

depicted in harrowing and heartbreaking ways in Mattawa's slender volume of poems.

Mattawa approaches his subject with delicate lyricism, relying on image and sound rather than direct statement. In this evocative approach, various voices emerge to speak through his verse—refugees, human traffickers, rescue workers—without ever really settling into a set perspective. Images sometimes float freely from their contexts, and as appropriate for the subject, there is a sense of rootlessness, of drifting. The book is thus polemical only in that it is an act of witness, humanizing the migrants in their own voices. One poem, for instance, traces the speaker's attempt to connect through his cell phone with a beloved left behind: "An empty once-crowded barracoon / where the signal is one ribbon strong. / It is from here that I send all my love." Such moments help to personalize for the reader those involved in events that might otherwise be numbing in their proportions.

Mattawa blurs the line between exile and pilgrimage, between refugee and pilgrim. Doing so suggests there is something sacred in the trauma of the homeless, an encounter

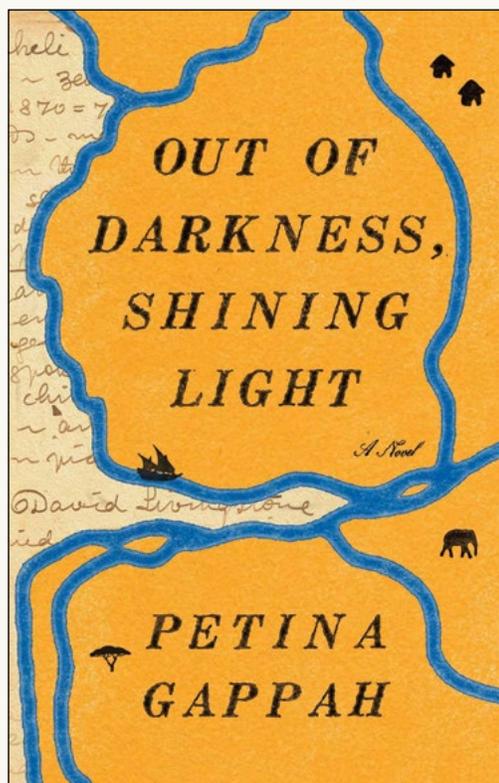
with the mystery of suffering and of survival. He writes of drownings, fuel burns, and other horrors experienced in human migration, and in doing so he confronts the reader with a reality far too easy to ignore in our comfort and isolation. But rather than throwing up a wall of factual reporting—the kind of thing that can contain the tragedy and safely distance us from it—Mattawa invites the reader to try to inhabit the perspectives of the various voices of migration.

"You remember weddings and feasts.  
/ Hail pocked the copper dust, and you, /

opened mouthed, gazed at the world," he writes in "Psalm for the Balkan Route." The undefined "you" in these lines reads like an invitation to place ourselves in the experience. Yet, as the poem gives us memories that are not our own, the pronoun is also a reminder that we can never fully inhabit these experiences. This is a path to compassion without arrogance and mystery without indifference.

Benjamin Myers  
Oklahoma Baptist University

PETINA GAPPAH



Petina Gappah  
*Out of Darkness,  
Shining Light*

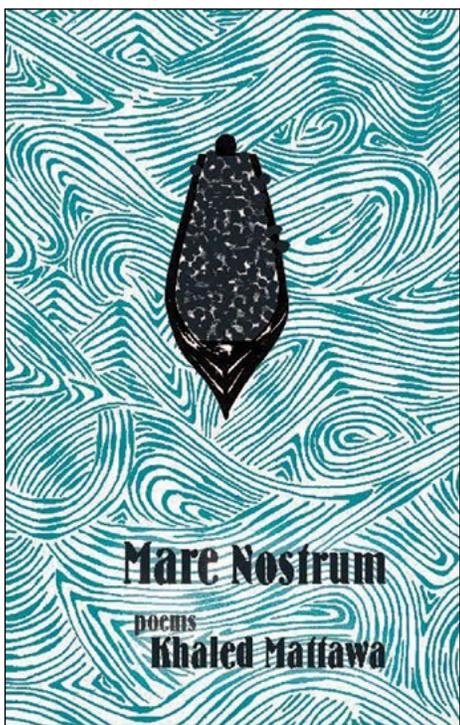
New York. Scribner. 2019.  
320 pages.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE was a household name to late nine-

