

gesprek oor letterkunde en literêre werke is dit tog nie 'n onbelangrike gegewe nie.

Maar dis nie Willemse se bekommernis nie. Hy argumenteer dat die swart skrywer gemarginaliseer is deur geslagte Afrikaner nasionalistiese kultuuraktiviste. Hy wil hierdie skrywers uit die vergeethoek haal en tewens wys op die invloed van die politiek-maatskaplike situasie op hul skryfwerk. Hy verdedig sy standpunte met baie oortuigende argumente en met volle oorgawe. Hierdie persoonlike betrokkenheid lei egter partykeer daartoe dat 'n eensydige beeld geskep word. Die prentjie is dikwels meer verwickeld en genuanseer as wat Willemse wil toegee. Vir 'n breër perspektief sou dit byvoorbeeld baie interessant wees om die werk van bruin skrywers wat in Engels skryf en die beoordeling daarvan te vergelyk met hul teenhangers in die Afrikaanse letterkunde.

Hein Willemse het voortreflik daarin geslaag om die marginale posisie van die swart Afrikaanse skrywers te belig. *Aan die ander kant* maak dit duidelik dat skryf en skrywerskap ten nouste verbonde is aan die maatskaplike en kulturele omgewing waarin die skrywer moet funksioneer. Die literêre produk is die resultaat van 'n saamspeel van faktore. Die beperkte aanwesigheid van die swart skrywer in die Afrikaanse letterkunde laat 'n blywende leemte. Die belang van die ondersoek van Hein Willemse is dat dit die aandag vestig op die wanbalans in die Afrikaanse literatuur en kritiek. Die verlede kan nie meer ongedaan gemaak word nie. Maar dis belangrik om daarvan kennis te neem om met meer insig die pad vorentoe te kan bepaal. Deur aan elke Afrikaanssprekende die moontlikheid te bied om volwaardig en ewewaardig deel te neem aan die volle lewe in Afrikaans word die kondisies geskep waarin Afrikaans kan oorlewe. "Vir solank as wat Afrikaans 'n kodewoord vir die Afrikaner (of dan ten minste Afrikanerbelange) bly en daar nie waaragtige pogings is om die taal in sy Suid-Afrikaanse diversiteit uit te bou

en te koester nie, sal die pogings om die merkbare agteruitgang van die taal op amptelike vlak te stuit minder suksesvol wees" (215) skryf Hein Willemse in sy slotbeskouing. *Aan die ander kant. Swart Afrikaanse skrywers in die Afrikaanse letterkunde* benader die Afrikaanse letterkunde vanuit die perspektief van die bruin skrywer. Dit maak die leser bewus van die impak van Afrikaner nasionalisme op die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Die boek is 'n noodsaaklike korrektief op 'n eensydige inkleuring van die Afrikaanse letterkunde.

*Luc Renders*

Limburgs Universitair Centrum

Diepenbeek, België

**The Sacred Door and other Stories.  
Cameroon Folktales of the Beba.**

Makuchi. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. 2008. 205 pp. ISBN: 978-0-89680-256-8.

In *The Sacred Door and Other Stories: Cameroon Folktales of the Beba*, Makuchi has collected thirty-three folktales of the Beba people. These stories are presented in English only. The book contains a foreword by well-known oral literature scholar, Isidore Okpewho and a preface by the author. In the foreword, Okpewho states that: "Tales like these need to be retold again and again, because the lessons they yield belong not merely to a long-forgotten historical or so-called primitive past but very much to the present times in which we live" (xi). The book therefore represents a sense of continuity between past and present. Although the tales may no longer be told in the same way that they were many years ago, the messages contained in the tales remain as relevant today as they did in the past.

The collection includes a variety of stories drawing on thematic repertoires such as greed, revenge and deception. In the title sto-

ry a poor man comes across an old woman. She tells him that he is not to open the sacred door. As a result of not opening the door he is elevated to the position of King and he possesses everything that he wishes for, but one day he is tempted to open the door. He is then propelled back into his previous world and he again finds himself in the forest, poor and destitute with only the rags on his back. This is a tale about temptation and greed and it ends with the question: "What would you have done?" This allows the hearer or reader to come to his/her own conclusions. This tale unpacks the human condition of greed and it portrays a very relevant message for the world as we know it today.

"The Flutes", for example, also explores human frailty as it relates to power relations in terms of sexuality, polygamy, gender, envy and greed. Another tale which catches one's attention is that of "Penis, Testicles and Vagina". In this tale, human sexuality is the focus. However, it is not just a tale about sexuality, but rather about responsibility towards each other, i.e. male and female. It is about the values encompassed in loving someone. In a world where rape and other sexual crimes seem to be the order of the day, such a tale remains highly relevant. In relating tales such as these, Makuchi is drawing on what she heard as a child, growing up in Cameroon, West Africa. She draws on Beba oral traditions to show how they reflect the values of a rural community. These tales are able to reflect the continuity that exists between the past and the present.

The book is divided into three parts reflecting some sort of categorization, though it is acknowledged that folktales can also cut across categories and that any attempt at categorization is in and of itself problematic. The tales, or *ble* in part 1 are mainly etiological tales which explain why something is the way it is today. In part 1 the characters are mainly animals. That said one could find tales in other sections which have humans as characters

and which are also explanatory. In her afterword, Makuchi explains this as follows: "King-of-Scabies' explains why cannibalism is a thing of the past. [...] However, on closer examination [...] 'King-of-Scabies' can also be described as a legend, a story that seeks to capture a pseudo-historical event or time when cannibalism might have been a reality" (193). This is not a Beba story and it leaves one wondering as to whether the Beba indeed practised cannibalism or were they victims of it?

The book appropriately ends with a series of riddles which form the final part of the afterword. A few examples follow:

"I visit everyone but no one can visit me."

"The eye."

"I am a house with no walls."

"The sky."

"I build my house with one stick."

"A mushroom."

The afterword in the book offers some historical and theoretical contextualisation of the folktales. Arguably, this section should have come at the beginning of the book. The preface and afterword should come as one section at the beginning of the book. This would afford the reader an opportunity to engage with the socio-economic, political and historical context of the Beba before engaging with the folktales. Nevertheless, *The Sacred Door and other Stories: Cameroon Folktales of the Beba* makes a valuable contribution to the study of oral literature in Africa. It builds on the work of Okpe who himself, as well as other scholars such as Ruth Finnegan, G. P. Lestrade, Noverno Canonici and Harold Scheub, who have all contributed extensively to the analysis of the narrative genre in Africa. The book is recommended for anyone who is interested in oral literary studies, folktales and literary anthropology.

Russell H. Kaschula

Rhodes University, Grahamstown