THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF

AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

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This history offers new perspectives on African and Caribbean literature. It provides the general coverage and specific information expected of a major history. Chapters address the literature itself, the practices and conditions of its composition, and its complex relationship with African social and geopolitical history. The book provides an introduction to the entire body of productions that can be considered to comprise the field of African literature, defined both by imaginative expression in Africa itself and the black diaspora. It also accounts for the specific historical and cultural context in which this expression has been manifested in Africa and the Caribbean: the formal particularities of the literary corpus, both oral and written, that can be ascribed to the two areas, and the diversity of material and texts covered by the representative works. This magisterial history of African literature is an essential resource for specialists and students.

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Preface

In her inaugural lecture as Professor of English at University College, Ibadan, Molly Mahood justified the formal study of English literature in an African university on the grounds that the English language was uniquely placed to play a significant role in the emergence of new national literatures in the African territories under British rule, as part of the process of their transformation into national entities that the colonial situation had inevitably set in motion. Invoking the precedent established in the early part of the twentieth century by the signal contribution of Irish writers to the renewal of English, Mahood envisioned a parallel development in which creative writers in Africa would function as effective bearers of an original imagination, rooted in the local culture, and forging out of the common experience a new and compelling expression in English. Her intimation of a literary renaissance in Africa based on English was further premised on a sociological observation that took account of the progressive rise of a national elite educated in a common language, that of the colonizer, and from whose ranks would arise not only the creative writers but also a new reading public, and in particular a cadre of informed critics, responding to their work in terms familiar to both writer and public and thus serving as the primary audience for the new literature. In her view, the university in Africa could thus be regarded as the enabling environment for the formation of a new literary culture, in what Stanley Fish was later to call "an interpretive community," for which the colonial language stood to function as the determining cohesive element (Mahood 1955).

The main point of Mahood's argument which has to do with the potential for the rise of a new literature in English was soon to be fully verified in the Nigerian context that was the immediate focus of her attention. Although Cyprian Ekwensi and Amos Tutuola were already published writers by the time she delivered her lecture, the significance of their work as harbingers of a new literary culture was to be heightened by the appearance in 1958 of Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, a work that has since established itself as

one of the master texts of modern African literature. The fact that Achebe himself was an alumnus of Ibadan thus gave point and effect to Mahood's argument, for Achebe's achievement was soon to be mirrored in that of other alumni of Ibadan, notably Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, and John Pepper Clark, whose work began to appear in the immediate aftermath of Nigerian independence. With other writers who had no direct connection with the university but who began their careers in the early sixties, such as Gabriel Okara and Onuora Nzekwu, they represent the first generation in the full emergence of literature in English as a major component of Nigeria's cultural history in modern times.

It is of particular interest, fifty and more years since Molly Mahood's inaugural lecture, to evoke the Nigerian case, which has been in many ways emblematic of the cultural transitions that accompanied the political process on the African continent in the second half of the twentieth century, for similar developments were taking place in other parts of colonial Africa, with varying degrees of achievement and interest. The developments in which the European languages began to be employed effectively as means of the expression of African responses to the historical, social, and cultural implications of the colonial dispensation, for the representation of indigenous modes of life and the articulation of a new sense of identity, derived from the traditional, precolonial folkways and heritage of cultural values. This new literature of African assertion, in many ways the culmination of an earlier discourse going back to the eighteenth century concerned with exploring the historic encounter with Europe, helped to define a new historic profile of Africans and black people as part of the human community, a status they had been denied by an accumulated history of slavery, colonialism, racism. The writer assumed a prophetic role as the vanguard of the African revolution – the "voice of vision in his own time" as Wole Soyinka was later to proclaim – and literature an intense valuation as the mode of expression of a new consciousness. For reasons having to do with this thematic focus related to African self-definition, as well as its accessibility in the European languages, it is this tradition of African letters that has come to be regarded as the central reference in the general conception of African literature.

The emergence in the years after the Second World War of the African writer as a cultural icon also helped to direct attention to other areas of African imaginative life, in particular that represented by the oral tradition, obscured by the emphasis upon literacy as the mark of modernity. The oral texts that infused with life the institutional framework of precolonial African societies and

cultures featured in western scholarship largely as ancillary documents in such disciplines as anthropology and ethnohistory. The emphasis on structure and orientation toward expressive values in literary scholarship occasioned by the so-called "oral-formulaic theory" associated with Parry and Lord helped to foster a renewed attention to African orality and a recognition of its purely literary articulations. Two major collections initiated in the sixties helped to provide the wealth of primary material on various aspects and genres of African oral literature that sustained this interest. These collections, the Oxford Library of African Literature and the "Classiques Africains" series in France have furnished the main reference texts on which scholarship on African oral literature continues to rely. The concern with the indigenous heritage of literature culminated in the rediscovery of the great oral epics, *Sundiata*, *Ozidi*, *Mwindo*, and others, a result that has been due as much to the diligent research of scholars as to the enterprise of both academic and trade publishers in Europe and America, which has enabled the texts to become available in workable editions. The collections, monographs, and detailed studies produced by African and European scholars have thus contributed immensely to our understanding of the modalities and procedures of African orality, so that the oral literature came to assume a new significance as elements of Africa's cultural capital. At the same time they presented theoretical and methodological interest for academic areas such as discourse analysis and performance theory (via the pioneering work of Victor Turner, 1967, on ritual) as well as for comparative poetics, for example, with respect to parallels between the modes of literary creation in Africa and in medieval Europe: parallels which have been pursued in the work of scholars like Jeff Opland (1983) and, in the later phase of his career, Paul Zumthor (1983; 1990).

The scholarly interest in African orality also drew attention to the considerable body of literature in the African languages that had come into existence as a consequence of the reduction of these languages to writing, one of the enduring effects of Christian evangelization. The ancient tradition of Ethiopian literature in Ge'ez, and modern works like Thomas Mofolo's *Shaka* in the Sotho language, and the series of Yoruba novels by D. O. Fagunwa, were thus able finally to receive the consideration they deserved. African-language literatures came to be regarded as a distinct province of the general landscape of imaginative life and literary activity on the African continent (Jahn 1961 and 1966; Gérard 1971 and 1981).

These were the circumstances that gave impetus to the academic study of African literature as a discipline, focused on the two modes of existence, oral

and written, in which this literature has been manifested. We have endeavored in the present work to provide an account of the entire body of productions that can be considered to comprise this broad field as defined both by imaginative expression in African itself, and aspects of the continuum as represented by literature in the Caribbean and to some extent in North America. The work has been designed to take account of the specific historical and cultural context in which this expression has been shown in the two areas of human experience concerned by the project, the formal particularities of the literary corpus, both oral and written, that can be ascribed to the two areas and, in particular, the diversity of material covered by the representative texts.

This observation raises the question of delimitation of the field designated by the term "African literature." We are aware of the fact that the extensive scope and the heterogeneous character of the material covered by this history raise the problem of definition in an acute way. However, we have not attempted to provide an unqualified answer to the question as to what qualifies as African literature, either in terms of intrinsic features of theme and cultural reference, or of stylistic modes and formal conventions, and ultimately, of extrinsic factors related to conditions of production, performance and transmission of the texts, oral and written. The question of definition arises from the peculiar historical pressures that have attended the development of modern African expression, and their implications for the academic study of African literature. As Dan Izevbaye has shown, in the various efforts to define African literature, it has not been possible to apply the standard criteria such as language (as, for example, with French literature) or that of a unified territorial/national reference (as with the literature of England/Britain) (Izevbaye 1968). The political and ideological background to the emergence of modern African literature – pan-Africanism and African nationalism – has thus determined the recourse to the term now in common usage, which the present work has not only adopted but seeks to endorse in its reference to the entire field of imaginative expression in Africa.

In conformity with accepted practice, therefore, the term "African literature" has been taken here to mean the literature that has been produced on the African continent, whatever the specific provenance of the oral or written text and of the corpus being considered, and whatever the language of expression of the text in question, the particular modes it employs, or the conventions to which it conforms. Africa is viewed here in geopolitical terms, covering both the sub-Saharan regions habitually associated with black populations, as well as North Africa, including Egypt, inhabited today predominantly by Arab people. This explains the inclusion of literature in Arabic,

despite the inevitable overlap with the Middle East. The project's working definition is especially important for literature by Africans of European descent, notably South Africans writing in English and Afrikaans, who are being located within the social and cultural history and the literary traditions of a continent with which they have often maintained an ambiguous relation in the past, but to which they have become aware of being irrevocably bound. In this perspective, Afrikaans is considered an African language, comparable to Ki-Swahili in its emergence on African soil as recognizably a new language, and in its development as a significant communicative and expressive medium.

The literary area defined by the geopolitical conception of Africa that underlies this work embraces a wide variety of languages, each serving to ground a cluster of literary forms. As already noted, imaginative expression in Africa can be identified in two broadly distinct modes: on one hand, that associated with an indigenous oral tradition, and on the other, that deriving from the conventions of the literate cultures with which the continent has been in contact for the best part of the preceding millennium. However, this primary division soon begins to yield a multiplicity of categories determined by the considerable range of languages and literary conventions to be found on the African continent. Given this diversity, a literary history of Africa, consisting of a coherent and linear narrative of its development over time, and valid for the entire continent, is neither feasible nor even meaningful. These considerations have compelled an approach that departs in important respects from the conventional literary histories, which typically consist in a progressive narration of distinctive periods and movements in the evolution of a national literature, with appropriate emphasis on the great figures and works that have determined this evolution. This work has therefore been conceived as essentially a comprehensive survey of the field, structured along generic lines as regards the oral tradition, and along linguistic/regional lines as regards the modern literature in both the African and European languages.

The term "African literature" has also been taken to refer, albeit in what may be considered a secondary sense, to the "colonial literature" produced by metropolitan European writers for whom Africa has served as the setting either for a complete cycle of works (Pierre Loti, Rider Haggard, Joyce Cary) or for single/specific works (as in the case of Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, and Castro Soromenho). It needs to be stressed that the discourse of power either elaborated by this literature or implicit within it represents the principal symbolic channel of the colonial ideology, with which Africans and black people in the African diaspora have had to contend.

This prompts a consideration of the thematic and formal links between African literature and Caribbean literature, links that make it convenient to consider them together in a single project. The early forms of expression by blacks in the New World, either in the oral mode (the folktales, songs, and chants, as well as the textual content of ritual practices) or in the literate mode (as exemplified notably by the slave narratives) not only reflect an African response to the novel historical circumstances of Atlantic slavery; they also bear the stamp of a distinctive African sensibility. The slave narratives in particular mark the common origins of modern literary expression by blacks in Africa and the New World; they began as African texts, evolving later into a distinctly American genre (Woodard 1999; Andrews and Gates 2000). They represent the earliest texts in which the implications of the historic encounter between Africa and Europe are documented in factual terms and explored in imaginative terms, and inaugurate a modern awareness arising out of this encounter, an awareness that is bound to a new sense of the black racial community, defined as much by its objective situation of historical adversity as by the cultural continuities which bind the black populations of the African diaspora to the mother continent. The postulate of a fundamental African sensibility conditioned by common forms of social experience and cultural practice is strengthened by the evident vitality in the New World of African-derived forms of folklore and religious expression. This awareness informs such concepts as pan-Africanism and Negritude, and provides the keynote to the most significant literature by black writers in the twentieth century.

