
The Spirit Machine and other new short stories from Cameroon, ed. by Emma Dawson (Nottingham: Critical Cultural and Communications Press, 2009), pp. 142. ISBN 978 1 905510 21 4 (UK), 978 1 60271 018 4 (USA). £9.99, \$16, ₦12.

Daughters of Eve and other new short stories from Nigeria, ed. by Emma Dawson (Nottingham: Critical Cultural and Communications Press, 2010), pp. 171. ISBN 978 1 905510 27 6 (UK), 978 1 60271 023 6 (USA). £9.99, \$16, ₦12.

Butterfly Dreams and other new short stories from Uganda, ed. by Emma Dawson (Nottingham: Critical Cultural and Communications Press, 2010), pp. 136. ISBN 978 1 905510 30 6 (UK), 978 1 60271 927 6 (USA). £9.99, \$16, ₦12.

Man of the House and other new short stories from Kenya, ed. by Emma Dawson (Nottingham: Critical Cultural and Communications Press, 2011), pp. 253. ISBN 978 1 905510 32 0 (UK), 978 1 60271 029 0 (USA). £12.99, \$20, ₦15.

Reviewed by Jane Wilkinson

New writing in English, or, more specifically, “new world Englishes fiction” is featured in four recent anthologies of short stories from Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya. Emma Dawson, the editor, is specialized in the teaching of World Englishes literature in schools in England and the series is probably designed for educational use, while still undoubtedly likely to appeal to other readers.

All four anthologies follow the same format as they are part of a single project aimed at finding, researching and publishing new and relatively unknown authors from different countries (although not all the writers are “new” or “unknown” within their own country). A call for short stories is made to writers, writing groups, universities and other organizations in the country addressed. Before selecting and accepting the stories submitted, the editor undertakes a journey to the country. Here she performs an act “of ‘listening’”, recording testimonies, gathering information from “those who know” – writers, readers, teachers, critics, those “who are writing the literature *now*”, making new contacts and carrying out research into the history of the country and its culture, criticism and literary events. The call for submissions is then re-opened for a brief period and a final selection is made for publication.

A single format is also used within the anthologies: a map of the country; a general editor's preface illustrating the project; personalized acknowledgements followed by an identical closing formula; an introduction whose first section, "Defining 'World Englishes Literature', shared by all four anthologies, consists in an overview of the definitions: John Talbot Platt, Heidi Weber and Mian Lian Ho's model of "New English" (1984), Jennifer Jenkins's "World Englishes", "first" and "second" diasporas and "English as a lingua franca" (2006), and Braj B. Kachru's 1982 model of "World Englishes" and of "Inner, Outer and Expanding circles". The definitions are also examined more specifically in their relation to postcolonial literatures. The section closes with an invitation to move beyond the tendency to view Anglophone writers in relation to their colonial past, which the editor believes to be the prevalent inflection in previous discussions, exploring the "many other avenues for discussion and appreciation of this enormous body of writing." (13). The second and third sections of the introduction – "World English Literatures in Cameroon [/Nigeria/ Uganda/ Kenya]" and "Write There, Write Now" (or "Write Here, Write Now", which is used, curiously, only in the case of the Ugandan anthology) – are specific to each volume. After providing a summary of the development of literature in the country addressed, the editor devotes a couple of pages to very brief accounts of the stories included, ending with a list of references which however only includes bibliographical details for the works quoted, not those referred to and at times discussed.

The stories themselves are followed by biographical notes and a photograph of each of the contributors. Several of the authors have already published some of their work, although not all the biosketches include indications as to the publishers or even the country of publication. One imagines they are local, but it would have been interesting to have more information – also in order to facilitate access to other work by the same authors. The publishing scene in the different countries is briefly addressed in the "World Literatures in X" part of the introduction, but more information relating to the individual authors would have provided a useful integration. The high quality of their writing is also a confirmation of the importance of local as against foreign publishing for the development of the countries' literature, despite the very considerable difficulties encountered by local presses.

The writers appear to belong to quite different age groups – several are young, some very young, others were born half a century ago – and they range from presidents of the local Writers' Associations to students and others who are publishing for the first time but show considerable talent. Although men outnumber women in three of the anthologies (only one woman writer figures among the Nigerian authors), the Uganda collection boasts five women writers as against three men. FEMRITE, the association of women writers in Uganda, founded in 1995, is clearly a dynamic, stimulating presence in the country, playing a role among the female authors or would-be authors similar to that of the Kwani Trust for writers in general in Kenya. Many of the stories, whether their authors are women or men, deal with questions of gender and sexual orientation, several with the world

of the internet, emailing and social networks, reminding us, incidentally, of the liveliness of African writers' blogs and websites, whether in Africa or in the diaspora, where so much of the new writing circulates. The quality and interest of the stories varies, but this reader at least found all of them original and well worth reading. The impression from all four anthologies is of an extremely lively, varied and promising literary environment, contradicting the fairly widespread opinion that the best African authors are now to be found outside Africa.

