

Department of African Literature
University of Yaounde.

Yaounde, 28th September, 1981.

Dear Mr. Bongasu,

I am enclosing my comments on the long poem; my remarks are, I hope, tentative: I needed to have read more of your poems. I do not know whether this poem represents the line of work you intend to follow — I do find in it a conscious effort to find your voice in the context of the original, "primal", systems of apprehension of your people. The eight day week, for instance, presupposes a cyclic consciousness of time. I may be wrong. Your originality derives from your having discovered (in the context of Cameroon poetry) a new medium, the rhythmic speech, characteristic of ritual enactment of Nso. Idioms such as rituals have the tendency of producing a distancing effect, taking the writer away from preoccupation with contemporary themes; yet, although the diction is largely archaic, the sensibility is contemporary and modern, all the same. The poem relates to most important poetry of all ages: it reveals, how, in the search for right images, metaphors and most apposite expression, we often find ourselves listening to the voice that "bids us return to our own sources."

Since you have discovered the right idioms, you have, throughout the poem, undergone the process of depersonalisation, have indeed obtained objectivity: little of yourself is felt in the poem. You obtain this effect by the use of the appropriate voice — that of the priest of the ceremony.

Yet there are occasionally lapses(?) into the topical, imposing a derivative perspective on an archaic landscape: "atonement", "reconciliation" etc., yet the combination of the archaic and the mundane is not accidental; your intention being to bring the past and the present, to recall the two areas of experience to live a simultaneous existence in the consciousness of the poet.

You do not rely on the effects produced by the overall use of the printed word; instead you play with sound, repetition, and dramatic gesture to produce an auditory effect. I am thinking especially of the last stanza wherein you introduce a succession of musical instruments, producing an interfusion of sound, reinforcing the idea of attempting by the mind of the poet. The poem's interest therefore which have been ingested by the mind of the poet, but it also reminds us of fore resides not only in the newness of the idioms used, but it also reminds us of great poetry of all ages, poetry founded on the lore, myths and rituals of a people; a poetry informed by the life, and time of a particular place, to the extent we are compelled to accept the general belief that all art has always had a nationality; moreso, because your poem, attempts to express a life that has not been adequately expressed in literature.

Your generation was nursed on the stale milk of popular nationalistic poetry, perhaps the moment is ripe for poets to listen to the voice that bids them turn to their own sources, where they will verify the myths that unify our cultural experience. We can only do so by the study of our native languages which alone contain our beliefs. Poets must now assume responsibilities which had hitherto been left to ethnographers and linguists; in this way they will discover the moving forces in the life of their own people.

"Our times now burn with unwieldy flames
driving us headlong to embrace the unknown
With our blameless arms."

Siga Asanga
28/9/81.

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