

= Jean @-@ Joseph Rabearivelo =

Jean @-@ Joseph Rabearivelo (4 March 1901 or 1903 ? 22 June 1937) , born Joseph @-@ Casimir Rabearivelo , is widely considered to be Africa 's first modern poet and the greatest literary artist of Madagascar . Part of the first generation raised under French colonization , Rabearivelo grew up impoverished and failed to complete secondary education . His passion for French literature and traditional Malagasy poetry prompted him to read extensively and educate himself on a variety of subjects , including the French language and its poetic and prose traditions . He published his first poems as an adolescent in local literary reviews , soon obtaining employment at a publishing house where he worked as a proofreader and editor of its literary journals . He published numerous poetry anthologies in French and Malagasy , as well as literary critiques , an opera , and two novels .

Rabearivelo 's early period of modernist @-@ inspired poetry showed skill and attracted critical attention but adhered strictly to traditional genre conventions . The surrealist poetry he composed beginning in 1931 displayed greater originality , garnering him strong praise and acclaim . Despite increasing critical attention in international poetry reviews , Rabearivelo was never afforded access to the elite social circles of colonial Madagascar . He suffered a series of personal and professional disappointments , including the death of his daughter , the French authorities ' decision to exclude him from the list of exhibitors at the Universal Exposition in Paris , and growing debt worsened by his philandering and opium addiction . Following Rabearivelo 's suicide by cyanide poisoning in 1937 , he became viewed as a colonial martyr .

The death of Rabearivelo occurred just prior to the emergence of the Négritude movement , by which time the Malagasy poet had established an international reputation among literary figures such as Léopold Sédar Senghor as Africa 's first modern poet . The Government of Madagascar declared Rabearivelo its national poet upon independence in 1960 . The legacy and influence of his works continue to be felt and his works are a focus of ongoing academic study . Modern Malagasy poets and literary figures including Elie Rajaonarison have cited him as a major inspiration . A street and a high school in Antananarivo have been named after him , as well as a dedicated room in the National Library of Madagascar .

= = Biography = =

= = = Childhood = = =

Jean @-@ Joseph Rabearivelo , born Joseph @-@ Casimir on 4 March 1901 or 1903 in Ambatofotsy (north of Antananarivo) , Madagascar , was the only child of an unwed mother descended from the Zanadralambo (" sons of Ralambo ") caste of the Merina andriana (nobles) . When the French colonized Madagascar in 1897 , Merina nobles including Rabearivelo 's mother lost the privileges , prestige , and wealth to which they had been entitled under the former monarchy , the Kingdom of Imerina . Madagascar had been a French colony for less than a decade when Rabearivelo was born , situating him among the first generation of Malagasy to grow up under the colonial system . He first studied at the Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes school in the affluent neighborhood of Andohalo , then transferred to the prestigious Collège Saint @-@ Michel , where he was expelled for lack of discipline , poor academic performance , and his reluctance to become religiously observant . He ended his studies at École Flacourt in 1915 . He is believed to have published his first poems at age 14 in the literary review Vakio lty under the pen name K. Verbal .

After leaving school , he worked a variety of low @-@ skilled jobs , including as a lace designer , an errand boy , and a secretary and interpreter to a district administrator . During this period he developed a passion for French 19th and 20th century literature and refined his fluency in the French language ; he also began teaching himself English , Spanish , and Hebrew . He changed his name to Jean @-@ Joseph Rabearivelo to have the same initials as Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau , while continuing to occasionally use pseudonyms , including " Amance Valmond " and " Jean Osmé " . He was particularly attracted to poets and writers who were outcasts in their own society ,

including Baudelaire and Rimbaud .

= = = Early period = = =

In 1920 , Rabearivelo was hired as an assistant librarian at the Cercle de l'Union social club . That same year he drafted his first book , a short novel written in the Malagasy language . He began to correspond with a wide range of writers around the world , including André Gide , Paul Valéry , Jean Amrouche , Paul Claudel , and Valéry Larbaud , and spent large sums to buy books and ship them to Madagascar . By these means he amassed a diverse collection that constituted the richest library on the island . In 1924 he took a job as a proofreader at the publishing house Imprimerie de l'Imerina , a position he would continue to occupy for the rest of his life . In 1921 he befriended high level French colonial bureaucrats who shared his passion for French literature , including Robert Boudry , the colony 's financial manager , and Pierre Camo , Madagascar 's postal magistrate and founder of the literary magazine 18 ° Latitude Sud .

He published his first collection of poems , *La coupe de cendres* (" The Cup of Ashes ") in 1924 ; the same year he also translated twelve previously unpublished Malagasy language poems into French and published them in literary magazines , including 18 ° Latitude Sud in Antananarivo and *La Vie* in Paris . This publication launched him into the intellectual and cultural circles of Antananarivo high society , where he established himself as Madagascar 's leader not only in poetry and prose , but as an esteemed journalist , art critic , translator , and writer of essays and plays .