Despite its connection to Africa, literature in the Caribbean has developed along specific thematic and expressive channels related to the charged historical drama of the region and its complex racial and cultural composition. This makes it imperative to take account of the double reference of Caribbean literature: as both the reflection of a global African experience and as testimony to a process of collective self-fashioning in a new environment. Although unified by reference to a common experience (slavery and its colonial sequel), literature in the Caribbean exhibits some of the diversity remarked upon in the case of Africa, not least as regards the literary traditions associated with the three languages of expression in the region: English, French, and Spanish. It is thus important to stress the contribution of the Caribbean region to contemporary literary culture. Contemporary West Indian literature in English can be considered as one of the focal areas of literary modernism (Gikandi 1992). The award of the Nobel Prize to Derek Walcott in 1993 has been regarded not only as a consecration of the work of Walcott himself but of West Indian literature in general: of a literary renaissance represented by the work

of such eminent figures as George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, up to and including Lorna Goodison (perhaps the most eloquent poetic voice today in the region). It is also of interest to note the current revival of interest in the work of Jean Rhys, whose work and career appear to confirm the connection between European modernism and the perception of the Caribbean as an area of literary reference. This connection is even clearer in the French West Indies, where the work of Aimé Césaire, to whom we are indebted for the term "négritude," was hailed from the beginning by André Breton as an outstanding demonstration of the moral and aesthetic principles of the Surrealist movement. Edouard Glissant, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Maryse Condé, and, more recently, Patrick Chamoiseau (Prix Goncourt, 1992) have been able to sustain in their own work this innovative thrust of francophone Caribbean literature, within which we locate the Haitians: René Depestre, Jean Métellus, and Frankétienne. Finally, as regards the Caribbean, it needs to be recalled that Alejo Carpentier (the originator of the concept of "magic realism"), Nicolás Guillén and Pales Matos spearheaded a literary renaissance in Cuba that gave a powerful impulse to modern literature in other parts of the Spanish-speaking world.

As can be seen, apart from the cultural continuities they represent, a major point of interest is that both modern African literature in the European languages and Caribbean literature provide powerful testimonies to the colonial experience, which, thanks to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, has come to be regarded as a crucial factor in the constitution of the present global system (1974). We might remark in passing that the discourse of modernity these literatures propose is central to Paul Gilroy's formulation of the concept of "The Black Atlantic" (Gilroy 1993). It is of interest at the same time to draw attention to the comparative perspective that African and Caribbean literatures provide on western canonical texts and the literary conventions associated with them, a perspective that illuminates the relation of these literatures to the various metropolitan traditions from which they derive not merely their language of expression and standard forms, but also, as J. P. Clark has averred, much of their fundamental creative impulse (Clark 1970). Conversely, there is a growing recognition of the impact of African and African-derived forms of expression on European modernism. Thus, along with writers from Latin America and other parts of the Third World (notably India, in the case of English), African and Caribbean writers have contributed in very important ways to the expansion of the expressive field of European languages. The dynamics of this "Euro-African intertextuality" (Irele 2001) may be said to lend further theoretical density to the concept of the "postcolonial," a concept that,

since its inauguration by the work of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1989) has stood in need of rigorous theoretical formulation and textual exemplification.

*

The remarks above serve to indicate the direction of the present work. We need to say a word of explanation concerning the structure of the book. We have designed the work as a succession of self-contained chapters focused on specific areas, with a bibliography of primary and secondary works provided at the end of each chapter. This arrangement involves the inevitable overlap between chapters; however, we do not consider this a serious problem, conscious of the fact that, confronted with such a large work, readers can be expected to go to topics in which they are interested.

The early chapters are devoted to an extensive overview of the oral tradition in Africa and the New World. This is followed by accounts of representative instances of the written literature in the African languages. The transition to modern experience signaled by literary and intellectual response to the encounter with Europe, in all its tragic dimensions, provides the keynote of the latter chapters, devoted largely to the literature in the European languages, marked by its engagement with the problems of racial emancipation and of decolonization both in Africa and the New World as well as with the aftermath in the post-independence period. Against this general background, the chapters have been organized as a series of surveys along linguistic and regional lines, in order to reflect the coherence they lend to the material and to allow in each case for a certain measure of chronological ordering in the presentations. These survey chapters are complemented by "thematic" chapters that take account of convergences across linguistic and regional categories. The very nature of the project dictates that the presentation in each area should incorporate a historical perspective wherever possible. This is especially the case with the modern literature, where the major thematic preoccupations that have attended the genesis and evolution of literature by black people require to be presented in close relation to the ideological and intellectual concerns by which African and Caribbean expression has been driven since the eighteenth century.

It is believed that the structure outlined above has the methodological advantage of focusing attention not only on the intrinsic aspects of the various bodies of texts and literary productions examined here, but also on the correlations between them. For example, the continuity that binds the oral tradition to modern expression in African literature has been convincingly demonstrated

by Leroy Vail and Landeg White in their study *Power and the Praise Poem* (1991), a study that has the special merit of indicating the possibility of arriving at a unified vision of the entire field of African literature by proceeding from structural analysis of formal features to the conventions they enjoin and the apprehension of the world they entail.

As regards the extrinsic aspects, the particular problems that arise from the guiding conception of the project happen in fact to form an integral part of the history of the literature. We have highlighted a number of factors such as the colonial situation and the role of formative journals, in the rise of modern African literature. One other issue that pervades the volume is that of the question of language, which has constantly featured in discussions of African literature, and whose cultural dimension and implications for the creative process have been highlighted by the pronouncements of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his shift from English to Gikuyu for his own creative work (Ngugi 1986). Another issue that arises from a consideration of the corpus is the question of "national" literatures in Africa being increasingly raised by African scholars, notably the Beninois critic Adrien Wanou, who has argued for the "territorial imperative" as a determining factor in the development of new literary traditions in contemporary Africa, a question that assumed prominence with the publication of Richard Bjornson's pioneering study of Cameroonian literature (1991).

This brings us to a final point regarding the character of this work as a reference. Although questions of value have not been be excluded (they are already implicit in the choice of authors and texts), contributors have had to bear in mind that the emphasis of the publication has had to be a factual account of the development of each aspect of the corpus, rather than on evaluative discussion of texts and works or critical appraisal of writers, a function we leave to the judgment of scholar critics and ultimately to history.

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Chronology

Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Trans-Saharan Trade (Antiquity)	
Egypt: Old Kingdom (2500 BCE)	
	Book of the Dead (c. 1500 BCE)
Egypt: Middle Kingdom (1900–1500 BCE)	
Egypt: New Kingdom (1500–1200 BCE)	
	Hymn of Akhenaten (c. 1375 BCE)
Kush, Meroe, Nubia	
Greek Conquest of Egypt (100 BCE)	
	Herodotus: *History* (c. 450 BCE)
	Aesop: *Fables*
	Apuleius: *The Golden Ass* (c. 155 BCE)
	Terence (195–159 BCE): *The Self-Tormentor*; *Woman of Andros*
	Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (100)
Introduction and Spread of Christianity in North Africa (200–350)	
	St. Augustine: *Confessions* (400)
Axum (100–700)	
	Development of Ge'ez script
Rise of Ghana (300–1200)	
Arab Conquest of North Africa (640–700)	
	Epic of Antara
Spread of Islam in West Africa (800–1000)	Arab Chronicles: Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, etc.
Zanji Empire and Swahili City States (10th century)	
Ozi Kingdom (10th – 13th century)	

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Islam in East Africa (1000)	*Epic of Banu Hilal* Swahili – *utenzi* tradition; writing in Swahili-Arabic script
Rise of Mali (c. 1200)	
Chewa settle in Malawi (c. 1200–1400)	
Great Zimbabwe flourished (1200–1400)	
Rise of Kongo Kingdom (c. 1300)	*The Mwindo Epic*
Consolidation of Islamic Learning in West Africa (1400)	*Epic of Son-Jara*
Munhumutapa State flourishes (c. 1420–1720)	
Rise of Songhay (1495)	*Epic of Askia the Great*
Portuguese rule in East Africa (1498–1699)	Fumo Liyongo wa Bauri
	Leo Africanus (c. 1513)
Rise of Benin (c. 1400)	*The Ozidi Saga*
Zimbabwe (Monomotapa) (c. 1500)	African oral tradition enters West Atlantic (1560–1870)
Portuguese explorers on the West and Central African coasts (1450–1600); Portuguese attempt to consolidate power in Munhumutapa State (c. 1590–1690)	Hausa Literature in Arabic language; Joao de Barros: *Da Asia* (1552)
Atlantic Slave Trade (late 1500s – mid-19th century)	Camões: *Os Lusiades* (1572)
Dutch in South Africa (late 16th century); Dutch control of Cape of Good Hope (1652)	Joao dos Santos: *Ethiopia Oriental* (1609)
Lunda empire expands south from Southern Congo into Zambia (c. 1600–1700); Lovale settle in Northwest Zambia and Southern Congo (c. 1690); Changamire destroy Portuguese settlements in Northeast Zimbabwe (1690)	
British begin trafficking slaves (1620s); Royal Adventurers receive charter, authorizing slaves as supply source (1660s)	
Bemba consolidate their power in Northeastern Zambia under leadership of kings entitled Chitimukulu (c. 1700–1800)	
Ukawsaw Gronniosaw is born in Borno (1710–14?)	