teenth-century Brits. His story was one of colonialist triumph, of British imperial masculinity's simultaneous love and disdain for Africa. Zimbabwean author Petina Gappah's new novel, however, takes a different approach to Livingstone, beginning not with presumption but with pity and duty: "This is how we carried out of Africa the poor broken body of Bwana Daudi." In Gappah's novel, Livingstone is not the great explorer but a dead body, a burden to the Africans and Arabs who traveled with him. He has become an inert figure whose final history has yet to be writ-

ten by the colonial world but whose legacy is being actively shaped by the men and women with whom he spent his final years—the men and women whose stories were forgotten as Livingstone's was immortalized.

Gappah's opening words reenvision the life of the "great man" Livingstone, summarizing the entire project of her powerful



Keum Suk Gendry-Kim  
*Grass*

Trans. Janet Hong. Montreal. Drawn & Quarterly. 2019. 480 pages.

AN ORAL HISTORY in comics form, *Grass* tells the story of Korean national Lee Ok-Sun, who, at the age of fifteen, was abducted into sexual slavery as one of tens of thousands of “comfort women” serving (being raped by) Japanese soldiers during World War II. Sensitive and

understated, this rendering of one woman’s horrific experiences—both during the war and after—does not shy from hard images. The artist-author’s pairing of spare words with lovely black-and-white ink artwork demonstrates that for some things there are not only no words but also really no images. Pages alternate between clearly defined scenes, partial images, and illegible smears of ink; between light and darkness; full-page bleeds and boxy frames. Natural imagery—trees, grasses, stars, flowers—scatter through and cradle the narrative,

reminders of the inaccessible beauty and open spaces that surround these women’s closed and difficult daily lives.

At times, the narrative moves very slowly. When this works best, the pace demands the reader stay in a difficult experience or offers quiet spaces for reflection. Yet, perhaps the result of documenting a life derailed, in this slow pace the story itself can feel a bit lost. The art is skillful and imaginative; the tale could use a stronger throughline—and a more nuanced development of who Lee became as an



novel. The words are spoken by Livingstone’s cook, Halima, a Nubian former-bondswoman who grew up in the service of the Omani sultan’s representative in Zanzibar. Halima is one of two narrators in Gappah’s novel; the other narrator is Jacob Wainwright, a Baganda freed in childhood from slavery and sent by the British to Bombay, India, to learn Christianity and “civilized” ways. Both narrators are semi-

unreliable, relating separate visions of the various members of Livingstone’s party as they journey nearly a year from the interior to the east coast of Africa to Bagamoyo, a hub of the Indian Ocean slave trade.

*Out of Darkness, Shining Light* turns Livingstone’s love and revulsion for Africa back on him, using the real personnel of Livingstone’s expedition to navigate how his legacy has evolved in the wake of Brit-

ish colonialism and the establishment of nations like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—all affected by Livingstone. Moreover, Gappah shows that even at the height of European colonialism, East Africa was a confluence of forces: British, Portuguese, Omani, Indian, and African. Gappah goes beyond the national histories that so many postcolonial novels provide and pays no attention to the national boundaries that will be drawn; instead, dozens of African tribes, kingdoms, and clans intermingle, their differences alive on the page, resisting the historical processes of nation-making that Europe will impose.

We need novels like Gappah’s *Out of Darkness, Shining Light*, for they remember the stories that have been papered over by history—by whiteness and empire. As Gappah notes in her acknowledgments, these stories may not be real, but we also know that the histories we read are not totally real either, and stories like Halima’s and Jacob’s, told through Gappah’s expert characterization, are not not-real. They are the possibilities always at the edges of the master narratives we learn; they need only to be brought out of the darkness.

Sean Guynes  
Michigan State University