of love-constructive and destructive. The idea of wrestling with crocodile perhaps implies the violent but conflicting passion of the young man that makes him 'whirling puzzle'. The concluding part of the poem is suggestive of a journey. The way to the heart of the lover is long, thus hard to complete. A tragic note resonates throughout the poem, carried through

imagery. The imagery of the poem is very picturesque adding to the visual quality of the poem. Heavy use of metaphor enriches the complexity of experience. The uneven sentence distribution is keeping with the theme. The whole poem is in a single stanza implying continuity of thoughts that is conveyed in a manner resembling stream of consciousness. The speaker questions in vain, as they are left unanswered. Comparatively less number of pauses makes the poem a fast read that matches the emotion of the speaker.

“Choice” is a very short lyric by Flavien Ranaivo. Unlike the earlier poems, it is in form of a dialogue, a short conversation between two people, possibly two friends- one questions and one answers. It is divided into two short stanzas, one about ‘the daughter of the new-chief-of-thousand’ and one about ‘the sister of the widow-with-jamerose-perfume’. Interestingly the poet uses hyphens instead of space in descriptions, both of the daughter and the sister- ‘she whose-feet-go-clattering-the-ground’ and the ‘sister of the widow-with-jamerose-perfume’. The unusual use of hyphens suggests an intimate connection between the two ladies and their qualities with which they are associated. As the form is dialogue, the sentences are not very long. The poem begins with a question and the question stirs a vision. The onomatopoeic words add to the sensory effect. The image of night falling along with the proposed love exchange has a sensual implication. The simile used denoting love as coral is quite common in love lyrics. The poet uses varied imagery to enrich the lyrical flavour like olfactory imagery of jamerose perfume, kinaesthetic imagery of feet clattering the hard ground. The language is densely metaphoric. Like most other traditional hain-teny, the poem is also a kind of riddle. Much is left unsaid, unexplained. It is not clear whether the two ladies from two stanzas are the same person. The capriciousness on part of the lady about one of the speakers suggests an older acquaintance that may imply unfulfilled love. On the whole, the poem produces a sense of incomplete love. The love of the speaker is not reciprocated, his offerings are rejected. The pauses of the concluding line indicated by punctuation marks like comma,

colon induce a sombre note suggesting the futility of the efforts.

The poem “Distress”, like the previous poem “Choice” is also in dialogue form- a short conversation between ‘long-haired beauty’ and a ‘young man’ in distress, as suggested by the title. The young man complains of his adverse situation and the lady gives her advice. Answering the question of the lady about his identity and describing his ‘distress’ the young man gives a long sentence using a plenty of punctuation marks like comma and semicolon. Many ideas compressed into the single sentence suggest their interconnectedness. The pace of line is fast denoting the excitement of the speaker. The lady answers in many short sentences suggesting a composed manner. The pace of the line is also slow with many pauses. Though the manner is conversational, language is quite formal especially on the part of the young man indicating a lack of spontaneity. He also appears self-defensive in speech, contrasting a positive quality with slightly negative ones. The lady’s manner of speaking is logical and convincing. She justifies the advices before delivering and answers each complain coming from the young man. Use of alliteration adds to the force. The climax concluding the poem has optimistic tone for pining will be gone; with pining pain may also be gone. Overall the structure of the experience is rather complex. Though the conclusion does not imply any resolution, the optimistic ending blurs the tragic note.