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Arab and Portuguese slave raids destabilize Malawian and Eastern Zambian societies (c. 1700–1890); Portuguese depose Munhumutapa Choika (1719)	
	Golden age of *utenzi* tradition; *Utendi wa Tambuka* (1728)
Increasing Omani influence in East Africa (1700s–1800s)	Ukawsaw Gronniosaw: *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars . . .* (1770)
Mazrui rule in Mombasa (1729–1837)	Phillis Wheatley: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)
British peace with the Maroons in Jamaica (1738)	Edward Long: *History of Jamaica* (1774)
Seven Years' War (1756–63)	
Bemba hegemony established in Northeastern Zambia (late 18th century)	Posthumous publication of Ignatius Sancho's *Letters* (1782)
	Quobna Ottobah Cugoano: *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787)
Haitian Revolution (1790–1804)	Olaudah Equiano: *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* (1789)
Rise of Chaka and Zulu (c. 1795); London Missionary Society (LMS) (1795)	Oral narratives of histories, myths, stories, poetries, epic tales and other traditions (Southern Africa)
Napoleon invades Egypt (1798)	
Aborigines Protection Society to abolish slavery, with William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton at helm (1799)	Mungo Park: *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799)
Islamic *Qadiriyya* Revivalism in Hausaland (1800)	Zulu *izibongo*
First Ngoni invasions into Zimbabwe (early 1800s)	Birth of *Ajami* literature in West African languages
Usman Dan Fodiyo, Jihad Wars in Hausaland – Rise of Sokoto Caliphate (1804–10)	*Al-Inkishafi* (1810s)
British wrench control of Cape of Good Hope from Dutch (1806); Dutch are traditionally farmers ("boers") while the British represent capitalism	Jihad *Ajami* literature in Hausa language
Abolition of Slave Trade: Britain and the US (1807). Congress of Vienna extends laws against slave trade to rest of Europe (1815). Abolition of slavery:	Ntsikana, Xhosa chief and oral poet, under the influence of Christianity, begins to compose hymns orally in the Xhosa musical rhythms and

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
England (1833), France (1848); Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in US (1863)	idioms. His most famous hymn, "Ulo Thix' omkhulu" (You are the great God), in the form of a praise poem for God as a warrior to protect and preserve truth and goodness, is written down and translated into English, bringing together the oral and the written. The hymn is printed and published in 1828.
Egypt under British occupation (1822–1914)	
	John Bennie, sent by Glasgow Missionary Society (GMS) (1821), learns Xhosa, creates an orthography, and writes the first book in Xhosa in the form of a primary reader. A small booklet is printed (1824) containing an alphabet, prayers for going to bed, waking, beginning a meal, concluding a meal, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. GMS publishes "a systematic Vocabulary of the Kaffrarian language in two parts; to which is prefixed an Introduction to the Kaffrarian Grammar" (1926), published at Lovedale.
Founding of Fourah Bay College (1827)	
	Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle: *Polyglotta Africana* (1854)
French conquest of Algeria (1830); Algerian resistance to French invasion (1835–47); Ngoni under Zwangendaba cross the Zambezi (1835); other Ngoni groups move north of the Zambezi (late 1830s)	Setswana translation of the Gospel of St. Luke translated by Robert Moffat (1830) – "the first published Scripture translation in a South African Bantu language"
	London's Anti-Slavery Society publishes Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831)
Emancipation of slaves in Caribbean (1834–68)	
Emancipation of slaves of Southern Africa (1833), which becomes a major grievance of the Dutch, and one of	

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
the causes of "the Great Trek" (1836), which is the migration north by the Dutch who were till now confined to the Western Cape. This was to result in many wars and the loss of land and livestock to the Dutch trekkers, as well as personal freedom, whose consequences are still felt. Newspapers in African languages established by the missionaries begin to play an important role in stimulating interest in learning to read and write, but especially to read the Bible. These can be considered a mid-nineteenth-century phenomenon, spanning approximately the last two-thirds of this century. Some of the titles are: *Umshumayele Indaba* (Broadcaster of News) by the Wesleyan missionaries (1837); *Ikwezi* (Morning Star) in English and Xhosa, by the GMS (1844); *Indaba* (The News), by the GMS at the Lovedale Mission Press – bilingual, two-thirds in Xhosa and one-third in English; *The Kafir Express*, established by Dr. James Stewart (1870)	
	Thomas Fowell Buxton: *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (1840)
Frederick Douglass escapes from slavery (1838), gives first anti-slavery lecture for William Lloyd Garrison's Anti-Slavery Society (1841)	
Indentured Indian labor arrives in Trinidad and Guyana (1845–1917)	Yoruba-language publications begin (1840s)
	Robert Moffat: *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (1842)
Ngoni factions settle in Zambia and Malawi (1845–55)	French missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) arrive in Lesotho, pay respects to King Moshoeshoe, and are given site to establish their mission, which they name Morija. The mission becomes a thriving cultural center and the home of the newspaper *Leselinyana la Lesotho* and of the publishing house called Morija Sesuto Book Depot.

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
	Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)
	Robert Knox: *The Races of Man* (1846)
	Gobineau: *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55); Frederick Douglass: *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855)
	David Livingstone: *Missionary Travels and Researches* (1857)
	Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona (1858)
London Missionary Society establishes Matabele Mission (1859)	Regular reports and letters from agents of the LMS, and subsequently the Church of Scotland and Free Church of Scotland published in missionary magazines 1860–90. Some subsequently republished in the Oppenheimer Series 1945–50. Jesuit Zambezi Mission Letters 1879–89 republished in 1960s and 1970s. Harriet Wilson: *Our Nig* (1859)
	Richard Francis Burton: *Lake Regions of Central Africa* (1860)
Bemba increase their wealth by exchanging slaves and ivory for guns (c. 1860–90)	
	John Speke: *Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (1864)
	David and Charles Livingstone: *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and Its Tributaries* (1865)
Sufism in West Africa; founding of Touba, Senegal (1866)	Shaykh Bamba: *Masalik al-Jinan* (The Roads to Paradise)
Diamonds discovered in Griqualand and later where Kimberley now stands (1870); Lobengula confirmed as Ndebele king (1870)	
	H. M. Stanley: *How I Found Livingstone in Central Africa* (1872)
Death of Livingstone (1873)	
	H. M. Stanley: *Through the Dark Continent* (1878)
Tunisia becomes a French Protectorate (1881)	Suppression of *Ajami* literature in French-controlled Hausaland
French colonization in West Africa (late 1800s)	Swahili chronicles: *Habari za Mrima* (1880); Swahili as official language

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
British colonization in West Africa (late 1800s)	F. C. Selous: *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (1881)
Mahdi Rebellion in Sudan (1881)	Latinization of Hausa alphabet Translation of English literature into Hausa language Olive Schreiner: *The Story of an African Farm* (1883)
Berlin Conference (Partition of Africa (1884–85))	H. M. Stanley: *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration* (1885); H. Rider Haggard: *King Solomon's Mines* (1885)
German rule in Tanganyika (1885); British colonial rule in East Africa (1885)	Writing in Swahili-Roman script; Swahili translations of English classics; Swahili historical chronicles
Gold discovered (1886): Transvaal declared a gold mining area	
Introduction of the *Pass System* to control movement in order to control availability of cheap labor, defining the relationship of the people and the police as a constantly and inevitably violent one, resulting in such events as the Sharpeville Massacre.	
	Edward Wilmot Blyden: *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887)
Lobengula grants concession to Charles Rudd, who works for Cecil Rhodes to mine metals and minerals in his territories (1888)	
Royal Charter granted to Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company on the strength of the Rudd Concession (1889)	
Boer War (1889–1902)	H. M. Stanley: *In Darkest Africa* (1890)
Islamic Revivalist Movement in Nigeria (1890s)	
Frederick Lugard establishes depot of Imperial British East Africa Company at Dagoretti (1890); British protectorate in Malawi declared and northern and southern boundaries agreed with Germany and Portugal (1890); British South Africa Company forces occupy Mashonaland (1890)	

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
British South Africa Company invades Ndebele kingdom. Lobengula escapes northwards and possibly dies (1893)	
Rhodesia becomes name for British South Africa Company territories (1895)	
Kenya Protectorate established (1895); remaining independent areas of East and Northeast Zambia brought under British Control (1895–99)	Enoch Sontonga composes "Nkosi sikelel' i Afrika" (God Bless Africa) (c. 1897), a choral piece that was sung at the first meeting of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912 and at many of their political meetings and rallies and was to become the national anthem of South Africa and other southern African countries
Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)	
Mauritania French Protectorate (1903)	
British Central Africa Protectorate renamed Nyasaland Protectorate (1907)	Swahili acquires nationalist role
Maji-Maji Rising in German East Africa (1908–12)	
Union of South Africa formed (1910), unifying whites against blacks	Thomas Mofolo: *Pitseng* (1910) Republican Cuba's journal *Bohemia* (1910–50s)
Morocco becomes a French Protectorate (1912)	
Libya under Italian occupation (1912–47)	
Formation of the African National Congress (1912), in recognition of the common oppression of all blacks and of the need for united action; The Natives Land Act passed in South Africa (1913), the first major land law legally disenfranchising the black from owning land Marcus Garvey founds Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica (1914)	
First World War (1914–18); Egypt British Protectorate (1914–22); Native Associations formed in Nyasaland to press for more African control over economic, social, and political issues in the protectorate (1914–15)	Sol T. Plaatje: *Native Life in South Africa* (1915)

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Members of the Ndebele royal family form the National Home Movement to recover land for the nation and petition George V (1915)	
Du Bois and Pan-African Conference, Paris (1919); Egyptian Nationalist uprising (1919)	
Kikuyu Association formed (1920)	Harlem Renaissance (c. 1921–29)
East African Association formed (1921)	René Maran: *Batouala* (1921)
Southern Rhodesia settlers vote to become a self-governing colony rather than a fifth province of South Africa when the British South Africa Company charter ends (1922)	
Rhodesia Bantu Voters' Association formed (1923)	
Kikuyu Central Association formed (1924)	New Testament of the Bible first published in Gikuyu (1926)
	Lamine Senghor's journal *La Voix des Nègres,* from Paris (1927); Jean Rhys: *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927)
Jomo Kenyatta travels to London as representative of the Kikuyu Central Association (1929)	*Muigwithania* first published (1928)
Creation of Zaria Translation Bureau in Nigeria (1930)	Thomas Mofolo: *Shaka* (1930)
Libyan Independence (1931)	
	C. L. R. James and associates' Trinidad journal *The Beacon* (1931–33, 1939)
African National Congress founded in Southern Rhodesia (1934)	Stanley Kiama Gathigira: *Miikarire ya Agikuyu* (1934)
Labor riots in anglophone Caribbean territories (1935–37)	L. S. Senghor and associates' emergence and the journal *L'Etudiant Noir* (1935)
Italian invasion of Abyssinia (1936)	Birth of Hausa fiction writing in Hausa language
	Leo Frobenius: *History of African Civilizations* (1936)
	Jomo Kenyatta: *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938)
	D. O. Fagunwa: *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1938); C. L. R. James: *The Black Jacobins* (1938)
	Aimé Césaire: *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939)

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Second World War (1939–45)	Aimé Césaire's Martinique journal *Tropiques* (1941–45)
Kikuyu Central Association banned (1940)	
	Albert Camus: *L'étranger* (*The Stranger*) (1942)
	Frank Collymore's Barbados journal *Bim*, with Derek Walcott's first poems in print (1942–90s)
Brazzaville Conference (1944); Kenya African Union founded (1944); Nyasaland African Congress holds first conference in which Hastings Banda is involved (1944)	Eric Williams: *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944)
Manchester Pan-African Conference (1945)	A. J. Seymour's British Guiana journal *Kyk-Over-Al* (1945–90s)
Pan-African Conference, Manchester (1946)	Edna Manley's Jamaica journal *Focus* (1946–60)
Jomo Kenyatta becomes Kenya African Union president (1947)	Alioune Diop and associates' founding of *Présence Africaine* (1947)
Arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in England (1948)	L. S. Senghor: *Chants d'ombre; Anthologie* (1948)
National Party comes to power in South Africa and institutes policy of Apartheid (1948)	Hausa nationalist literature
	Placide Tempels: *Bantu Philosophy* (1949)
	Mouloud Feraoun: *Le fils du pauvre* (1950)
	South Africa's journal *Drum*, a pioneer voice of culture and politics, continent-wide
	Doris Lessing: *The Grass Is Singing* (1950)
	Emergence of Agostinho Neto and the Angolan journal *Mensagem* (1951–52)
Declaration of public emergency in Kenya (1952)	Amos Tutuola: *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952); Samuel Selvon: *A Brighter Sun* (1952); Mohammed Dib: *La grande maison* (1952)
Mau-Mau War (1952–56)	
	Camara Laye: *The African Child* (1953); Phyllis Allfrey: *The Orchid House* (1953); George Lamming: *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953)
Algerian War of Independence (1954–62)	Cheik Anta Diop: *Nations nègres et culture* (1954)
	Nigerian journal *Odu* (1955–)

