

then...elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies.” Oandason has created a new ceremony in his collection. Unfortunately, with only forty-eight, four-line poems the ceremony is brief, too brief one suspects to do justice to the Ukommo’ of Round Valley. We can only hope for more poetry from Oandason.

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Okot p’Bitek. *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol.* (London: Heinemann, 1984) 151 pp., \$6.50, paper.

Heinemann’s reissue of two early works by Okot p’Bitek includes *Song of Lawino* in Okot’s own translation from the Acoli published in 1966 and his shorter companion piece, *Song of Ocol*, 1967, composed in English only. The volume includes an introduction and brief biography of Okot and a critical analysis of the two poems in the light of Okot’s background and other works, written by George A. Heron in 1972. Heron includes a comparison between the Acoli and the English versions of *Song of Lawino*, and a comparison of the traditional poems inserted into the songs with some of the traditional folksongs collected and translated by Okot himself.

Okot p’Bitek was varied and accomplished in his many artistic pursuits. In college he danced and acted in theatrical productions and composed an opera. Later he was to become active in the Uganda Cultural Center, even creating a Gulu festival of folk art to celebrate his country’s independence in 1960. When he returned to Uganda after completing his European education, he wrote *Song of Lawino* and treatises on oral literature and on African religions. An early novel written in Acoli (Luo) *Lak Tar* is now required reading in local schools.

Song of Lawino was the first of his works to be couched in a book-length, recitative form. Okot’s mother was a “great singer,” also named Lawino, and was a major inspiration for this first poetic work, although her own songs were shorter poems sung in traditional Acoli style. Okot wrote the English translation of *Song of Lawino* in blank verse. In it, Lawino, a traditional Ugandan woman, voices a long complaint. She feels her husband, Ocol, has become corrupted by Western ways. He despises Lawino, his first wife, and prefers his second wife, who can speak English and who follows modern fashions.

When the beautiful one
With whom I share my husband
Returns from cooking her hair
She resembles
A chicken
That has fallen into a pond;
Her hair looks
Like the python's discarded skin. (54)

In the first five chapters, Lawino addresses Ocol directly, urging him "not to uproot the pumpkin" in the old homestead, not to despise her or the traditional values she represents and accepts. In the next five chapters, Lawino compares Acoli life before and after the English colonizers had marked Africans like Ocol, causing them to turn away from traditional beliefs and behaviors. She ridicules African imitations of European dress, education, religious institutions. Okot's light satire upon electric stoves, china dishes, bottle babies, Christian Mass and Christian names gently mocks the reader through clever paradox and turn-about situations. Okot's Christian name is Milchizedek Gregory, and when Lawino pronounces it in Acoli, "It sounds to me like, 'Give the people more vegetables; Foxes make holes in the pathway.'" (82)

In the last two chapters, Lawino's indictments are more intense. Ocol has become obsessed with Uganda's struggle for independence. He is so caught up in political agitation that he quarrels with his brother, berates some kinsmen as communists, others as Catholics, and causes dissension and division everywhere. Where, says Lawino, is the promised unity they vaunt?

Where is the Peace of Uhuru?
Where the unity of Independence?
Must it not begin at home? (107)

She concludes by beseeching Ocol for just one more chance to sing and dance before him in traditional fashion to bring him back to his senses.

Okot's earthy imagery, his insertion of traditional lyrics and proverbs, his witty satire on both traditional and westernized African behavior have won this poem critical praise and wide readership. Women readers, however liberated they may be, easily identify with Lawino. She may be illiterate, displaced, and provincial, but as a "leader of the girls" Lawino is sustained by her pride and her confidence. She is strong and passionate in her plea to win back her husband. Though he may reject her or wish her different, the reader cannot.

Song of Ocol, appearing in 1970, is complementary but not parallel. Okot wrote *Song of Ocol* in English only. It is less than one-third the length of Lawino's song. Ocol's phrases are more abrupt, direct, staccato. The song begins: "Woman, Shut up!" (121) Ocol is pungent, bitter, and ultimately disillusioned with the unkept promises of Uhuru. But he is

disenchanted with the past as well — a past that cannot be reconstructed for today, like the old homestead.

