



Rain: And Other Stories

Mia Couto

Eric M. B. Becker, Translator

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Mia Couto's *Rain and Other Stories* is reminiscent of centuries-old legends told and retold from one generation to the next. They read like stories designed to preserve a culture's history, traditions, and way of life. These stories, however, are decades, not centuries old, and arise from the blood, ashes, and ruins left behind by Mozambique's fifteen-year-long civil war. Instead of attempting to resurrect memories of all that was destroyed, they explore mystical kingdoms accessible only to those who, through the loss of all they held most dear, discovered that life and death's greatest treasures are invincible.

Nothingness weaves through these stories as if nothing could be more substantial or meaningful. A grandson searches the other side of the lake for strange visitors from another time and place, only to see "less than no one." Then, suddenly, "the nothing" is interrupted by his grandfather's voice. An old man, rendered "nothing more than a sigh" in response to being ordered to leave the only home he's ever known, boldly applies "a second coat of silence" upon being commanded to leave a second time.

Even the nothingness of linguistic voids are used to their best advantage. When an ideal word or phrase fails to exist in the English language, this void becomes a laboratory where words are cajoled into serving functions not normally within their job descriptions. The blind man, upon suffering the loss of the companion who did so much more than merely tend to him, experiences an overwhelming sensation of being "dis-tended to."

Were the phrase "all that remained was absence" to be embedded in any other collection, it might signify grief or hopelessness, but in Mia Couto's *Rain*, translated from Portuguese by Eric M. B. Becker, it promises the opposite.

LINDA THORLAKSON (January/February 2019)

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