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Bandung Conference (1956)	
Suez Crisis (1956)	Shaping of Swahili novel and play; Shaaban Robert (1909–62)
Morocco and Tunisia become independent (1956)	
Ghana Independence (1957)	Albert Memmi: *Le portrait du colonisé* (1957)
Hastings Banda assumes presidency of the Congress (1957)	Ulli Beier and Nigerian associates' journal *Black Orpheus* (1957–82)
Hastings Banda and other Congress leaders detained (1958)	
Loi Cadre, French African Colonies (1958)	First Congress of Black Writers, Paris (1956)
General de Gaulle and Referendum on "French Community" Independence of Guinea (1958)	Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
Malawi Congress Party founded to replace banned Nyasaland African Congress with Orton Chirwa acting as leader until Banda's release (1959); ANC (SR) proscribed (1959)	Student journal from University College, Ibadan, *The Horn* (1958–64)
	Student journal from University College, Makerere, *Penpoint* (1958–late 1960s)
Castro seizes power in Cuba (1959)	
	Ballets Africains of Guinea (Fodeba Keita)
	Second Congress of Black Writers, Rome, 1959
1960: Year of African Independence: Nigeria, Somalia, Mauritania, and several other African countries	
National Democratic Party formed to replace ANC (SR) (1960); Banda released from Gwelo prison (1960)	Wole Soyinka: *A Dance of the Forests* (1960)
South Africa: Sharpeville Massacre (1960)	Revolutionary Cuba's journal *Casa de las Américas* (1960–)
Reign of Hassan II of Morocco (1961–99)	Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); V. S. Naipaul: *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961)
War of Independence, Portuguese colonies (1961–74)	The journal *Transition/Ch'indaba*, started by Rajat Neogy, continued by Wole Soyinka (1961–)
Algerian Independence (1962); Independence in Trinidad/Tobago and Jamaica (1962)	Africa's Anglophone writers meet, with Ngugi attending, in Kampala (1962)

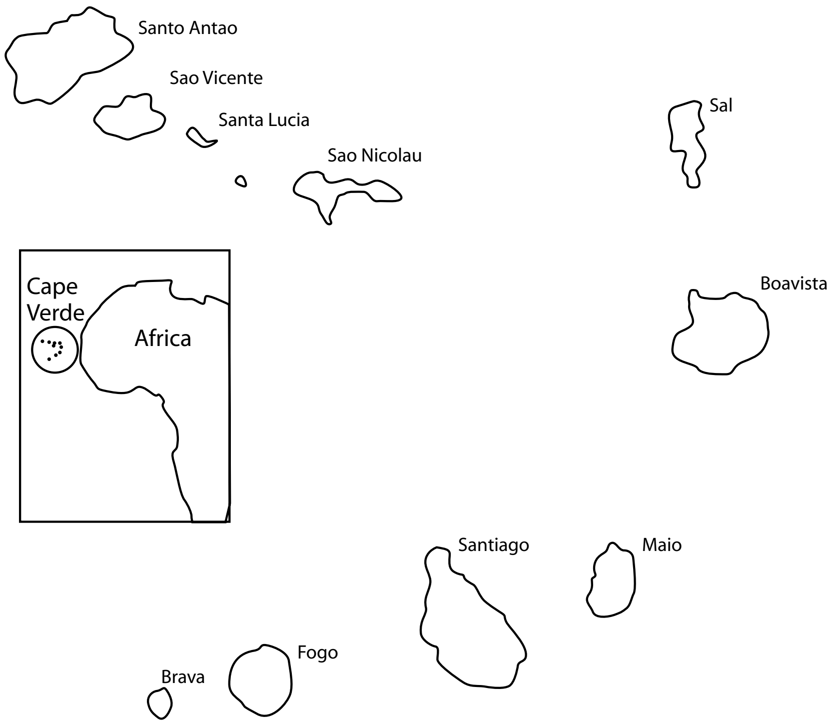
HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Founding of Organization of African Unity (1963); Kenya independence (1963)	Julius Nyerere translates Shakespeare (1963); Swahili nationalist literature; emergence of Swahili free verse
	Bernard Fonlon and associates' Cameroon journal *Abbia* (1963–82)
Zanzibar revolution (1964); Zambian independence with Kenneth Kaunda as Prime Minister and Malawian independence with Hastings Banda as Prime Minister (1964); Ian Smith becomes Rhodesian Prime Minister (1964); Nkomo and Mugabe in detention (1964–74)	
Fall of Kwame Nkrumah (1966); Malawi becomes a republic and one-party state with Banda as president (1966); Independence in Barbados (1966)	Dakar Arts Festival (1966); Chinua Achebe: *A Man of the People* (1966)
	Ahamdou Kourouma: *Les soleils des indépendances* (*The Suns of Independence*) (first published in Canada, 1968); Stanlake Samkange: *On Trial for My Country* (1966)
Nigerian Civil War (1967–70); *Ujamaa* (1967)	Olive Senior, Commonwealth Writers Prize (1967); David Rubadiri: *No Bride Price* (1967)
	Ayi Kwei Armah: *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968); Miguel Barnet: *Biographia de un Cimarron* translated into English as *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1968)
	Yambo Ouologuem: *Bound to Violence* (1968)
	Samuel Selvon awarded Hummingbird Medal of the Order of the Trinity (for literature) by the government of Trinidad and Tobago (1969)
	Algiers Arts Festival (1969)
	Ahmadou Kourouma: *Les soleils des indépendances* (published in France, 1974)
Coup by Siyad Barre in Somalia (1969)	
Nigeria Oil Boom (1970); Hastings Banda declared president for life (1970); Black Power uprising in Trinidad (1970)	

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
	V. S. Naipual: Booker Prize for *In a Free State* (1971)
	Chinua Achebe's journal *Okike* (1972); Walter Rodney: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972)
Kaunda established a one-party state in Zambia (1973); Bahamas independence (1973)	Ayi Kwei Armah: *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973); Kamau Brathwaite: *The Arrivants* (1973)
	Agostinho Neto: *Sacred Hope* (1974)
Soweto (1976)	Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii, with the Kamiriithu Cultural Center, develop and produce *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) (1976)
Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia (1976–77)	Hausa Boomtown literature; Hausa women's romance literature; Lagos Arts Festival (1977)
Independence in Dominica (1978)	Journal and publishing house *Staffrider*, superseding *Drum* for South Africa (1978–); Dambudzo Marechera: *House of Hunger* (1978)
	Mariam Bâ: *So Long a Letter* (1979); (Wins Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, 1980)
	Nuruddin Farah: *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship (1979–83)*; *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979)
Zimbabwean independence with Robert Mugabe as Prime Minister (1980)	Austin Clarke, Casa de las Américas Prize (1980)
	Nuruddin Farah: *Sardines* (1981)
	Jack Mapanje: *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1982); Frank Chipasula: *This Is the Time* (1982); Felix Mnthali: *When Sunset Comes to Sapitwa* (1982); Chenjerai Hove: *Up in Arms* (1982)
	J. M. Coetzee: Booker Prize for *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983)
US invasion of Grenada (1983)	Nuruddin Farah: *Close Sesame* (1983); Jamaica Kincaid: *At the Bottom of the River* (1983)
	Senghor elected to the French Academy (1983)
	David Dabydeen: Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1984); Malawi Writer's Group anthology, *Namaluzi* (1984)

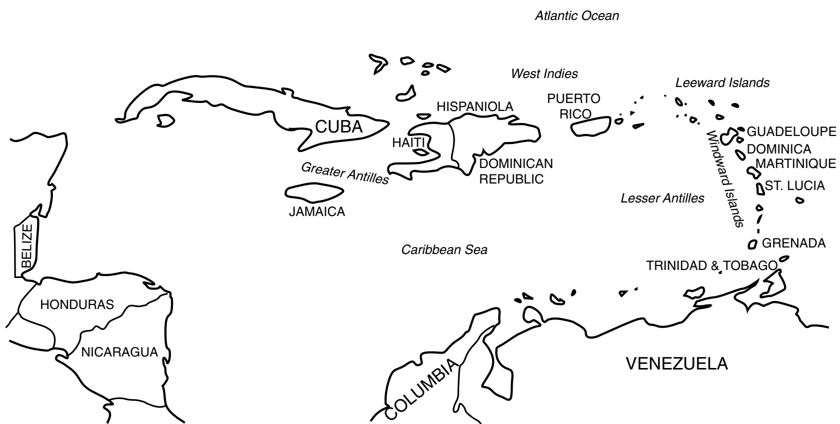
HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
	Maryse Condé: Grand Prix Littéraire de la Femme for *Moi, Tituba* (1986) Wole Soyinka: Nobel Prize (1986) Tahar Ben Jelloun: Prix Goncourt for *La nuit sacrée* (1987) Naguib Mafouz: Nobel Prize (1988); the Qur'an first published in Gikuyu (1988); Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions* (1988); Chenjerai Hove: *Bones* (1988) Chenjerai Hove: Noma Award (1989); Shimmer Chinodya: *Harvest of Thorns* (1989); Marlene Nourbese Philip: *She Tries Her Tongue* (1989)
Nelson Mandela released from jail as a political prisoner after 27 years (1990)	
Fall of Siyad Barre, Somali dictator (1991)	Nadine Gordimer: Nobel Prize (1991)
Somali Civil War (1991–93)	
Start of Algerian Civil War (1992)	Patrick Chamoiseau: Prix Goncourt for *Texaco* (1992) Ben Okri: Booker Prize for *The Famished Road* (1992) Henri Lopes: Grand Prix de la Francophonie de l'Académie Française (1993) Derek Walcott: Nobel Prize (1992); Caryl Phillips: *Crossing the River* (1993)
Nelson Mandela elected President of South Africa (1994)	Kamau Brathwaite: Neustadt Prize (1994) Caya Makhele: Grand Prix de la Nouvelle Francophone for "Les Travaux d'Ariane" Caryl Phillips: Lannan Literary Award (1994) Noma Award to work in Afrikaans (1995)
Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa by Military Government in Nigeria (1995)	Dapo Adeniyi's Nigeria journal *Glendora Review* (1995–) Abdourahman Waberi: Grand Prix de l'Afrique noire for *Cahier Nomade* (1996) Calixthe Beyala: Grand Prix de l'Académie Française for *Les honneurs perdus* (1996)