I see a large Pumpkin
Rotting
A thousand beetles
In it (124)

For him, Africa is an idle giant:
Diseased with a chronic illness
Choking with black ignorance
Chained to the rock
Of poverty. (125)

He inveighs against the defenders of tradition—the poets, the myth-makers, the scholars, the Africanists—all apologists for things African. They must be eliminated. But the new politicians who promised equality take brides and oppress the poor. The nine short chapters of *Song of Ocol* conclude in a sarcastic eulogy of the colonizers, founders of the new Africa: Leopold II, Bismark, Stanley, Speke, and end in a lament for the fallen and forgotten heroes of the real Africa who could not fulfill the promise of Uhuru.

As for Shaka
The Zulu general
How can we praise him
When he was utterly defeated
And killed by his own brothers?
What proud poem
Can we write
For the vanquished? (151)

Despite the real success these two works achieved, some African readers have a real aversion to Okot's poetic portraits. Does Lawino, with all her tenderness and strength, graphically represent the secondary position of the traditional African wife which many today would like to deny? Okot himself said that "Ocol is more like me and my agemates . . . The great debate in the poem is one which takes place inside us." Ocol is one of the new elite: educated abroad, infused with Western ways and values, blinded to tradition, and brainwashed by a colonial education. Okot knew his detractors: "I think most African reviewers have not been very fair to Ocol because they see themselves in him, and Western reviewers have not been very fair to him because they don't like the human creature they have produced in Africa, which is Ocol."

Okot, after all, had reason to be bitter. He did belong to an ethnic group in Uganda, the Acoli (or Luo) put down by British and Baganda alike. Idi Amin intended to eradicate the Acoli. Amin had erected a statue of Hilter on government grounds and had vowed, like him, to pursue a policy of genocide. Okot's satiric jibes at government officialdom in *Lawino* and

elsewhere cost him his job in Uganda in the late sixties. Until shortly before his death in 1982 he was a dispossessed wanderer—at Nariobi, Ife, Texas, and Iowa. He did not bend to government censure but he suffered deeply from it and from the persecution of his people. He felt literature must expose current evils: “The terrible things: the murders by governments, the destruction of systems of freedom of speech, the political detentions, the coups . . . Why are we not talking about these things?” Although *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* are delightful, satiric poems with wide appeal, they are not superficial. Okot’s wit, pithy statement, and humor make their message all the more forceful.

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Bernd Peyer, ed. *The Elders Wrote: An Anthology of Early Prose by North American Indians 1768 - 1931*. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982) 196 pp., DM 48 paper.

Bernd Peyer has collected a number of documents which, although available elsewhere, are not easily accessible. The twenty-three selections are arranged chronologically and are complemented by several photographs of the writers. A bibliography of materials written by American Indians between 1772 and 1938 provides additional resources for the scholar interested in reading the complete works from which many of these selections are taken. By collecting what was written during this early period by American Indians about their conditions, Peyer challenges readers to revise many stereotypes of the “savages.” Most summaries and anthologies of American Indian literature ignore the writers who are included here except for some twentieth-century writers such as Charles Eastman or Chief Luther Standing Bear. Although scholars are doing more research on early writers such as Samson Occom, William Apes, and George Copway, there are others included here who remain generally unknown—Joseph Johnson, Hendrick Upaumut, Elias Boudinot, Maungwudaus, and others.

Peyer points out that these writers, by virtue of their education and religious training, were not necessarily representative of the majority of American Indians. They represent, however, a point of view from Indian people themselves which is seldom discussed in historical studies of the period. In spite of their often-voiced desires for assimilation and education, these writers make clear that their allegiance is still to their people. Most of them have reached their conclusions by observing the upheaval in Indian lives caused by the intrusion of government agencies and the