In 1925 he published a historical novel called *L'Aube Rouge* (" The Red Dawn ") about the last years of the Kingdom of Imerina . In it he honored Rainandriamampandry , the governor of Toamasina who was executed by the French in 1896 for his suspected role in the Menalamba rebellion . Rabearivelo published his second and third poetry anthologies , *Sylves* (" Woodlands ") and *Volumes* , in 1927 and 1928 respectively . He also published his second historical novel in 1928 , *L'interférence* (" Interference ") , which depicts the life of a noble family from the last years of the monarchy until colonization . Throughout the 1920s , he translated the works of foreign poets and writers into Malagasy , including Baudelaire , Rimbaud , Laforgue , Rilke , Whitman , and Góngora ; he also translated traditional Malagasy kabary (oratory) into French for publication in French language literary reviews .

In 1926 , Rabearivelo married Mary Razafitrimo , the daughter of a local photographer , and together they had five children . He was also a womanizer and abused alcohol and opium , growing increasingly dependent on the substances after the death of his daughter . Rabearivelo constantly struggled with debt , and despite his growing fame and artistic success , he was unable to escape from poverty .

= = = Late period = = =

Throughout the 1930s , Rabearivelo joined with other Malagasy poets and writers in an emerging literary movement termed " *Hitady ny Very* " (" The Search for Lost Values ") , which sought to promote the traditional literary and oral arts of Madagascar . Together with fellow artists Charles Rajoeliso and Ny Avana Ramanantoanina , in August 1931 he founded a literary journal called *Ny Fandrosoam baovao* (" New Progress ") to promote Malagasy language poetry . He published two more anthologies of thirty poems each : *Presque Songes* (" Dream Images ") (1931) and *Traduit de la nuit* (" Translated from the Night ") (1932) . As an experiment , he wrote Malagasy and French versions of each poem in these two books ; the French versions were published in 1934 and 1935 respectively . For the remainder of his life he focused primarily on the translation of *hainteny* (traditional Malagasy poetry) into French , work which was published posthumously . He also wrote Madagascar 's first and only opera , *Imaitsoanala* (1935) , named for the legendary heroine mother of King Ralambo ; it was set to music composed by Andrianary Ratianarivo and was performed by Ratianarivo 's Troupe Jeanette at the Municipal Theater of Isotry in Antananarivo .

In 1933 , his three year old daughter Voahangy became ill and died . Rabearivelo was

deeply affected by this loss and was plunged into grief from which he never recovered . His last daughter , who was born in 1936 , he named Velomboahangy (" Voahangy Alive ") . The theme of death became prominent and recurrent in his works and journal .

The colonial high society of Antananarivo showcased Rabearivelo 's work as evidence of the success of the French assimilation policy and the beneficial effects of colonialism in Africa . In his journals , the poet wrote that he felt " used " by the French authorities in Madagascar . Governor Montagné awarded him an affiliation (membre correspondant) with the Académie Malgache in 1932 . But in 1937 , Rabearivelo 's trust in the assimilation messages and gestures of Antananarivo 's colonial high society was betrayed . He was imprisoned for three days for failing to pay taxes , a penalty from which he should have been exempted due to his status as a low @-@ ranking employee of the colonial administration . He had also been promised that he would represent Madagascar at the 1937 Universal Exposition in Paris , but in May 1937 the colonial authorities informed him that he would not be part of the island 's delegation . Consequently , Rabearivelo became embittered toward France and its colonial message of assimilation , a sentiment strongly expressed in his journals . He was likewise rejected by Malagasy high society , who condemned his unconventional behavior and views , particularly in light of his role as husband and father . His compatriots also held him in contempt for his perceived eagerness to embrace the French colonial rule and culture .

Rabearivelo was deeply troubled by these disappointments and his worsening chronic financial troubles , in addition to the continuing grief he felt for the death of his daughter . On 19 June 1937 , a French friend informed him that his hope to eventually earn a higher official role within the administrative authority could never materialize as he was largely self @-@ taught and lacked the required diplomas . Having staked his future on a government career , Rabearivelo began to muse about his own death in his journal , writing " Perhaps one needs to die to be found sincere . "

= = = Death = = =

Rabearivelo committed suicide by cyanide poisoning on the afternoon of 22 June 1937 . He may have been seriously ill with tuberculosis at the time . The morning of his suicide , Rabearivelo completed several unfinished works ; he then took fourteen 250 @-@ milligram quinine capsules with water at 1 : 53 pm , followed at 2 : 37 pm by ten grams of potassium cyanide . Before dying he wrote a final poem and burned the first five volumes of his personal journal , the *Calepins Bleus* (" Blue Notebooks " , 1924 ? 1937) , leaving four volumes of approximately 1 @, @ 800 pages that document his life after 4 January 1933 . In his final journal entries he recorded the detailed experience of his suicide , concluding with his final entry at 3 : 02 pm . At the time of his death , only half of his twenty literary works had been published ; the remainder were printed posthumously .