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
	Calixthe Beyala judged guilty of plagiarism for sections of *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1996) Earl Lovelace: Commonwealth Writer's Prize for *Salt* (1997) Nuruddin Farah: Neustadt Prize (1998) J. M. Coetzee: Booker Prize for *Disgrace* (1999) Jackie Kay: Guardian Fiction Prize for *Trumpet* (1999) Tierno Monénembo: Prix Tropiques for *L'aîné des orphelins* (2000) Noma Award for Swahili work by Kimani Njogu and Rocha Chimerah (2000) Marie Ndiaye: Prix Fémina for *Rosie Carpe* (2001); Lorna Goodison: *Travelling Mercies* (2001); V. S. Naipaul: Nobel Prize (2001)

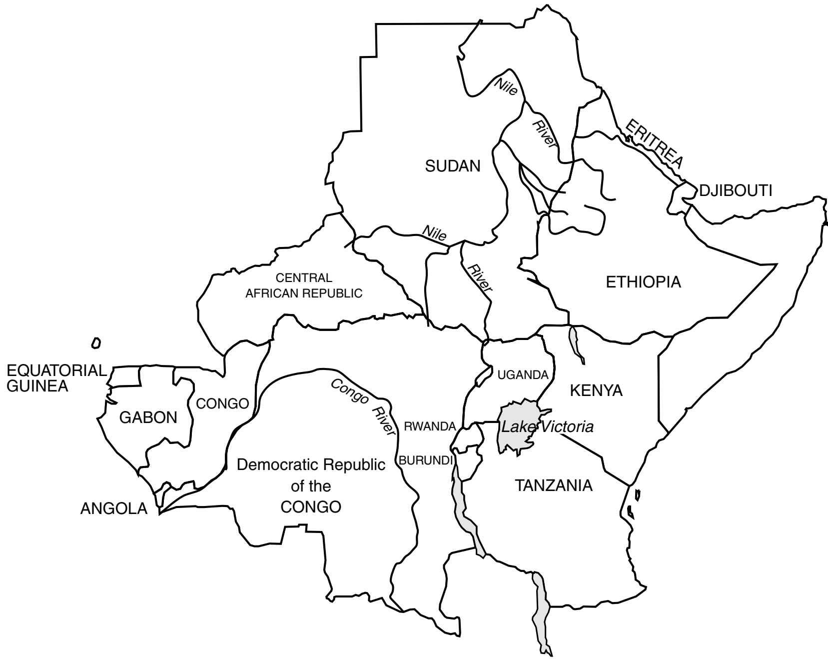
Map 1 Africa (physical and political)



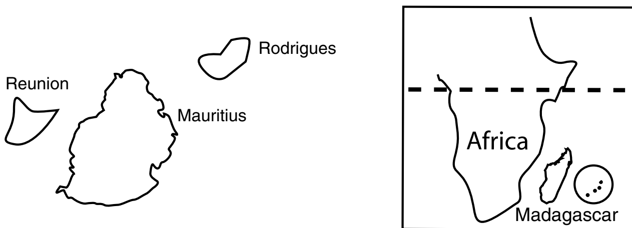
Map 2 Cape Verde Islands



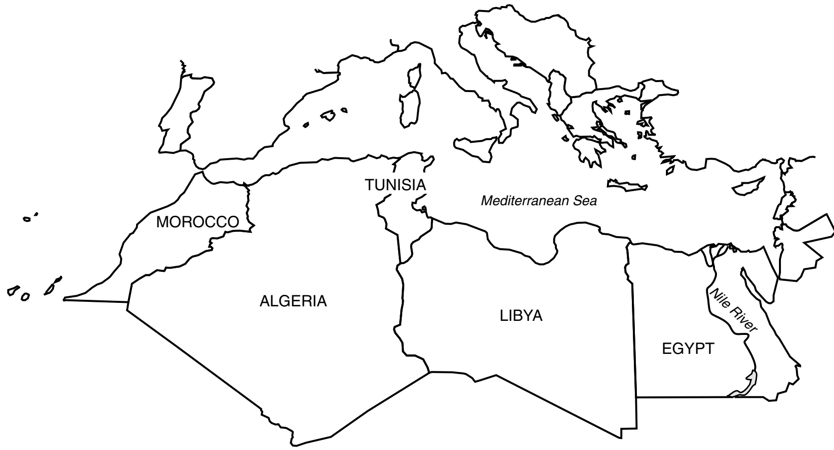
Map 3 The Caribbean



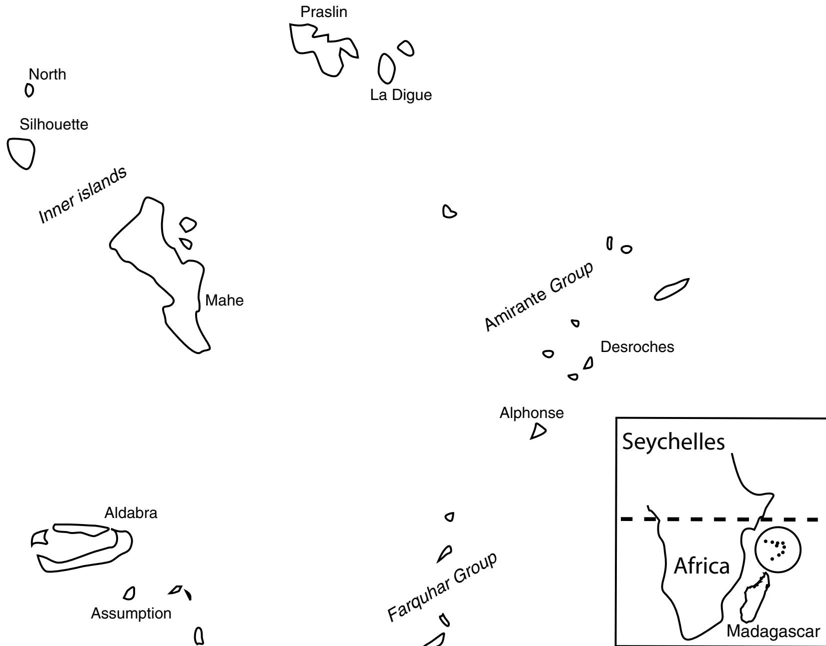
Map 4 East and Central Africa



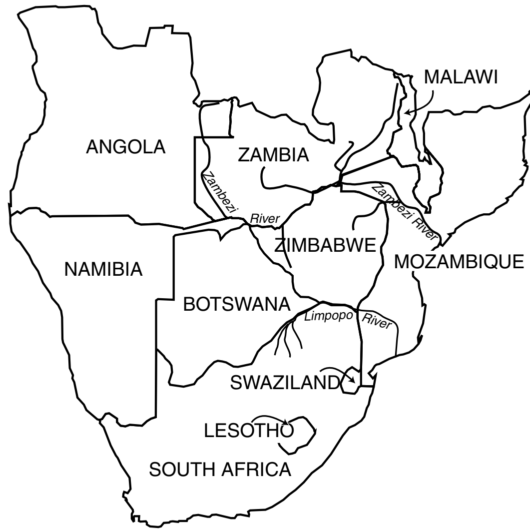
Map 5 Mauritius



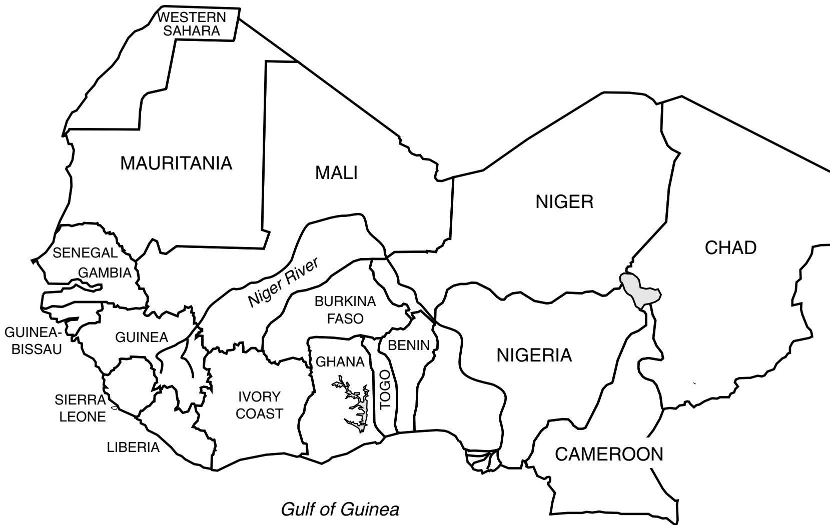
Map 6 North Africa



Map 7 Seychelles Islands



Map 8 Southern Africa



Map 9 West Africa

I

Africa and orality

LIZ GUNNER

The continent of Africa can be viewed as a site of enormous, long, and ongoing creativity in relation to orality as a vector for the production of social life, religious beliefs, and the constant constituting and reconstituting of society, ideology, and aesthetics. If it is language which has a crucial role in the production and reproduction of society, then in the case of orality it is often language combined with the performativity of the body, and enacted in both the public and the private space. If it is justifiable to call the African continent "the oral continent par excellence" we need to ask why this is so. What precisely might it mean and what conclusions could flow therefrom? Orality needs to be seen in the African context as the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organized their present and their pasts, made formal spaces for philosophical reflections, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power, and generally paid homage to "the word," language, as the means by which humanity was made and constantly refashioned. Orality was the means by which Africa made its existence, its history long before the colonial and imperial presence of the west manifested itself. In this sense, orality needs to be seen not simply as "the absence of literacy" but as something self-constitutive, *sui generis*. The accepting of this proposition has consequences for an understanding of world culture: namely, it is neither possible nor accurate to take one model that valorizes the written word as the blueprint for how the human race has developed.

What we can learn from the African model is that orality, manifested as types of formal speech communication, in some circumstances coexisting with music in the form of song, or with instruments, and dance, generated an almost unimaginable range of genres that enabled and empowered social, political, and spiritual existence. In some instances a specific mode of orality encoded a state's history; this was the case with the form of *ubwwiiru*, the nineteenth-century Rwandan dynastic ritual code that the historians Joseph Rwabukumba and Alexis Kagame have turned into a written record and made

part of a broader historical narrative (Feierman 1994; Rwabukumba and Mudandagizi 1974; Kagame 1975). In the west, the *oriki* (praise poetry) of the Yoruba interwove personal and public history and provided a poetic vehicle for the powerful as well as the ordinary citizen (Barber 1991; Babalola 1966; Yai 1994). Forms such as *oriki* recreated the past in the present; they made and, in the present, still "make possible the crossing from the world of the dead to the world of the living, making the past present again" (Barber 1991: 76). Thus they demonstrate the different kinds of historicity that an oral form can generate with very different conventions of interactivity from those governing a conventional historical printed text (Farias 1992; Vansina 1985; Opland 1974, 1987). History was often encapsulated in the elaborate dynastic poetry of a kingdom, composed and reproduced by specially trained bards and presenting a legitimizing, heroic view of past and present to the people at large. This was the case with the court poets of Rwanda. Alexis Kagame has meticulously documented this "specialized and learned artistic tradition" (Finnegan 1970: 87; Kagame 1951; Coupez and Kamanzi 1970), outlining the privileged position of the association of royal poets who were split between those who performed the works of others and those who composed new work. A "long and rigorous period of apprenticeship" by young members of the families of poets ensured mastery of existing poems and of the "vocabulary, imagery and subject-matter which formed the traditional basis of any future composition" (Finnegan 1970: 89). This genre of court poetry, plus the secret ritual texts, the *ubwwiiru*, and other genres from Rwanda are among the best documented on the continent and provide an indication of how orality could operate at the heart of the state. Poetry was, in a way, the heartbeat of royalty. As the increasingly beleaguered kings of the nineteenth-century kingdom of Rwanda fended off their hostile neighbors, and then had to contend with the incoming colonial powers of Germany and Belgium, the royal poetic tradition was also affected, and shifted, taking on first the patina of the colonial overlords' voice and then reflecting also the counterviews of a dissident group of poets who sought out "antidynastic histories in their own past" (Hertefelt 1964; Feierman 1994: 60).

