

Ada's Room

Adas Raum

Presented by: Kyung-Ho Cha

Sharon Dodua Otoo's novel *Adas Raum* (*Ada's Room*) is a political novel that deals with issues such as slavery, colonialism, racism, and violence against women in different historical periods. The novel highlights the links between individual fates and larger social and historical power structures. It emphasises the role of the collective in resisting political violence.

Adas Raum was published in 2021. The book has been translated into Italian (2022), Dutch (2022), Japanese (2023) and English (2023). The plot spans from the 15th century to the present. A complex narrative structure links slavery, the Great Famine (An Gorta Mór) in Ireland, the Holocaust and contemporary experiences of racism in four time periods (1459, 1848, 1945, 2019). The main character is Ada, who is first introduced as an African woman in the 15th century. She is reborn as Lady Ada King in 19th century England, then as the Polish woman Adelajda Marianska in the 20th century, and finally as Augusta Adanne Lamptey, a black woman born in London, raised in Ghana and later living in Germany. Other persons who play an important role in her different lives are also reincarnated. Unknown to Ada, a being accompanies her and travels with her through time. It inhabits various material objects such as a broom, a door knocker or a passport. This being is in contact with God.

The story begins in 1459 in Ghana. Ada loses her second child. At the funeral, she places a golden pearl bracelet with the child. Guilherme, a Portuguese merchant who wants to take possession of new colonies on behalf of the Crown, tries to steal the bracelet. Ada is shot dead when she resists Guilherme. The bracelet is found and ends up in Europe.

The next timeline begins in 1848, the year of a series of revolutions in Europe. Ada, who has been reborn as a mathematician, has an affair with Charles Dickens. Lizzie is her trusted servant who has fled Ireland with her brother because of the famine. Ada's husband Lord King finds out about her affair. He had asked her to show him the bracelet he had given her. Ada has entrusted it to Lizzie, who is unable to retrieve it from its hiding place in time. Her furious husband shoots Ada.

Ada is born in Poland for the third time. The story takes place in 1945 when Ada is a forced prostitute in the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp. Her best friend is Linde, who receives a stolen bracelet from a guard called Walde. The bracelet attracts the attention of SS officer Helmut Wilhelm. During an argument, the bracelet falls to the ground. Ada takes hold of it and flees, whereupon she is shot.

The final story is set in 2019, when Boris Johnson has been elected Prime Minister. Brexit is imminent. Ada, who was born in London and then moved to Ghana, is studying in Berlin, where she lives with her half-sister Elle. By chance, she meets Mr Wilhelm, the son of the Nazi officer who is in the possession of the bracelet. When Mr Wilhelm has a breakdown, he has a vision in which he

relives the past. He wants to return the bracelet to Ada, but she refuses. The novel ends with the birth of their daughter.

The novel *Adas Raum* is infused with cosmological myths, proverbs and symbols from Ghanaian folklore and religion which are translated into German prose. The idea of the transmigration of souls and the Sankofa symbol play a central role.

The novel can be linked to the literary and cultural movements of Afropolitanism and the idea of the Afro-European. The term Afropolitanism, as used by Achille Mbembe, describes a cosmopolitan attitude of people living in Africa or in the African diaspora. This cosmopolitanism with African roots does not exclude universalism and cultural particularism. On the contrary: Afropolitanism assumes that the universal is realised in different historical forms of the particular since no single culture can claim to represent the whole of humanity.

The idea of the Afro-European can be seen as a variant of Afropolitanism in relation to Europe. It attempts to change the image of Europe and emphasises the presence of Africans in Europe and how they appropriate European culture to create an Afro-European culture. In Otoos's novel, European history is appropriated and combined with African myth and knowledge. The visions of Afropolitanism and of Afro-European culture are given a universal moral appeal. The idea of transmigration serves to transcend artificial ideological boundaries of ethnicity and culture, which are all manifestations of humanity. The story of humanity is told not only as a story of violence but also as a story of mutual care.

LANGUAGE: German / Deutsch

PUBLISHERS: Riverhead Books, S. Fischer Verlag, MacLehose Press, Aantal pagina's 272, hakusuisha, Stagione 2022

CENSORSHIP STATUS:

Politics of literature • Political novel • Fiction • book club

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Audience:

Reading Groups