A.R.Na’Allah in his *Globalization, Oral Performance and African Traditional poetry*, observes, “It is always important...to consider the social and community status of the artist creators and the socio-cultural setting where the creativity took place, as extrinsic as both might seem to the textual or artistic content” (Na’Allah 21). Rejecting the post-modern and post-structural view of the ‘death of the author’, he argues, “the idea of the death of the author is totally foreign and, I might say, seems even ridiculous to a critic with a community-oriented literary value of African folk tradition” (Na’Allah 21). To kill the author in African folk tradition is to kill the community as the declaration of the death of the author insists that the

community ceases to exist as an active aspect of creativity. Supporting Na'Allah's claim, it can safely be said that it is impossible to read Malagasy literature rejecting the socio-cultural background of the very place. Indeed it is the flavour of rural Madagascar that is the essence of Ranaivo's lyric poems. Ranaivo may write in French to reach wider audience, but his works are deeply in Malagasy folk tradition that he has desperately tried to save and preserve throughout his life. Though not a fierce Negritude activist like his compatriot Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Ranaivo had supported the cause. His poetry is more deeply anchored in folk culture of Madagascar that has given it its authenticity. Among all other contemporaries, it was Ranaivo who most exploited the rich poetic resources of the hain-teny opening new structural possibilities for modern love poetry. Before independence, most literary artist from Madagascar, like Jacques Rabemananjara, Regis Rajemisa-Raolison believed staunchly in the artists' duty to participate in the effort to resolve the problems of the country. This is the main reason why principal themes of their works centre on the lyrical expression of the poet's pride and love for the national past and his determination in the struggle for freedom and justice. Ranaivo's works, on the other hand, is less concerned with political affairs but they do exhibit the pride and love for Malagasy cultural tradition. Landscapes of rural Madagascar are the settings for most of his poetry that is enriched with Malagasy proverbs, symbols and rhythms. As observed by Edris Makward, "in an era where the formerly colonized world perceived literature and art in general as always functional and committed, Ranaivo writes apparently without any affection or regret in an art for art's sake vein" (Makward 210). He stands apart from all other contemporaries. His themes centre on the chaste fluttering of the lover, the pains of separation and distance and the humorous and witty confessions of the village lovers. Works of very few other modern Malagasy poets are so deeply rooted, both thematically and in its form and inspiration, in the tradition of the ancient Malagasy hain-teny than Ranaivo's. While the settings of rural Madagascar adds to the appropriate mood, it also offers, as suggested by Rita Barnard, "the exotic appeal of a

remote place with strange physical and human scenery" (Barnard 19). Though not an active member of Negritude movement, Ranaivo, as it appears, also believed like Senghor that "to be an African, a negro, is to belong to this 'natural' world where man is in communion with nature, where learning, wisdom and courage come from the resources of nature and not from the artifice or craft of man" (Egudu 41). In Ranaivo's lyric poems, nature and human beings are assimilated in a single entity. Introducing flora and fauna of Madagascar, Ranaivo celebrates peasant folklore, indigenous practices, Malagasy traditional values. O. R. Dathorne observes, "although an anonymous intermediary, he [the artist] was expected to reorder the group experience, not merely because there was a 'need to create an atmosphere' but because he was ultimately responsible to that absolute ideal of art present in the collective memory of the tribe (Dathorne 8). "The stated aim of the French was to impart their culture to the native inhabitants of their colonies" (Moss and Valestuk 291). Ranaivo adopted the language for a different purpose, but his literary works are deeply rooted in native Malagasy culture. His translations of ancient Malagasy poems into French bear the evidence of his sincere efforts to introduce the native culture of Madagascar to the larger world. While his contemporary poets were politically committed to nation, Ranaivo was culturally committed to his native land. It is retreat to the Malagasy classical dialogue love poetry hain-teny that has animated and fertilized the love poems of Flavien Ranaivo. In modern African literature, even nature has been politicised. "African literature on environment invokes environment and challenges capitalist industrialism through transnational engagements and the visionless government policies that are not people-oriented" (Okuyade xiii). But Ranaivo keeps away from such engagements. Nature in his works is uncorrupted, charming and blissful.

