

Kofi Awoonor. *Until the Morning After: Collected Poems, 1963-1985.* (Greenfield Center, N.Y.: Greenfield Review Press, 1987) 216 pp., \$10.95.

Until the Morning After represents a large share of the poetry and the life of Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor. The poems are grouped by sections, titles of earlier volumes arranged sequentially. Much of Awoonor's rather stormy life, including his political protest, strategic self-exile, and incarceration is reflected in this collection. But there are central themes: a love of land, an ethnic pride, a desire to perpetuate local expressions and natural beauties. Despite his years abroad and extensive travels, Awoonor's poetry is very African. In fact, it is a celebration of Africanness. Characteristically, although he signed his earlier work as George Awoonor Williams, he now writes as Kofi Awoonor, like compatriots (John) Atkuwei Okai and (Christina) Ama Ata Aidoo.

Awoonor believes in the poet's mission. His collection opens with "My God of Songs Is Ill." By renewing his own allegiance to Ghanaian traditional culture, Awoonor says he cured his god, who "burst into songs, new strong songs, that I am singing with him." Awoonor dedicates many of his own poems to fellow African poets he has known: Dennis Brutus, Zeke Mphahlele, Dan Kunene of South Africa and Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka of Nigeria. Many of these, like him, suffered prison, persecution, and exile. He ends the volume calling to fellow writers to join him in a hymn to future victory.

Chinua, Masizi, Okigbo, La Guma
Laye, Ngugi, Okot, Efua,
Brew, Okai, Rubadiri and
I with your leave Zeke
add my name
For the coming excellence of days
For the lovely resurrection time.

Awoonor's style varies somewhat over the twenty-two year period represented here. In the first section, "Rediscovery," he evokes the old ways, declaims proverbs. At times his imagery is so full of traditional symbols that only the initiated can fully interpret it. "Your palm trees will prosper / but you will die of thirst . . . death's tentmakers are alert / to plant the planks / and place you on the swings." At times his prolixity becomes tiresome. "Among the nims the dancers gather their cloths / stretching their new-shorn hides off offered cows / to build themselves new drums. / Sky wailing from afar . . ." He explains his love of words in the brief epilogue:

Our people say the mouth that eats salt cannot utter falsehood. For the mouth is the source of sacred words, of oaths, promises, prayer, and assertions of our being, presence and affirmation. This is the source of my poetry, the origin of my commitment — the magic of

the word in the true poetic sense.

Awoonor, if not a self-conscious poet, is certainly a first-person poet. He came to the United States in 1968 after visits to Russia, England and Scandinavia. He taught six years at Stony Brook. Two sections of his collection, "American Profiles" and "American Memories," display sardonic wit, much irony, and often bitterness — both at what he found here and at what he left behind. He rails at an academic: "The celebrate acolyte of the goddess of cant and trivia." He bewails America's black/white separatism in poems to Harlem. He praises Langston Hughes and Malcolm X.

Following his return to Ghana in 1975, he was imprisoned. Many African poets and scholars wrote for his release. His prison poems tend to be short and direct. "I plait my hope into poems . . ." He inveighs against psychic and physical torture. He draws the title of the collection from one of his prison poems. As a political prisoner seeking independence for his own minority Ewe group, he swears to outlive his sentence to achieve their freedom. "So much Freedom means / that we swear we'll postpone dying / until the morning after."

Since his release he has written plays, fiction and criticism. Only nine poems are included in the "New Poems" section. He writes he is returning to his family's world. "So the world changes / rain comes after the drought / the yam festival after the sewing time." In the last poem he avows his hope in a vision:

that no perfect armaments can destroy;
of the human will that shall endure,
of the coming festival of corn and lamb
of the freedom day that shall rise
as the sun tomorrow.

—Charlotte H. Bruner
Iowa State University