

08 BOOK REVIEW

BY KELLIE CHAMBERS

LITERARY MISCELLANY

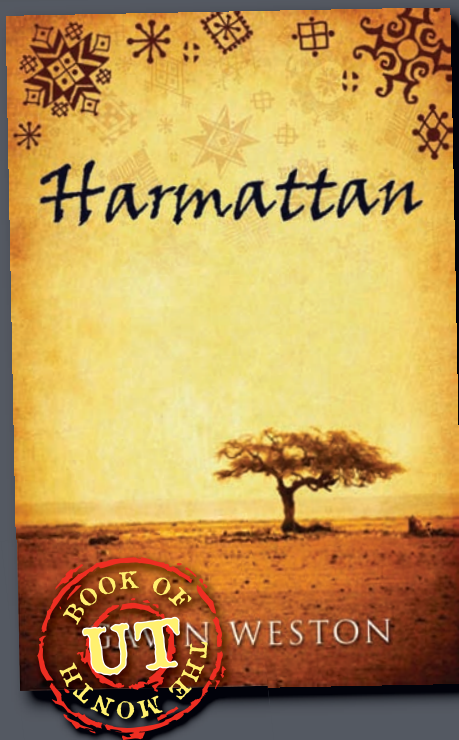
CREATING A STORM

HARMATTAN

By GAVIN WESTON Myrmidon (£16.99)
Published Spring 2012. Available for
pre-order on Amazon, Waterstones, WH Smith

Gavin Weston is one of Northern Ireland's leading visual artists. Spring 2012 will see the release of his debut novel, *Harmattan*, which tells the story of Haoua, a young girl growing up in a remote village in the Republic of Niger. Spirited, independent and intelligent, Haoua has benefitted from a stable home life and a loving and attentive mother. She thrives on her schoolwork, and ultimately dreams of becoming a teacher. As well as playing with her siblings and friends, Haoua loves writing to a family in Ireland who act as her aid sponsors.

However as civil strife mounts in Niger, Haoua finds there is also unrest bubbling beneath the surface of her home life. Her elder brother, Abdelkrim, a serving soldier, quarrels with their father, accusing him of gambling away the money he sends home. Their mother's health begins to deteriorate and it soon become apparent that her illness is much more serious and further advanced than anyone had recognised. It also emerges that their father plans to take a second wife. As these storm clouds form on the horizon, Haoua approaches her twelfth birthday alone and vulnerable for the very first time in her life.



From the opening sentences of *Harmattan*, Weston sets the tone for the novel. Rife with atmospheric and powerful imagery, it is immediately apparent that the story that follows will command the readers' full attention. As well as a remarkable talent for conjuring stark images with his writing, Weston succeeds at making his

novel so compelling through his depiction of Haoua. From the innocent 8 year old girl at the start of the novel to the world weary young woman at the end, Weston's portrayal is remarkable. As a protagonist, Haoua is incredibly likeable. Her naiveté of the world outside her hometown of Wadata is endearing; her courage in the face of the trials she faces as a young child is commendable and her unbreakable spirit is admirable.

By juxtaposing Haoua with Katie and Hope, the two young children from Ireland whom she writes to, Weston emphasises the vast difference in the lives of children from the developing world compared to those in the Western world. Whilst Katie and Hope are allowed to act as carefree children, who holiday in Spain and are rewarded for passing their exams with a pony, Haoua is forced to put her limited education on hold so that she can do extra chores at home as well as act as a parent to her brother and younger sister whilst their mother is ill.

Harmattan is a captivating, heart-breaking and beautifully written debut novel. Over the years Weston has garnered first hand experiences of Niger and consequently his depiction of Haoua and Wadata resonates with authenticity. Whilst his expert use of language creates exquisite prose which you will want to savour, Gavin Weston's unique and distinctive style also hails a new era in Northern Irish literature.



COCO CHANEL: THE LIFE AND LEGEND

By JUSTINE PICARDIE HarperCollins
(£14.99)

The paperback edition of the beautifully illustrated bestselling biography *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* has recently been released. The book, written by Justine Picardie, is the definitive biography of the woman who founded the most successful fashion label in history. As well as being the pioneer of the little black dress, bobbed hair and trousers for women, Chanel's iconic creations were proudly worn by living legends such as Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe.

Picardie has an exquisite writing style which allows her to eloquently explore the life of an icon. Whilst effortlessly weaving together the lost

threads of Chanel's life and unveiling the secrets hidden behind her public persona, *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* reveals the story behind how an abandoned child born into poverty became one of the most influential women in history. This thoroughly researched and impressively presented book is a compulsive and riveting read which enthralls from start to finish.

LOUGH ERNE

By ALAIN LE GARSMEUR and KEITH BAKER
Blackstaff Press (£20).

Blackstaff Press have recently published a new book celebrating the beauty of Lough Erne. This unique collection features over 150 photographs from acclaimed photographer Alain Le Garsmeur and an informative narrative from acclaimed novelist Keith Baker. From the busiest days of summer to ice covered water, Alain's stunning photography captures the magic of the lough year round in his trademark photo-journalistic style. The book also showcases the wealth of history in the area from the carved stone figures on Boa Island to the spectacular Crom Castle estate. *Lough Erne* is a wonderful compilation, which will enchant both those familiar to the area and those seeing it for the first time.