Ranaivo's poems display a kind of simplicity and innocence that matches the theme. Even when the complexities of love experiences are conveyed, it is done through simple expression that touches the readers' hearts at once. Taking "Old Merina Theme" as example, difficulties of love is expressed

in simplest manner possible, just as the ways to overcome the hurdles:

The door is closed, my darling,

But my heart is open

This single line explains everything: Love can transcend all barriers. "The Common Lover's Song" has the similar kind of innocence. It is sincere plea to the beloved to love in a manner that is ever-lasting, ever-enduring, and ever-growing. The comparisons that the speaker makes are ingenuous and metaphoric. Even it is a song of a common lover, love should not be common like honey, rather it should be an extra-ordinary experience. The carefully chosen contrasting metaphors inform the thematic richness of the poem. Poems like "Choice", "Distress" have dialogue form, an original hain-teny tradition and pose riddles before the readers; thus are simultaneously intellectual and emotional exercise. In "Song of a Young Girl", complexities of love are explored in deceptively simple style. With delicate portrayal of psychology of a young girl, the poem is Ranaivo's one of finest achievements. "Song of a Young Girl", "Old Merina Theme", "The Common Lover's Song" are more general in nature; "Choice", "Distress" are concerned with individual experience. But all five poems are deeply rooted in Malagasy folk tradition, with images, proverbs and symbols particular to Malagasy, more precisely Merina culture. They are full of suggestiveness and local colour. Both "Old Merina Theme", "Song of a Young Girl" map the emotional journey of the devoted lover but the passionate and composed tone of "Old Merina Theme" is replaced by an impatient and distressed one in "Song of a Young Girl". Spontaneous generosity and conquering power of love is celebrated in "Old Merina Theme". In "Common Lover's Song", innocent and impassioned plea of the lover raises the noble experience to a level of sublime exaltation and a sentiment to be cherished by humanity. "Song of a Young Girl" is more practical rather than sentimental. The speaker comes to learn how to pace life and live in present reality. Distress is the celebration of life and optimism. Dreaming is necessary for a better reality. One has to 'sink' before rising. The dialogue form gives a personal

touch to the poem, but the appeal is universal. Ranaivo escapes any political association so far as his poetic works are concerned. His poetry provides genuine enjoyment and pleasure to any poetry lover and is not confined to any time and space.

In the essay, "African Feminism: Toward a new politics of Representation", Gwendolyn Mikell discusses the activities that "mark the willingness of African women to engage in actions and dialogue with the goal of mediating gender differences and restoring women to valued roles and statuses through constitutional and legal means" (Mikell 703). Whereas women's declining status before independence was directly related to the oppressive control of the colonial regime, the continued male suppression of African women in postcolonial Africa cannot be ignored. The gendered nature of pre-independent African literature is reflective of women's subordinate position in the society that is carried forward to a great extent to post independent era. Gender, according to Mary Klages refers to "a set of signifiers attached to sexually dimorphic bodies and these signifiers work to divide social practices and relations into the binary opposition of male/female and masculine/feminine" (Klages 92). This confinement into binary division is almost unavoidable. All trivial pleasures are associated with woman as if they are incapable of sombre or serious thoughts-

She was proud ;

was it because she wore a lamba thick

and studded with coral?

The binary that rests on patriarchal set up associates all that is irrational, immoral, illogical, trivial with women. Helene Cixous, in her essay "Sorties: Out and Out" argues "women is always associated with passivity in philosophy....Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought" (Cixous 55). In Ranaivo's lyric, the earnest plea to break through the passivity highlights the nature of this passivity as essentially feminine one.

Open up, I'll tell you secrets

Open up, so we can talk

Open up, I love you!