While the introduction to the literature previously produced in each of the countries is too brief to allow much comparison with "what is being written *now*" (although, especially in the case of the Ugandan, Cameroonian and in part the Kenyan anthologies, of considerable interest in its indication of the organizations and institutions that promote new writing), the impression is indeed one of novelty. Even where, as in Ba'bila Mutia's "The Spirit Machine" and Oscar Chenyi Labang's "The Visit" (Cameroon), or Ikeogu Oke's "The Discovery" and Alpha Emeka's "Haunted House" (Nigeria), or Ismael M. Akango ADD's "A Night in Hell" (Kenya), 'traditional' figures, beliefs and practices return, the perspective is new and they are usually inserted in a contemporary environment, whether urban or rural (a partial exception, from Cameroon, is Job Fongho Tende's "The Lost Art", set however not in the past but in the future: 2150 and 2153 A.D., and telling the story of a sculptor of religious statues, descended from a lineage of Bantu craftsmen, caught in the conflict between church and state). One is reminded of the work of Okot p'Bitek and, particularly, of Taban lo Liyong's transmutations of traditional stories and his invitation to writers "to take off from where the anthropologists have stopped", using the traditions "as part and parcel of our contemporary contentions and controversies", in his introduction to *Eating Chiefs* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970, x).

A strong element of suspense is present in numbers of stories. The anthologies tell generally of considerable economic hardship; episodes of violence and sexual abuse; a high incidence of mortality and disease – several stories touch on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, notably John Nkemngong Nkengasong's "Kakamba" (Cameroon) and Muthoni Garland's "Kissing Gordo" (Kenya); others present the traumas suffered by child soldiers and their families (as in Ugandan Beatrice Lamaka's impressively beautiful and moving "Butterfly Dreams" and in the memories that haunt the nightmares of Kenyan Alison O. Owuor's protagonist in "Screaming Thunder"); corruption in high – and low – places (a topic present in nearly all the stories) and the closely related theme of abuse of power positions in ministries and universities: several of the protagonists are university professors or work at the university – one of the characters who struck me most with her tenacity and humour was Mimmie, secretary to a depressed professor of lexicology in Mbuh Mbuh Tenu's "The Betrayal", Cameroon; while another of the Cameroon stories, Eunice Ngongkum's "A Lie Has A Short Life", tells of student protests.

Although pessimism abounds in the protagonists of most of the stories, there are also ample examples of courage, generosity, resilience and humour. Some stories

(Ugandan Yusuf Serunkuma, “The Naked Excellencies”, or Kenyan Lloyd Igane’s “Shaba Park”, for example) are given a sharply ironical or satirical twist, reminiscent in some ways of Ngũgĩ’s representations of Kenyan leaders in *Devil on the Cross* (1980/1982), or of Ahmadou Kouroumah’s *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (1999). Others are love stories, usually tragic tales of the absence or failure of love, sometimes within a couple, sometimes within a family; many involve the condition of women or of the ill and the disabled (see for example Ugandan Violet Barungi’s tragic “Impenetrable Barriers” and the presence or fear of AIDS that circulates in all four volumes).

Contrary to what one might have expected, given the linguistic orientation of the introductions, language varieties and registers and interlinguistic relations do not appear in many of the stories, although many include untranslated words and even phrases from the local languages or *lingua francas*. The prevaricating imperium of French – both standard and non – in officially bilingual Cameroon is amusingly foregrounded in Tenu’s “The Betrayal”. The editor has obviously and to my mind rightly given precedence to the literary quality and interest of the stories included.

The rush to get the anthologies into press in order for the stories still to be new and unknown is probably responsible for the number of typos in some of the stories and even introductions – the Kenyan introduction, for example, misspells the names of Samuel Kahiga and David Maillu and curiously sees Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1938) as one of the “1960s ethnographic and anthropological works” (18), rather than as one of the ethnographic and anthropological works that circulated widely in this period. Certainly Secker and Warburg’s reprints in the forties and fifties, the new edition of the book by Mercury in 1965 and especially its inclusion in Heinemann’s African Writers Series in 1979 contributed to its fame and allowed easier access to it by writers as well as readers, but this kind of error, particularly in volumes that will be used in schools and universities, tends to be recycled. More seriously, several of the stories deserved and needed far more careful copy editing and proof reading. But, again, it was of the utmost importance to publish the collections as quickly as possible and it should be possible to make further corrections in later editions.

The project is excellent and has supplied all those interested in the present – and future – of African writing with some fascinating reading and the desire for more. Only the limitations of space and time prevent me from giving way to the temptation to comment on all the stories included in the anthologies; the presence or absence of references in this review, aimed at giving a very general idea of the topics and issues to be found in them, is in no way indicative of a scale of value or even personal preference, as future readers will hopefully be able to discover for themselves.