= = Style and influences = =

Rabearivelo 's first poetic work , *La coupe de cendres* (1924) , demonstrates the evident mastery of meter and rhythm in his earliest works , despite an absence of innovation on the classic models of poetry he uses . The works that follow this initial effort can be broadly clustered into two phases , the first being highly influenced by the symbolist and romantic schools of poetry , and the second reflecting greater creativity and individuality in personal expression , and with a recurrent interest in reconciling a mental image of a " mythic past " with an " alienating modernity " .

In the romantic period , typified by *Sylves* (1927) and *Volumes* (1928) , Rabearivelo 's poems are shorter and reflect a purer form of traditional models . He identified himself and his work as post @-@ symbolist in the early part of his artistic career . Regarding Rabearivelo 's works from this period , editor Jacques Rabemananjara acknowledged the poet 's evident talent but critiqued his over @-@ adherence to form and poetic conventions at the expense of innovation and genuine self @-@ expression .

Beginning in 1931 , his works begin to change in tone and show the influences of surrealism and modernism . His poems become more daring , free , and complex , while also reflecting greater

doubt . According to academic Arnaud Sabatier , this change reflects " the rediscovery and embrace of the sound and images of traditional Malagasy poetry , from which he had previously distanced himself or which he had subjected to the colonial language and culture . " These later works are described by academic Claire Riffard as " his strangest , evoking rural and commonplace images alongside unexpected dreamlike visions , superimposing the new and the forgotten ... " His break from convention in this period offered greater freedom to reconcile his conflicted identity , such as through his bilingual creations , *Presque @-@ Songes* (1931) and *Traduit de la nuit* (1932) .

= = Legacy = =

Rabearivelo has long been considered the first modern poet of Africa . Academic Arnaud Sabatier identifies him as " one of the most important writers of the twentieth century " . He has also been described by Radio France Internationale journalist Tirthankar Chanda as " the founder of the African francophonie " and " the enfant terrible of French literature " . Rabearivelo is the most internationally famous and influential Malagasy literary figure . *Jeune Afrique* described him as " Madagascar 's greatest poet " , a sentiment echoed by Léopold Sédar Senghor , first president of Senegal and founder of the Négritude movement , who called him the " prince of the Malagasy poets " . He was described by academic Claire Riffard as " one of the principal founders of contemporary Malagasy literature " , and following national independence in 1960 , the government of Madagascar affirmed his cultural contributions by promoting him as the island 's national writer .

Rabearivelo struggled throughout his life to reconcile his identity as Malagasy with his aspiration toward French assimilation and connection with the greater universal human experience . He has been depicted as a martyr figure as a result of his suicide following the refusal of French authorities to grant him permission to go to France . He has been the subject of a significant number of books and conferences ; on the fiftieth anniversary of his death , his work was commemorated at events organized in North America , Europe and Africa , including a week @-@ long conference at the University of Antananarivo . Recent scholarship has questioned Rabearivelo 's elevation as a colonial martyr , arguing that the poet was by and large an assimilationist who did not view himself as African .

The Lycée Jean @-@ Joseph Rabearivelo was inaugurated in central Antananarivo on 21 December 1946 in honor of the poet . A room has been dedicated to the poet in the National Library of Madagascar , located in the capital city .

He was included in the seminal volume of poetry of the Négritude movement , Léopold Senghor 's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malgache* (" Anthology of New Black and Malagasy Poetry ") , published in 1948 . He has inspired many Malagasy writers and poets after him , including Elie Rajaonarison , an exemplar of the new wave of Malagasy poetry .

The Francophone University Agency and Madagascar 's National Center for Scientific Research collaborated to publish the entirety of Rabearivelo 's works in three volumes . The first volume , comprising his journal and some of his correspondence with key figures in literary and colonial circles , was printed in October 2010 . The second volume , a compilation of all his previously published works , was released in July 2012 . The remaining 1 @,@ 000 pages of materials produced by Rabearivelo have been published in digital format . The first complete English translation of his masterpiece *Translated from the Night* was published by Lascaux Editions in 2007 .

= = Works = =

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Presque @-@ songes . Antananarivo : Imprimerie de l'Imerina , 1934 .

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Resy hatrany . Antananarivo : Imprimerie nationale , 1988 .

Prose :

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