

J. Reed and C. Wake, eds. *A New Book of African Verse*. African Writers Series 8 (Exeter, NH: Heinemann, 1984) 116 pp., \$5.50 paper.

A New Book of African Verse, edited by John Reed and Clive Wake, is actually a new edition of *A Book of African Verse*, which appeared in 1964 just as black literature of Africa and of the United States was gaining recognition, particularly in academic circles. The authors' intention has been consistently modest. From the first, the authors chose works from contemporary poets of French or English expression from Africa south of the Sahara. Certainly in 1964 their first volume brought attention to almost unknown poetry and was useful as "an introduction to new readers of African poetry."

The editors feel justified in reediting the book, dropping thirty-three poems from the original version, adding seventy-nine, omitting the Malagasy poets, and expanding from one to seven poets from Southern Africa. They have also added more recent poetry by some of the authors in the earlier edition of two decades ago. They admit that now they are in competition with many collections of African poetry. There are now available volumes by single authors, volumes representing regional poets, and volumes encompassing all of Africa, including Northern areas now often included when African literature is defined. Obviously, Reed and Wake's new edition must bear comparison with these other available sources. Both Heinemann titles appear as Number Eight in the Heinemann African Writers Series, which now comprises over 250 volumes. The contrast of what was available two decades ago (eight) and now (250) is obvious even if one considers only Heinemann publications.

The editors, John Reed, professor of English, and Clive Wake, lecturer in French, have both taught in Salisbury, Zimbabwe. Together they have also published translation volumes of Senghor, Rabearivelo, and of other francophone poets. Reed is now in Zambia and Wake in England. Unfortunately their translations have always been somewhat awkward, at times even ungrammatical, and inconsistent in idiom. The translations of the francophone poems in the first volume have been republished without change, and the translations of added poems bear the same type of stylistic confusions and confusing imagery: "I pull up my feet . . . to carry them . . ." Mixed phraseology: "How slender their legs become through excess of noble spirit"; or "hangovers" with "climes." The authors do not usually attempt translation in poetic form, but are sometimes too literal, following a line division or placement of a modifier in a French order quite foreign to English. In 1964, few translations existed of the Negritude poets. Now, skilled translators like Janis Pallister or Ellen Kennedy make more harmonious translations that do more justice to the francophone poets.

On the whole, however, the collection is still appropriate for the uses the editors intended. The necessary greats are included: Senghor, U Tam'si, Okigbo, Brutus, Dadié. The South African and Congolese additions are useful, and the inclusion of Neto is proper acknowledgment both of the stature of the man and the importance of lusophone literature in Africa. P'Bitek's and Soyinka's satiric touches are always welcome and also recall the foundation of oral tradition in indigenous languages so basic to much of contemporary African literary expression. Readers could argue for adding Achebe, Bebey, or Lopes, but the editors have to choose and have the right to select with the whole collection in mind.

A serious omission, however, is that of known women poets. Ama Ata Aidoo has the lead poem in the revised edition, a slight, satiric verse. She is the only woman represented. Was her addition to the all-male voices of the first collection mere tokenism? Certainly her compatriot, Efu Sutherland, is as well-heralded as she, and has written more poetry. Mabel Segun, although not prolific, has been well-recognized in Nigeria, and East Africa has Micere Mugo, who has a whole volume of delightful satiric verse. Most striking, however, is the omission of Amerlia House and Gladys Thomas of Southern Africa who have published and edited works alongside of the male poets here selected.

The Reed and Wake revised edition has an advantage over several similar anthologies for use as "an introduction to contemporary poetry in schools in Africa" because of the modesty of its size and its unpretentiousness. Heinemann also is to be commended for holding down printing costs in order to keep the book cheap enough for the African market. Many comparable anthologies exist only in hardback or cost two or three times as much in paperback and are thus virtually out of reach for most African readers. American students also, who may take courses in African literature, will welcome a reasonably priced text in a course where several volumes may be required.

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