I have mentioned the Rwandan case in some detail to demonstrate firstly a formidable example of poetry, politics, and power operating in a particular historical context in Africa, without the mediation of the written or printed word. What the Rwandan example also shows is that the set of cultural practices that the poetry embodied was not static. Rather it was dynamic, changing in response to the historical pressures of the time. There is no evidence that the genres of the Rwandan court have survived into the modern era (the monarchy was abolished in 1959) and only the meticulous scholarship of Rwandan

and non-Rwandan scholars provides an archive from which we can attempt to reconfigure, in the interests of the history of both world and African culture, the vibrant voices of a past poetic tradition.

Some forms of orality now exist only in written, audio or visual archives, although brief, remembered snatches may remain, tantalizingly, in living discourse, encapsulating metonymically a vast unreachable hinterland of cultural knowledge. Like the Central African drums, two of them Kuba, and one Lele, described by the historian Jan Vansina, such fragments "impress onto their own society a silent discourse, and simultaneously, as loci of memory, recite silently their own past and that of the society that made them possible" (Mudimbe 1994: 68; Vansina 1984: 47). There are, however, oral genres that exist vigorously in the contemporary era, either as part of a new global culture, as part of the local, or as what the musicologist Thomas Turino in his study of Zimbabwean music has called the indigenous, namely, a line of culture that may be closer to performance genres not significantly altered by modernity (Turino 2000: 17–18). Part of this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which orality has been extended into various configurations of modernity, thus belying the argument for a purist orality that is beyond the grasp of the modern. Nor should we see orality in Africa in the new millennium as a residual state, battered by forms of modernity: songs, chants, a dance, a gesture with a fly whisk or a spear, used simply as a nostalgic resource by politicians seeking to evoke a distant idyllic past and so link themselves to it; rather we can see it as a mode of communicative action that has in the past been finely honed to fit a myriad of different social, ideological, and aesthetic needs in many different societies on the continent. In the present, forms of orality have in some cases powered the new technologies of mass communication by influencing their direction. The extensive presence of live performances and recordings of tied and freelance singers, and poets on Hausa television and radio stations in northern Nigeria is one example of this (Furniss 1996: 126–27). Literacy has impacted in various ways on oral modes of communication and has often produced brilliant hybrid forms (touched on below), but the book itself, in terms of written literature from the continent, has been profoundly influenced by orality. It could be argued that the directions taken by contemporary written African literature, have largely been shaped by the presence of a substantial and established body of rhetoric holding deep knowledge with which writers have often felt compelled to engage, even when moving from the African language/s in which the poetry or narrative is expressed, to writing in English, French, or Portuguese.

As the example of the Rwandan school of specialist poets demonstrates, one of the roles of oral forms in many parts of the continent has been to

give verbal expression to the ordering of societies through the public recitation of genealogies and praises of rulers, often by highly skilled and specialist poets. In the Rwandan case the often esoteric poetry, full of archaisms and elaborate prosody, was not accessible to the majority of the kingdom's subjects even though they all (Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa) shared the same language, Kinyarwanda.[1] In other comparable forms of poetry, there was often a shared knowledge of the poetic skills, so that it was, in important ways, a more widely accessible form. Praise poetry in Shona and Zulu exemplify this more horizontal proliferation of both linked genres and poetic skills. Certainly the vast areas across which the form of praise poetry has been used, testify to the importance placed on the making of meaning and the place of dense, rich poetic language as carriers of public social values and ideologies.

The need for societies to have memory banks that act as mirrors and as a form of working archive led in many instances to the extensive use of oral poetry to formalize memory of the past, and to make the past comprehensible and accessible. Praise poetry, differently named, often with elaborate yet flexible prosodies, and existing in each instance in a particular hierarchy of genres, has its place in a number of very differently constituted societies covering a range of language groups across the continent. It is one of the most widespread forms of oral poetry that engaged with the attempt to provide public, active memorials through performance. It can be found in many sub-Saharan African societies and in some instances it has found a niche as an ongoing cultural practice in contemporary communities or in the modern state. A number of south and southern African societies still have considerable cultural capital held in praise poetry. In South Africa, Xhosa praise poets who supported figures opposed to the apartheid Nationalist government were on more than one occasion persecuted by the apartheid police (Opland 1998: 278–81) and in the postapartheid state former President Mandela is frequently accompanied on official business by his praise poet, Zolani Mkiva, who has also released a number of compact discs of his work, with musical backing. The praise poet has license to critique the object of his praise, but this is usually done sparingly. Praise poetry has often been constituted as history from above, for instance the *lithoko* of the Basotho (Damane and Saunders 1974; Kunene 1971), the court poetry of the old kingdom of Rwanda (Kagame 1951), Hausa praise poetry and song (Smith 1957, 1978; Gidley 1975; Muhammad 1979; Furniss 1996), and the royal and chiefly *izibongo* of the Zulu (Nyembezi 1958; Cope 1968; Gunner and Gwala 1991). Even here, the history of rulers is often rich with ambiguities and frequently contains the resistant voices of those groups that have been defeated, and the dissident voices of critics (Brown 1998: 94–95;

Hamilton 1998). It is the ability of praise poetry to absorb and reflect changes within the society it enunciates (Vail and White 1991) and also to provide a sense of the past in the present (Barber 1989: 20) that are among its most compelling qualities and ensure its place as one of the great genres of the continent. Nevertheless its continued existence is uncertain. Among the Basotho in the nineteenth century, the elaborate *lithoko* with their heroic ethos and elaborate imagery captured the exploits of King Mshweshwe and his sons as they battled to maintain their mountain kingdom against Boer attacks but the poetry also allowed for moments of reflexivity and for the inclusion of close observation of the natural world and of place which frequently became absorbed into the praise names themselves (Kunene 1971). This official poetry still flourishes on state occasions but now lacks the pervasive influence it once had, and it has been argued that a new genre "of the people," *lifela*, is more representative of modern Basotho national and transnational identity than the older *lithoko* (Coplan 1994). Shona praise poetry, once part of an assembly of spoken and sung genres (Hodza and Fortune 1979) in which clan praises had a particularly important role has largely fallen into disuse. Hodza and Fortune note that

> One of the most pleasing forms of love poetry, and, indeed, of praise poetry as a whole, arises out of the rhythmic use of praise names and their expansions, accompanied by variations in the imagery. (Hodza and Fortune 1979: 39)

Their beauty and intricacy, their deep engagement with the imagery of the natural world are very striking, as the following two examples illustrate, one from the poetry of love and courtship, and the other from the praises of a wife to her husband:

> You are my mother,
> One with loving embraces
> One with a neck as long as a giraffe's . . .
> My calabash, so light yet so capacious.
> Tasty paste that sticks to my gums,
> Ground nuts doubly ground.
> (Hodza and Fortune 1979: 39)

And

> (Tembo clan praises of endearment):
> Thank you Zebra;
> Zebra with a striped coat;
> One adorned with its own skin;
> One who gives delight . . .
> Thank you, Hornless wild beast;

Your sweetness lies at your base;
A stalk of sweet sorghum;
Male yet female in your love.
(Hodza and Fortune 1979: 163)

Even though such intimate eloquence has fallen out of fashion, new genres, as in the Basotho case, have emerged. During the war of liberation of the 1970s, in what was then Rhodesia, the rich and symbolic imagery of many of the popular songs, sold commercially on audiocassettes and even played on the radio station of the Smith government, often held hidden messages linked to the struggle. The ease with which urban audiences "read" such *chimurenga* (liberation) songs was in large part due to the way they "hugged the common cultural ground which they shared with their audiences" although the message was new (Pongweni 1997: 65). In his account of the new music that played so crucial a role as a conduit of comment and resistance, Alec Pongweni identifies three types of songs, already part of Shona cultural practice, that were utilized in *chimurenga* music: the narrative genre known as *ndgaringo*; another genre, *kudeketera,* which built on the repetition of small units; and the genre of work songs known as *jukwara*, which frequently made use of poetic license (Pongweni 1997: 66; 1982; Vambe 2000). The example of such Zimbabwean music, which was so knotted into accepted linguistic and musical forms but at the same time departed from them, shows orality as a dynamic force, operating as part of what Raymond Williams has termed "emergent culture" (Williams 1977). Important as its presence is, it cannot call back into active use the elaborate speech genres that were once part of the Shona language repertoire.

The multiplicity of expressive forms that African societies have produced is shown by its exploitation by those well outside the domains of public power. As Jean Derive has pointed out, the capacity for oral performance is not merely the "distinctive sign" of a given social condition, but is also a potential means of exerting pressure upon or transforming social conditions and power relations (James 1997: 468; Derive 1995). Thus those without power may nevertheless use a recognized art form to complain, and hope for change. Derive has recorded how Douala married women would make use of a sung and danced genre performed in public on the arrival of an important visitor, to record, obliquely but publicly, their anxieties and the problems they were experiencing as women, and often as women in a polygynous situation (Derive 1978). Although such a genre might not be seen by outsiders as prestigious, by those within Douala society the genre, known as *kurubi donkili*, was highly enough regarded to

have produced its own famous composers (such as Nasara Kamagati) and to be valued as a means by which those without power, in this case women and particularly married women, could claim a space of free and public expression (Derive 1978). The potential of exerting pressure, even if not of transforming power relations, is held in such a genre. In carefully documented cases from other parts of the continent, such as Mozambique, we see how song, often with dance, can become a vehicle not only for critical comment by generations of the oppressed but how it can hold with a kind of shifting tenacity "a whole tradition of rejection" (Vail and White 1997: 63).

