

D.I. NWOGA, ed., *West African Verse*, London, Longmans, 1967, 242 pp.

Kwesi BREW, *The Shadows of Laughter*, Longmans, 1968, 67 pp., 10/-.

Michael ECHERUO, *Mortality*, Longmans, 1968, 57 pp., 9/-.

*West African Verse*, the first annotated edition of its kind, is intended to acquaint African students with the poetry of fellow-Africans and to make them aware of their own cultural background. For the general reader it is an excellent introduction to one of the richest and most varied production of poetry in Africa today. The anthology contains a selection of poems written by three groups : Pioneer Poets and Modern poets, both writing in English, and Poets of French expression presented in translation. These are contemporary with the Pioneer Poets and, like them, devote much of their poetry to glorifying Africa and to themes connected with the notion of *négritude*. But they are nearer to the Modern Poets by their experiments with language and poetic form. It is interesting to note how quick these Modern Poets were in giving up the public themes of colour and colonization, so urgent for their predecessors, in order to create in terms at once more individual and universal though inseparable from their African background. They attempt to express in a new and original form the meeting of two worlds, their feeling of alienation from one or the other, and the difficult or painful blending of two ways of life. This anthology will enable African students to compare different ways of dealing with the human experience in Africa. Otherwise, there is little ground in collecting verse on a mere geographical basis, the less so as poetry

in translation loses much in originality and flavour. The editor's notes are very helpful to the general reader, usually unacquainted with the African words used in the poems or with the customs alluded to.

Two poets represented in *West African Verse*, Kwesi Brew, a Ghanaian, and Michael Echeruo, a Nigerian, have published their first collection of poems respectively under the title : *The Shadows of Laughter* and *Mortality*. In Brew's collection light and delicate variations on themes of every-day life express its gaiety and sadness in a simple, concrete, yet very poetic language, whose images are drawn from nature and show a deep, awareness of its reality. Some poems deal with love and its evanescent moods, with the sense of frustration born of the incapacity of men to communicate or of the absence of simultaneousness in their desires; some deal with unfulfilled promises and with disillusion. Even in the section entitled *Questions of Our Time* the tone remains familiar, and the meaning is conveyed in clear metaphors inspired by African life and customs.

Michael Echeruo is more sophisticated and more intellectual as a poet. He is also bolder in his use of language, though his symbolism is sometimes obscure. The five sections of *Mortality* show him by turns witty, grave, sharply ironical, but moved by a deep sensitiveness and strong convictions. Some of his poems are a striking blend of contained passion and erudition. His notes provide a welcome elucidation of the many literary and biblical references in his poetry. It will be worth following his development as a poet when he has rid his language of some stylistic mannerisms. — H. Maes-Jelinek.