

***Butterfly Dreams and Other New Short Stories from Uganda* edited with an introduction by Emma Dawson (Critical, Cultural and Communications Press [CCC Press], 2010)**

Butterfly Dreams and other new short stories from Uganda is an anthology of eight stories by various Ugandan writers, most of whom are relatively unknown outside of Africa. The brief biographies at the end of the collection provide a useful background for each of the writers (132).

In the Preface the term ‘New Englishes’ is briefly explained, as are the submission and selection process for sourcing and inclusion of writers.

The journey to meet the writers is one that is made in order ‘to listen’ and not ‘to tell’ in an attempt to avoid being viewed as just another publication from ‘the Western armchair.’ (5)

The inclusion of a map assists the reader to gain a sense of Uganda’s centrality to neighbouring African countries (4).

Emma Dawson’s introductory essay discusses ‘the term “World Englishes” and ... how this relates to “World Englishes Literature”.’ (9) Dawson also outlines the role of Makerere University commonly called ‘the hill’ (14), and its central position in the development of the arts not only in Uganda, but throughout East Africa during the pre-Amin period when writers such as Okot p’ Bitek¹ held a respected place in African literature (16). In the post Amin era the arts in Uganda did not immediately ‘spring back to life’ (18). However the arts and Makerere’s role in it are re-emerging, particularly aided by such groups as FEMRITE, an organization involving many of the writers in this anthology (18).

The stories in this collection convey universal themes of love and loss, hope and fear, culture and identity. The writers illustrate a Uganda recovering from the aftermath of terror and bloodshed, tyrannical leaders and corrupt governance.

In the opening story, *Butterfly Dreams*, Beatrice Lamwaka uses an almost poetic prose that paints a picture of a family coming to grips with the return of their traumatised daughter who was removed forcefully from them when eleven years of age to become one of the many child soldiers in the wars that occurred in northern Uganda. The following passage is a haunting description of the family’s dilemma:

We watched you silently. In return you watched us in silence. We gave you food when we thought you were hungry. ... We didn’t want to treat you as a stranger but in our hearts we knew that you were new ... would never be the same again.’ (26)

Now 15 years old and a young woman, it will take patience, dedication, courage and determination on her part and also that of her family if she is to rebuild her life.

¹ Okot p’ Bitek, *African Books Collective* <http://www.africanbookscollective.com/authors-editors/okot-pbitek>

This heart-wrenching story faces us with a familiar view of Uganda; the stories that follow seek to reveal another view of Uganda as it emerges from the dark years.

Ulysses Chuka Kibuuka is one of the older writers in this anthology, and his 'The Wedding Ball' is a humorous tale about an almost-didn't-happen wedding that alludes to the National Army, Ugandan health care and the economy. When he is suddenly crippled by agonising pain an army major requires medical attention.

'You don't have a car, a major in the mighty national army! And of course you cannot have money since it is not yet month's end.'

'Don't rub it in, fellow; actually I had deposited all the cash I had on me ... for Doris' wedding things. I only retained the fare to return us to the barracks.'

'Is your army really like that or is my brother here pulling my leg when he says ... that a sergeant in Idi Amin's army was a lot better off than a senior officer in this once-upon-a-time guerilla outfit that is the Ugandan army?' (58)

The more formal style of the English of this story enabled me to almost hear the African accented English-speaking voices of the characters. The writer maintains the style well as the trio engages with the trials of public transport, finances and the Ugandan health system.

Kelvin Odoobo deftly illustrates the divide between old customs and modern ideas in 'The Good Samia Man'. Using a satirical, at times almost bitter, cynicism, he writes almost in the tradition of oral storytelling. This monologue would be a wonderful performance piece, and for me is the standout in the collection. The narrator tells of a well-educated young man and the farce of his city-apartment faux designer label life-style.

Your home in Kampala ... three clumsily erected rooms ... a cheap microwave from China ... a utensils rack from Kenya. You live in Kampala's suburbia ... a twenty first century slum, with hundreds of television antennas prodding the air ...

You step, hop and jump over puddles of murky, putrid water ... trying to act all immaculate, avoid soiling your new fake Gucci boots ... you rearrange your second hand tie ... pretending you didn't have to jump over what you jumped over to get to where you are... (73)

The young man travels on a crowded bus to visit his family who live in a village, and as he nears his destination the city man begins to recede and the good son, the Samia man begins to emerge.

As the bus slows down to a stop ... tempting smells of chicken thighs and beef barbeques suspended on sticks awash with roasted plantains in their full golden colour appear and the villager in you momentarily materializes. (76)

At the last stop he purchases gifts as is the village custom, making the appropriate selection and buying 'three of everything for the three wives of your father'. The narrator says 'You shun the native way ... but you cannot candidly eschew the

customs, lest you are labeled the disloyal son' (77). The rhythmic flow of Odobo's writing in this thought-provoking piece is excellent.

The final story in the anthology, 'The Naked Excellencies' by Yusuf Serunkuma, immediately made me recall *The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen. In this story a security-conscious president has called a special meeting. He arrives ahead of the guests having instructed his guards to ensure all who follow are 'stripped of anything' (120). The first guest to arrive not only removes his coat, but also his trousers. Initially surprised by his action, the guards recover and in order to have a bit of fun, quickly decide this will be 'the code of the day' (121). At first uncomfortable, the still-clothed president acknowledges that a naked man is 'easier to watch than a clothed one' and also disrobes (122). All goes well until the first lady arrives. Extremely beautiful and revered by the guards as 'their mother, their tireless benefactor' (127), she is also feared by them. That she is actually the head guard's mother and it is 'taboo' (127) to view a naked relative compounds their dilemma. The president declares the meeting an opportunity for 'the beginning of equality' (130). However, events take an unexpected, ironically humorous turn.

Stories such as Princess Ikatekit's *iLove* (84-98), Violet Barungi's *Impenetrable Barriers*, and Jackee Budesta Batanda's *1 4 the Rd ... till 4am* take a modern approach to reflections about love, angst and betrayal, whilst Glaydah Namukasa explores the risks taken for love by a prison escapee in *Living Hope*. Altogether this collection of New Englishes writing presents a satisfying showcase for the styles and ideas, of the eight selected writers. It is an excellent testament to the variety of talent and ideas currently emerging from Uganda.

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