The beloved's expression is unrecorded but the desperate appeal to 'open up' underscores an unwillingness on the part of beloved, an obvious extension of passivity. In "Common Lover's Song" also, the absence of beloved's voice is discernable. Luce Irigaray, in "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream", deconstructs the active/passive binary opposition that is important in Freud's sexual universe. She argues, "Woman cannot be involved in hearing or producing a discourse...The enigma is woman will constitute the target, the object, the stake of a masculine discourse...which would not consult her, would not concern her" (Irigaray 644). The common lover's plea for an extraordinary love experience does not involve ladylove's voice, thus reinforcing patriarchy's marginalizing tendency towards women. Apart from this exclusion if we consider social aspects, a woman's social status is determined by the quality of her being married or attractiveness towards the male members of the society, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observes, "...a wedding ring will automatically make her seem worthy of respect, while not wearing wedding ring would make her easily dismissible. That's why being newly bedded can make a girl proud.

She was proud;

Was it because she wore a lamba thick

And studded with coral

Or because they are newly bedded?

Even the identity of a woman rests on her relationship to the male-

- Who is she-whose-feet-go-clattering-the-hard-ground?
- The daughter of the new chief-of-thousand.

Michele Barrett in her essay "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender" discusses the politics of identity and representation "in terms of sexual differences...what has to be grasped is precisely the production of differences through systems of representation, the work of representation produces difference that cannot be known in advance" (Barrett 158). Juliet Mitchell echoes the similar opinion in her "Femininity, Narrative and

Psychoanalysis"- "Here we are: women. What are our lives to be about? Who are we? Domesticity, personal relations, personal intimacies, stories" (Mitchell 149). "The Water-Seeker" thematically revolves round this domesticity highlighting women's confinement. The body is 'soulless' but it do ruffle the soul of the soul of others. In her seminal work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir observes, "The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage...Marriage is the reference by which single woman is defined" (Beauvoir 451). Marriage is important as it dictates the status of women. The inability to get married to the lover frustrates the young girl-

We are lovers,

but he won't marry me.

Even after marriage, the woman is expected to be a submissive wife, full of love, care and self-sacrifice. Elaine Showalter observes, "The middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood...prescribed a woman who would be a perfect lady, an Angel in the house, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity and religiosity, queen in her own realm of the Home" (Showalter 125). "The Common Lover's Song" highlights this desire for the 'perfect lady' whose love should not be common as honey but expensive and enduring as the silver coin. "Old Merina Theme" rests on the similar desire for the 'pure' faithful lover. Though Ranaivo's poems are apparently simple love lyrics written in art for art's sake vein, such feminist analysis highlights the thematic complexities leaving room for further research.

To conclude, it would not be hyperbole to say that Flavien Ranaivo deserves a seat among one of the finest lyric poet of not only Madagascar but the entire African continent. But he is one of the most underrated poets in African Literature that is mostly dominated by works with political interest. His works are deceptively simple with layers of complexity to be explored gradually. His free use of Malagasy symbols, proverbs, rhythms has resulted in majestic poetic verse that requires knowledge of Malagasy history and culture as well as sophisticated poetic interpretation. Ranaivo perhaps is the only poet of twentieth century who escapes ideological

classification prevailing in contemporary Africa. He fits neither with the poets of negritude like his contemporary Rabemananjara, nor with the preceding generation of writers whose stance corresponds to an unquestioned acceptance of French assimilation policy. "Madagascar is country still famous for its verbal arts, particularly folk tales, proverbs and poetry- traditions practiced throughout the island by orators respected for the energy and fluency of their art form" (McElroy 22). Ranaivo is undoubtedly one of the most prominent figures responsible for introducing Malagasy culture and folk tradition to the outer world. His ingenuity is marked by his search for violent contrasts, his taste for ellipsis; one feels all the desire to find in French the subtleties of the Malagasy language. He makes it present in his verses by the stripping of the sentence, the removal of the words-tool, the use of dashes to agglutinate the words like Malagasy suitcases. Though his theme is that of love, there is a touch of unexplained melancholy which is like the mark of the highlands of Madagascar; vague and throbbing sadness, desire to return to past glory. Huge volumes of Ranaivo's lyrics call for attention of the researchers. It is unfortunate that such treasure of lyric poems have been neglected for so long.

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