AGNI Presents

on Wednesday, November 10, 2010
A CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN FICTION

with two events:

A PANEL DISCUSSION
(4:00 p.m., at BU’s African Studies Center, 232 Bay State Road, 5th Floor, Boston)

A READING & RECEPTION, with Senegalese Drumming & the BU Kenti Wala Dance Ensemble
(7:00 p.m., at BU’s Photonics Center Auditorium, 8 St. Mary’s Street, 2nd Floor, Boston)
An evening not to be missed! Caine Prize-winner Henrietta Rose-Innes, flying in from South Africa; Ugandan writer Doreen Baingana, coming from her home in Kenya; Zimbabwean story-writer Bernard Matambo; and acclaimed Nigerian novelist Helon Habila, another winner of the prestigious Caine Prize, read their fiction and answer questions. Renowned Senegalese percussionist Lamine Touré will open and close the program—and as an intermezzo, the BU Kenti Wala Ensemble will perform traditional African dances. A reception will follow.

These events, cosponsored by Boston University’s Center for African Studies, the African American Studies Program at Boston University, and PEN New England, mark the release of The AGNI Portfolio of African Fiction, edited by E. C. Osondu and William Pierce, and feature four of its contributing writers.

A landmark gathering of stories from Djibouti, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, the Gambia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, The AGNI Portfolio of African Fiction creates an unexpected portrait of the African continent—political, sexual, religious, commercial, and literary—by writers such as Abdourahman A. Waberi, Henrietta Rose-Innes, Helon Habila, Doreen Baingana, Chuma Nwokolo, Jr., and Monica Arac de Nyeko. The portfolio will connect AGNI’s two venues: half of the stories appearing in AGNI 72, the fall 2010 print issue, and half at AGNI Online.

The Boston Globe calls the literary and cultural magazine AGNI “among the nation’s best,” and The Guardian (UK) writes that AGNI “keeps alive the ideal of the independent intellectual.”

Helon Habila was born in Nigeria. He worked as a journalist in Lagos before moving to the University of East Anglia in the U.K. as a Writing Fellow in 2002. He writes both poetry and prose, and his writing has won, among other awards, the Caine Prize for African Writing, the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and the Emily Balch Short Story Prize. Habila is the author of three novels: Waiting for an Angel, Measuring Time, and Oil on Water. He teaches creative writing at George Mason University in Virginia.
Doreen Baingana is the Ugandan author of *Tropical Fish: Stories out of Entebbe*, which won an AWP Short Fiction Award and a Commonwealth Prize. She has also won the Washington Independent Writers Fiction Prize and was twice a finalist for the Caine Prize for African Writing. Her stories and essays have appeared in *Glimmer Train, African American Review, Callaloo, The Guardian (UK), Chimurenga*, and *Kwani*. She has an MFA from the University of Maryland and most recently won an Emerging Writer’s Fellowship from the Writer’s Center in Maryland. She has taught creative writing in the United States, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda, and is managing editor of Storymoja Publishers in Nairobi, Kenya.

Henrietta Rose-Innes is a South African novelist and short-story writer. She has recently published a collection of short stories, *Homing* (Umuzi, 2010), and is the author of two novels: *Shark’s Egg* (Kwela, 2000) and *The Rock Alphabet* (Kwela, 2004). In 2008 she won the Caine Prize for African Writing, and in 2007 received the South African PEN Short Story Award. Her work has appeared in *Granta* and in various international anthologies. *Dream Homes* (merz&solitude, 2008), a collection of short pieces, appeared in German translation in 2008. She lives in Cape Town.

Bernard Farai Matambo, born and raised in Zimbabwe, is visiting assistant professor creative writing at Oberlin College. He received his BA from Oberlin and an MFA from Brown University, where his writing received both the Beth Lisa Feldman Award for Fiction and the Matthew Assafly Award. His work has appeared in *Witness, Pleiades, The Laurel Review, VespertinePress*, and elsewhere. He collaborated with sculptor Johnny Coleman and dancer/choreographer Dianne McIntyre on a multimedia woven reflection entitled “Still Searching.” Most recently he was artist in residence at the Delta Gallery in Harare, one of Zimbabwe’s leading contemporary and experimental art galleries.

Free and open to the public. For further information contact AGNI Senior Editor William Pierce at agni@bu.edu or (617) 353-7135 or visit AGNI Online at www.agnimagazine.org.

SHORT FORM:

On November 10th, the literary and cultural magazine AGNI—with cosponsors The Center for African Studies at Boston University, the African American Studies Program at Boston University, and PEN New England—celebrates contemporary African fiction with an **afternoon panel discussion** (4:00 p.m., at BU’s African Studies Center, 232 Bay State Road, 5th floor, Boston) and an **evening reading and reception** (7:00 p.m., at BU’s Photonics Center Auditorium, 8 St. Mary’s Street, 2nd Floor, Boston). These events bring to Boston four important voices in African writing: the acclaimed Nigerian novelist Helon Habila; Ugandan writer Doreen Baingana; Caine Prize—winner Henrietta Rose-Innes of South Africa; and Zimbabwean story-writer Bernard Farai Matambo. All four are contributors to The AGNI Portfolio of African Fiction. The panel discussion will be moderated by celebrated Nigerian writer E. C. Osondu, coeditor of the portfolio. The reading will include Senegalese drumming and traditional African dancing.
The idea seemed natural and easy when we were sitting together in a bar: we would gather fiction from several sub-Saharan nations by tapping writers that E. C. Osondu follows and admires. (E. C. won the Caine Prize for African Writing—the "African Booker"—two years after his AGNI story "Jimmy Carter’s Eyes" put him on the shortlist.) We would aim for breadth without attempting a quixotic "representativeness." We would publish roughly half of the resulting portfolio in the fall 2010 print issue and the other half at AGNI Online. And we would still get some sleep at night.

That was almost six months and fifty stories ago. Even the original list of potential contributors seemed ambitious, but as we went asking for fiction—something AGNI rarely does—those we contacted led us, again and again, to other admired and innovative writers. The list grew, reminding E. C. of the party invitations he received while growing up in Nigeria, which typically bore the legend: "Come One, Come All. Beer and Food Inexhaustible."

Something, it’s clear, is afoot in African fiction. What these stories seem to announce is a powerful narrative outlook that has almost nothing to do with the West’s expectation of "Africanness." Instead, it rises from the coming together of individual voices that happen to be broadly, variously African, writers with a straight-on, self-probing honesty and a poetic sort of thoroughness. Not African streets, African emigration, African love or violence—the adjective pre-flavored for us by Save the Children infomercials and centuries of myth and distance—but, simply, an African’s vision or experience of these things, of home, flight, return, death, disappointment, ecstasy, compromise.