

# Arts and Africa

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## "ARTS AND AFRICA"

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SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey. And today it's poetry across the continent in "Arts and Africa".

SIGNATURE TUNE

TETTEH-LARTEY

Appearing in book shops all over Africa at present, is what is probably the most extensive collection of poetry by the black poets ever to be published. We are going to take what can only be a very hurried look inside.

The book is called very straightforwardly, "Poems of Black Africa" and has a vast range - from antiquity to eternity, as might be expected from its editor, Wole Soyinka. The themes of the poems, according to the section headings, extend from Gods and Ancestors to Man in Nature and Human Mortality. But let's quote from Wole Soyinka himself to discover the aim of his choices:

BABOUKA GAYE

QUOTATION FROM PREFACE TO "POEMS OF BLACK AFRICA"  
By Wole Soyinka

TETTEH-LARTEY

So there you have it. Perhaps Wole Soyinka spread himself a bit too wide, and sometimes had to justify a category with a work which was hardly worthy of inclusion. But let's not cavil - we have more than sixty poets to choose from and about 400 poems. We'll start our sampling immediately out of the section "Ancestors and Gods" - here is a translation of a traditional poem out of the morning mists of antiquity, "The Fulani Creation Story", read by Kwezi Kay.

KWEZI KAY

"THE FULANI CREATION STORY" (TRADITIONAL POEM)

TETTEH-LARTEY

This, of course, can only be followed by a poem out of the section called "Animistic Phases". And for the particular choice we cross the continent to a Kenyan poet who now works in Dar es Salaam. He is Jared Angira, who has about a dozen pieces in the anthology - and we give you now "A Look in the Past" - read by Alton Kumalo.

ALTON KUMALO

"A LOOK IN THE PAST" BY JARED ANGIRA

TETTEH-LARTEY

From a look in the past then, to a quick experience of the stormy present, of struggle, emergence and independence. Who better to tell us of its yearnings than the aptly named Jorge Rebelo, born 35 years ago in Lourenco Marques and today he is the Information Secretary of the local liberation movement, Frelimo. His piece is called quite simply, "Poem". And again it is read by Kwezi Kay.

KAY "POEM" BY JORGE REBELO

TETTEH-LARTEY

For some the struggle towards freedom is not yet over and a remarkable Coloured poet from South Africa, Arthur Nortje, speaks for all of them. Nortje committed suicide in exile at the age of 28. Here is "Letter from Pretoria Central Prison".

KUMALO "LETTER FROM PRETORIA CENTRAL PRISON" BY ARTHUR NORTJE

TETTEH-LARTEY

One of the worst things about being in prison must be the sense of living only a shrunken life - so we turn with relief to the wide life-scapes of 38 year-old Doctor J.B. Tati-Loutard. He is Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of the University of Brazzaville. He is certainly one of the most impressive poets in the book, although only represented by one poem - and that a translation. Here are two parts of his "Transformation Scenes": First "Evening" and then "Morning"

KUMALO "TRANSFORMATION SCENES" BY DOCTOR J.B. TATI-LOUTARD

TETTEH-LARTEY

Now we come to a poet about whom the book's handy little "Who's Who" as the book tells us nothing. He is named Edouard Maunick - he talks of himself as a man of very mixed ancestry who finally chooses his race and identity. Here it is then, part of "Seven Sides and Seven Syllables" - all we know of Edouard Maunick.

ANTHONY DELENS

"SEVEN SIDES AND SEVEN SYLLABLES" BY EDOUARD MAUNICK

TETTEH-LARTEY

Tiny as our choice has been, unfortunately, from so wide a range, we are already running out of our own tiny allotment of air-space. So we give you a neat bit of simile from that ironic Zulu poet, Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali: It is called, relevantly enough, "Sunset".

KUMALO "SUNSET" BY OSWALD MBUYISENI MTSHALI

TETTEH-LARTEY

I hope in offering you this glimpse into Wole Soyinka's anthology, the sight of some new names and a few fresh voices - as well as old ones - will tempt you to look and listen further for yourself. By the way, the anthology "Poems of Black Africa" is published by Secker Warburg and costs £4.75. Perhaps you've got a birthday coming up, or somebody else has!

And as we have been listening to the human voice for the past 15 minutes, let's listen to Steve Rhodes and His Voices singing an Efik song. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey hoping you will join me next week for more "Arts and Africa".

STEVE RHODES AND HIS VOICES - EFIK SONG