The ChiSena worksong, with the name of Paiva (a brutal overseer whose name then signifies successive exploitative figures and ultimately the system itself) recurring through the decades, became a means of inscribing in social memory the successive malpractices relating to land appropriation and labor misuse by the Portuguese, and more broadly the colonial system under which the people suffered (Vail and White 1997: 60). Once again, the dynamic nature of song is noted, as the "same" song appears in Luabo (rather than ChiSena) and is described as "a map of suffering which our children will have to know" (Vail and White 1997: 56). It then moves again to become a women's dance song that comments cogently, and with inserted improvised drama elaborating the main themes, on the harsh conditions and the frequent sexual assaults women had to suffer as they worked in the cotton plantations in the mid-1950s. What the body of "Paiva songs" shows is how an older song can, through a measure of "recontextualizing," as performance theorists term it (Bauman and Brigs 1990), move languages and genres and yet remain recognizably "the same." Only in the 1970s, after the withdrawal of the Portuguese from Mozambique, did new words become attached to the song that then contained not only the criticism so central to the earlier songs, but also triumph over the oppressive Paiva figure:

> Paiva is diabolical
> *Ay Ay*
> Now we have escaped.
> (Vail and White:
> 1997: 60)

As the two instances above show, the license for those without formal power to comment and criticize through song or poetry (and sometimes dance and song) is a crucial part of the way orality has operated in African societies. The powerful could listen and take note, but they could not strike back as the license given to the genres themselves provided protection. A popular song deeply critical of the early nineteenth-century Zulu king, Dingane, recorded

by the musician and composer, Princess Magogo (d. 1989), a member of the Zulu royal house, had as its theme line: "Each day we are killed by Dingane" (Tracey 1974; Gunner 2002a).

In some instances the marginal voices produce not critical comment but long, semi-autobiographical finely crafted poetry that encapsulates some of the primary values of the larger community. Marginal people include the youth. Thus among the nomadic Fulani of West Africa, it is the young men who compose elaborate and intense poems, known as *jamooje nai*, for their cattle on the long and lonely journeys across the bare and forbidding savannah. Christiane Seydou points out that the poetry contains "their life, their soul"; in this genre that is individual and confessional yet exists within the clear parameters of a recognized form, their making of the poetry becomes the means by which they map and control, mentally, the harsh terrain through which they travel; and their mastery of the artistic resource offered by the poetry is displayed to the full community on their return to the river Niger in Mali (Seydou, 1991; Seydou, Biebuyck and Bekombo 1997).

What the African records and the ongoing production of culture in Africa make clear is that orality is not an amorphous, vaguely communal preliterate state awaiting redemption by various manifestations of modernity. It is rather a protean presence, changing, interacting, and producing a different kind of cultural equilibrium on the African continent, defining its own modernities through language (Benveniste 1966; Voloshinov 1986). The records of African performance genres show time and again that particular societies may produce precisely honed kinds of expressive art to fit the particular ambience of a specific culture. In a society that has for centuries been decimated by internecine wars, by slavery, and by disease, the specialist (male) Nzakara poets from the Central African Republic sing with stoic, sometimes satiric eloquence about death, the betrayal of women, and the impossible hardships of life (de Dampierre, 1963: 33). The production of the finest poetry by those who choose the art remains an austere obligation and a mark of high social value. Eric de Dampierre describes how a poet, accompanying himself on the harp, may use the accepted devices of his form – the known phrases, elliptical language, archaic words – and yet insert his own "voice" as a composer. In the instance of the Nzakara we see, again, performance as a cultural practice not linked to the reification of power but rather an expressive art form that is part of the ongoing making of meaning for both producers and listeners.

How oral material is transmitted between the generations, and what factors ensure that songs, chanted or spoken poetry, prayers, proverbs, narratives, and

so on are passed on is clearly a central question, crucial to social reproduction. Whereas the genres such as praise poetry, which are largely situated in the public domain, enunciate history and power "from above" other genres situated in the expressive forms of subaltern groups such as women and youth are in many cases less accessible to outsiders and are given less rhetorical space. They are often, though, crucially important to social structure. Initiation songs provide an insight into the ways in which African societies have engaged with song and forms of dance as the key modes through which they approach the difficult process of the move to adulthood and the responsibilities that go with it. John Blacking's work on the initiation schools of the Venda in southern Africa, and in particular those for Venda girls, opens up a number of fascinating points in this regard (Blacking 1969). He points out that like the modern system of school education, initiation is designed to "indoctrinate," not educate in the true sense of the word, namely, to reveal and develop individual qualities and abilities. Within that caveat, he explores what values and knowledge were being taught. In Venda society, Blacking observes, what is stressed is "the overriding importance of being human," and he continues, "technical incompetence in human relations is never accepted" (Blacking 1969: 71). He emphasizes that for women in Venda society, nonattendance at *domba* would prevent them from having any real say in women's affairs and would isolate an individual from her peers in times of trouble. In traditional Venda society, women hold considerable power and almost undisputed authority in certain fields of religious duty, home management, marriage and divorce negotiations, the preparation of girls for marriage, and the control of young mothers. It is attendance at *domba* that regulates a woman's status and precise seniority among her peers for her whole life (Blacking 1969: 4).

Songs as well as dances have a central role in the educational process of initiation, and the exacting dances are practiced by novices both individually, with a teacher, and then communally in the evenings. The songs that make up the stage known as *vhusha* come from a variety of sources: some are composed by the graduates themselves, some are adaptations of beer songs, of children's songs, and so on. The teaching that is carried through both the songs and the dances seeks to redefine the novices' somatic knowledge as regards sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth, and the responsibilities of marriage. The compact and allusive songs thus hold and transmit cultural knowledge and social values through the intensive learning situation, which is both focused on the individual, when the novice learns with a single tutor, and the group, communal rehearsals where the skills are welded into a single whole.

In addition to the focus on the way in which novices may in some cases compose fresh songs or adapt existing songs, sometimes from other genres, Blacking also draws attention to the contrasting role of the specialist, or master of words, in another stage of the initiation process, namely, the learning of the regulations or *imilayo*. Here an interesting differentiation between popular and specialist knowledge and usage in relation to verse is evident: for the experts, the passing on of the "laws" is "primarily an exercise in memory and imagination" whereas for the average person the songs or fragments of songs become "passwords of a mutual aid society." Interestingly, Blacking takes his reader briefly into the densely poetic and value-laden map used by the masters of initiation with whom he worked most closely, and points to the pattern of a journey followed by many; for one master, this took the form of "the beginning, the river, the public meeting place, the drum, the fire, the council hut." The gap between the verbal skills of the specialists and the far more generalized knowledge of the initiates can be seen as illustrating a general characteristic of orality as it is (or has been) practiced in many African societies, namely, that of a deeply productive symbiosis between the specialist and the ordinary performer. The relevance of the performance and of attendance at *domba* for young Venda girls can be judged by the fact that it is seen as having a place in the construction of modern identities in the new millennium and in the new postapartheid nation.[2]

Resistant memory, which holds the history of a minority and ensures the maintenance of a community, has also found imaginative expression through song. The capacity of song to wrap itself round a point of great importance in the past and thus allow that moment or cluster of moments to live on in the collective memory is well illustrated by the songs of the Herero people now living in northern Botswana and forced to flee from South West Africa after conflict with the Germans in the early years of the twentieth century (Alnaes 1989). Kirsten Alnaes argues that the pain of the past is encountered through the images of "death, destruction, loss of land and loss of meaning and normality." She continues by showing how images of regeneration can exist alongside such confrontations with "the death-world" of past generations (1989: 293–94). Thus the songs and laments performed have the dual role of catharsis and revitalization and bind together a very different past and present. Alnaes also points out that such songs, often performed within the home, and in order to educate the postmigration generations into their past, function as reminders of the contrast between a secure present and a time of trauma in earlier, but relatively recent, history (1989: 293–94).

Current work on orality emphasizes its place in contemporary cultural practice in Africa and its often dialogic role with writing or print and with the electronic media. The hybrid forms to which I referred earlier have often been born of such synergies. The hymns from the AmaNazaretha church in South Africa founded by Isaiah Shembe in 1910 and composed by him were written down by scribes, copied in longhand into the personal notebooks of church members, or simply learnt by those without access to the tools of literacy – a pen, paper, and the knowledge of writing. Today they are both sung and in some instances used as dancing items in church worship. Their imagery and range of reference that are part of the power of their performance mean that the hymns carry the power not only to confirm a particular view or position, but also to transform it. Moreover, the words contain their force within the broader musical performance and this has its own role in evoking a broadly political consciousness (Blacking 1995: 201). Performers and listeners / audience are part of a fluid set of subjectivities that relate to the history of Christianity, Zulu and South African history, and an intersecting regional and national imaginary (Gunner 2002b; Muller 1999). It is this capacity to reshape while drawing on older energies that marks some of the genres of modern African orality and it is the composite power of the word, music, and the dance that is significant. Deborah James's comments on the modern South African migrant genre of *kiba* and its power to draw people together are also true of the AmaNazaretha hymns:

> The lyrics alone . . . cannot explain the strength of this new source of identification. But, in the broader performance context, lyrics combine with dance and music to embody a life and a specific view of morality which men and women labour migrants have created for themselves. (James 1997: 470)

The huge investment of cultural capital in a range of often intersecting oral genres and the active role of practitioners in constantly moving a genre forward and remaking it is an area of oral studies that is currently being emphasized in the work of scholars. The older model of freestanding oral genres, manifested in the often very fine collections of single or relatively few genres of "oral literature" from a particular African society such as those published by the pathbreaking Oxford Library of African Literature series in the late 1960s and the 1970s (for example Goody 1972; Cope 1968; Coupez and Kamanzi 1970; Morris 1964; Bin Ismail and Lienhardt 1968), has been superseded by theories of orality that embrace a far more interactive and interdependent sense of cultural practices and "text" (Hanks 1989). Thus Graham Furniss writes of

contemporary Hausa literature that genres: oral, written, and those written first and then performed, are both genres in the conventional sense *and* are defined by their practitioners in relation to one another. He observes that

> the practitioners operate complex networks of borrowing, countering and redefinition which means that the genre is never an entirely fixed set of features even if the label appears to stay the same . . . some genres constitute the building blocks of others and may appear as performed events in their own right in one context and then, in another context, appear as constitutive elements in another genre . . . Similarly, the relation between genres may invoke the satirical subversion of a dominant form by another. (Furniss 1996: 16)

In the same way Karin Barber argues for the fluid, floating nature of genre boundaries and the way in which, in any number of cultures, recognized clusters of words migrate across genres and are redefined by their new context (Barber 1999: 21).

