BOOK REVIEW

Susanna L. Sacks. *Networked Poetics: The Digital Turn in Southern African Poetry*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2024. 215 pp. Notes. Index. $99.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9781625347688.

Susanna L. Sacks's *Networked Poetics: The Digital Turn in Southern African Poetry* explores critically the pivotal roles played by social media platforms in the shaping of contemporary anglophone poetry. Focusing on anglophone poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, Sacks argues that the digital world branches into other spaces that contribute to our collective understanding of its functionalities, aesthetics, and the continuous interrogation of poetic representation in the digital age. She reflects on how performance poetry, slam poetry, hashtags, chants, WhatsApp groups, and so on are instrumental to the production of publics and agencies that inform both the digital space and the offline space. Discussing the propagation of poetry in the popular sphere and elite space, Sacks's critical intervention foregrounds institutional supports in the promotion of poetry and the function of algorithms in the evaluation of digital poetry. She shows how digital poetry and platforms are youth-driven—especially in the African countries examined in the book.

Divided into five chapters, each chapter is anchored by the critical responses to anglophone poetry and its digital networks. In the first chapter, Sacks interrogates the place of hashtags, poetry, and chants in the digital publics. She engages how "hashtagged and hashtaggable communications extend bodily action from street to screen and, crucially, back to the street" (23). Here, Sacks renders aptly the movement from the digital space to the street. This shift or movement from the digital space to the street validates the impact of hashtag, poetry, and chants in a local or global discourse. It acknowledges their potency to mediate or frame communication on social media platforms before leading to grounded action in the street. The second chapter attends to the aesthetics of digital networks and their affective tendency on literary forms in South Africa, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. Citing digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube as sites of digital networks and affordances, Sacks examines how the strength of digital networks affects digital platforms and the works shared on these platforms. She explores the effects of digital algorithm on contemporary literary networks and how this controls the visibility and virality of the work shared online.

The third chapter explores slam poetry/spoken word poetry across regional networks. Sacks addresses its transmission across virtual and grounded spaces, and how audience participation and institutional funding also shape spoken word poetry and its sustainability. For example, a poem shared online can be

read in a physical setting with people rendering the poem alongside the poet. The virality of the poem also matters in terms of its appreciation or appraisal. The audience interaction with the poem also determines the meaning and reception of the poem. The fourth chapter examines the ways digital networks produce cosmopolitan audiences. Sacks states that "national arts festivals compel poets to perform their local, particular identities to transnational, cosmopolitan audiences …" (121). Using the Tumaini Festival in Dowa, Malawi, Sacks intends to capture the stateless subjects—the refugees and their quest for nationhood. With this demand from art festivals, Sack contends that the poets (the refugees) become "stateless" as they "navigate between the cosmopolitan imaginaries of digital publication and the fetishizing demands for "authentic performances" (123). Sacks also samples festivals such as Poetry Africa and Lake of Stars to discuss the roles played by the audience in shaping the themes of the poems performed by the performers.

In the last chapter of the book, Sacks considers the digital world and the cultural institutions that affect the reception of poetry. Using Koleka Putuma's rare success as a poet, Sacks maps the shifting structures of the power that inform cultural capital in the digital age. Included in the Forbes Africa's "Under 30" top creatives to watch in 2018, Putuma's collection, *Collective Amnesia* became an instant success after publication. Also, one of her poems, "Waters" recorded a huge success on digital platforms and live performances. Thus, Sacks argues that Putuma succeeds in creating a cultural capital that helped her gain popularity through social media marketing and live performances. She states that Putuma's poetry "responds to a broader, popular vision of literature as connective tissue, bridging discursive fields in a networked public sphere" (159).

In conclusion, Sacks's *Networked Poetics: The Digital Turn in Southern African Poetry* provides a broad treatise on the aesthetics and networks that impact African poetry in the digital age. In all the five chapters, Sacks's acute understanding of the digital space is evident in her extensive engagement of topics that bring the readers face-to-face with the realities surrounding African poetry. Sacks's timely and excellent intervention adds, tremendously, to the compelling books authored by scholars like Shola Adenekan and James Yeku on African digital literature and popular culture. While Shola Adenekan's *African Literature in the Digital Age: Class and Sexual Politics in New Writing from Nigeria and Kenya* and James Yeku's *Cultural Netizenship: Social Media, Popular Culture, and Performance in Nigeria* unpack pivotal issues on poetry, media, popular culture, and performance from Nigeria and Kenya, Sacks's *Networked Poetics: The Digital Turn in Southern African Poetry* excels in deepening our knowledge of the roles played by digital platforms in transforming African poetry in South Africa, Malawi, and Zimbabwe.

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