In an era of globalization, orality has not disappeared but has often adapted itself in its many different forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of Africans. Thus, while it is true that, in some instances, genres of poetry or song and of narrative have not endured the erosion of the social base that sustained their performances and their producers, other genres have survived or grown. In two interesting instances from South Africa the social and economic pressures of the migrant labor system in the apartheid era have led to the emergence of new genres that retain a loose connection to their parent genre but maintain a certain independence as well. These can be seen in a double sense as "migrant" genres; thus the Sotho genre of *lifela*, fashioned by men moving between Lesotho and the mines of Johannesburg, grew both from young men's initiation songs and from the praise poetry of Basotho royalty and chiefs known as *lithoko* (Coplan 1994; Damane and Sanders 1974; Kunene 1971). Migrant or rebellious Basotho women, existing largely on the fringes of their male compatriots' social spaces, the border bars of Lesotho, and the shebeens of Johannesburg, made their own distinctive version of the genre and by so doing were able to create an identity for themselves as bold yet suffering women, enunciating a new version of what it meant to be a migrant (Coplan 1994). In another South African instance (already mentioned above), women moving between the rural areas of the north and Johannesburg worked first within a men's song and dance genre used in the hostels (*kiba*) and then moved the form into a more exclusively female domain. The name of the genre remained the same but it took on an additional and specifically female form and became a crucial vector for the

making of modern identities for migrant women, one that embraced both modernity and a sense of rural belonging (James 1994; 1997; 1999).

In many cases the electronic media, namely, television and radio, have played an important role in enabling new genres to emerge, or adaptations of old genres to continue; the audiocassette has also been a key instrument of transmission (Fardon and Furniss 2000). The use of the audiocassette as well as the radio in the spread of Somali oral poetry has been particularly remarkable and in one memorable instance a certain popular poem, *Leexo*, sung over the airwaves while a key parliamentary debate was in progress in the capital, Mogadishu, toppled a government (Johnson 1995: 115–17). In general, the evidence from contemporary studies shows that many oral genres are resilient and adaptable to the intense changes that have accompanied modern technology, urban living, and often difficult and oppressive industrial conditions. Oral genres have provided a means of formalizing new experiences and in a number of societies, for instance in the case of the Somali genres of the *balwo* and *heello* mentioned above, and in the urban genre of *isicathamiya* in South Africa, they have provided powerful new cultural texts for people's lives (Johnson 1974; Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964; Erlmann 1991; 1996; Johnson 2001).

Part of the defining of an African or African modernities and the connection of this to orality has been the way in which new publics have been made through the use of the electronic media. Radio, still the most influential medium on the continent, is often a conduit for new hybrid forms of orality that sometimes have their own complicated genealogies of origin and command large audiences in the urban and rural areas of the continent, and sometimes globally. The form of *isicathamiya* that was heard on the Paul Simon album *Gracelands* with the Ladysmith Black Mambazo group is one such genre (Erlmann 1991; 1996). Its cultural appeal lies in a complex of words, music, and dance, but within South Africa its continuing vitality is partly generated by the way in which radio, in this case the Zulu-language radio station uKhozi, announces fixtures all over the country, plays the latest music, and conducts interviews with eminent choir leaders. The genre of *maskanda*, also from South Africa, has been traced back to the solo love songs of lonely young women (James 1999: 73) but is now a style in which men and women perform. *Maskanda* works with standard themes but keeps as one of its vital functions the power to criticize and comment on social conditions, inequalities and, when necessary, the foolish ways of the powerful. Even a majestic form such as the West African epic, and in particular the Mandinka epic of Sunjata, has found its place in the electronic media, in this case largely though the work of the singer Salif Keita.

Here too, however, some critics argue that the move to the electronic media has meant a diminution in terms of the subtleties, verbal richness, and the carefulness of the text when compared to those produced by master *griots/jali* such as the Gambian "master of the word" Bamba Suso (Diawara 1997; Suso and Kanute 1999).

The active presence in Africa of the epic genre is being increasingly recognized and documented by scholars, and the epics themselves are in some instances being re-formed by singers such as Salif Keita (Belcher 1999; Okpewho 1979; 1992; Johnson, Hale and Belcher 1997); the role of epic as a carrier of messages about history, and its place in the present, as well as its function in defining regional and transnational identities is constantly being debated. Yet a slighter, emergent genre like the South African freedom song, may have played its part, briefly, as a vehicle for national consciousness and run its course. Now rarely heard, except at trades union rallies, they were, from the 1950s onwards a staple part of African oppositional public discourse, carrying their melodies and words along broad streets, into the camps and the bush of Angola, into dingy halls and into the jails of the apartheid era. They often played a role, as Blacking has suggested (1995), in the creation of a new trans-ethnic imagined community, and in the construction of new personal and group identities.

The work of documenting and debating the role of African oral genres in mediating social relationships, cementing personal and social ties, and generally making sense of the world, is an ongoing one. New work sometimes focuses on a genre or cluster of genres that has had its own vibrant, hidden life in the market place of people's lives although not in the libraries of academia. Thus the genre of jocular poetry, the Borana genre known as *qoosaa-taapaa*, and sung in the villages of northern Kenya and the slums of Nairobi, has recently been studied and shown to play a key role in the articulation of male and age-set, as well as clan relations. It also allows women to speak out from their marginalized positions and, through this witty and entertaining form, make their views about the "vices" of men heard in public, and also, on occasion, their views on a particular political dispute (Wako 2002). Such forms, currently being brought to a wider audience, together with the often highly coded genres of Somali poetry (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964; Andrzejewski and Andrzejewski 1993) commenting on love, honor, matters of philosophy and religion and, as in the case of the Dervish soldier/poet Maxamed Cabdille Xasan (c.1860–1921), on war against the colonialist, cannot be seen as part of what Abiola Irele has termed "the prison of the mythopoetic imagination" (Irele 1987:217) but rather as expressions of the diverse, modern world. It is in this world that African orality has its place.

Notes

1. See Hintjens 2001 for a chilling and finely argued account of early colonial complicity in the construction of ethnic rivalries in Rwanda and the state planning of the ethnic genocide in 1994.
2. Brief clips of the final, snake-like dance of all the initiates were shown on the South African Broadcasting Corporation national television in 2001 during one of the evening news relays.

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2

The folktale and its extensions

KWESI YANKAH

The folktale is the most important strand within the prose narrative complex in Africa. It is also the most widely studied. The distinctiveness of the folktale as a genre, however, is questionable due to its close textual affinities with other expressive genres such as myth, epic, dilemma tale, legend and proverb.

Even though local terminology often provides the best basis for resolving ambiguities in genre taxonomies (see Herskovits and Herskovits 1958), the folktale has sometimes posed a problem in Africa. In certain cultures, such as the Limba of Sierra Leone, the folktale and proverb do not have separate labels (Finnegan 1967: 28). Besides this, whenever the folktale has been cited in ongoing discourse for the purposes of persuasion, it has attracted the label "proverb" in certain cultures (see Yankah 1995: 88–93). The overlap between the proverb and tale should not be surprising, since they both convey moral lessons, and are mutually interactive in performance situations. Tales based on proverbs abound in Africa, and so do proverbs based on folktales. No doubt scholars who have compiled proverbs in Africa have often shown interest in the folktale (see Rattray 1916 and 1930; Dugaste 1975).

Dilemma tale

The dilemma tale constitutes a large class of folktales in Africa, but it has attracted very little attention partly because it does not appear to constitute a genre of its own. In the early twentieth century, dilemma tales sporadically appeared in folktale and legend compilations (see for example Hesler 1930; Cardinall 1931; Guillot 1946). In practice, they are hardly narrated independently, but emerge during the telling of riddles and folktales, with which they bear a close resemblance.

The dilemma tale is a narrative that ends in an unresolved puzzle and invites the audience to debate a solution. Without the concluding puzzle, it may appear as a folktale. Even though dominated by human characters, dilemma

tales in Africa may also have animals as principal characters. A number of such tales involve the mother-in-law, where one has to choose between wife and mother-in-law in allocating scarce resources, for example providing a missing eye or ferrying kinsmen across a river. These conundrums are significant not necessarily as literary products, but as pointers to cultural values, which often guide participants in providing and debating answers. The first major independent compilation of dilemma tales in Africa was by William Bascom in the mid-seventies (Bascom 1975).

Myth

Myth, as a sacred narrative that explains the processes that have shaped the world, has not enjoyed unanimous recognition among scholars of the African narrative, partly because the criteria for its global definition are not fully evident in the potential examples from Africa (see Finnegan 1970: 361–67; Okpewho 1983 and 1992: 181–82). On one hand, there are several published collections of African narratives designated by their authors as myth, such as Cater G. Woodson's *African Myths*, Ulli Beier's *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths*, Jan Knappert's *Myths and Legends of the Congo*, and *African Mythology*, by Alice Werner. Even so, there is evidence to suggest that not all such authors were certain of the correct narrative category to which their collections should belong. In his introduction to *African Myths*, Woodson interchanges the terms folktale, myth, and legend (1928: ix). On the other hand, scholars like Hermann Baumann and Ruth Finnegan doubt the existence of myth in Africa, but for different reasons. To Baumann, the Negro is devoid of the gift of myth making (see Radin 1952: 2). To Finnegan, however, scholars of the African "myth" have not provided enough contextual information, for their collections to be truly classified as myth (1972: 361ff.).

Considered sacred, true, and authoritative, the myth uses divine and ancestral characters to explain the origins of natural phenomena and cultural institutions. Creation myths, clan/lineage myths (accounting for the groups' origins), myths associated with divination have all been recorded in various parts of Africa (see Abrahamsson 1951; Bascom 1969; Parrinder 1986). The extent to which such stories are considered true and authoritative, however, has not always been clarified.

The problem diminishes in cultures where separate indigenous labels exist for fictitious and belief narratives, such as in Dahomey (Herskovits and Herskovits 1958). Even here, as the Herskovitses point out, the distinction is sometimes blurred. The gap between myth and folktale is blurred further

by trickster tales in Africa, which in places appear to combine the features of myth and folktale. Studying trickster figures among the Akan, Yoruba, Fon, and Ogo-Yurugu, for example, Robert D. Pelton observes that the most distinctive feature of the West African trickster is his association with divination (1980: 273). Combined with several cultural phenomena they generate in stories, tricksters would appear then to partly fulfill the criteria for spinning myths. Yet, the sacred traits of the trickster, even if relevant, may have diminished over time since trickster figures like Ananse are sources of sheer imaginative delight in the cultures in which they exist, and are considered to belong within the realm of the folktale (see Yankah 1983). Isidore Okpewho puts the entire myth controversy in a broad perspective, and treats the myth in Africa as a creative resource from which larger cultural values are derived (1983).

The folktale

Despite areas of overlap with other narrative forms, the folktale has a distinctive character of subsisting largely on play, fantasy, and aesthetic delight. The African folktale performer skillfully deploys literary, musical, linguistic, and dramatic devices to endow his imaginative narrative with an orchestral quality that compels co-participation by his audience. Because of its pervasiveness and popularity as a major source of entertainment in rural Africa, the folktale has arrested the attention of scholars and missionaries since the nineteenth century.

Its continued relevance in Africa is due partly to the unflagging dominance of the spoken word in Africa as well as the subtle and diverse manifestations of the folktale in contemporary life. What follows is an overview of important landmarks in the study of African folktale and a discussion of its nature and literary dynamics.

The collection of tales in Africa began in the mid-nineteenth century, as a sequel to trends in eighteenth-century Europe, where nationalism had fostered a recognition and respect for national literatures. A systematic collection of folksongs, tales, and myths had begun in Europe, through which treasures of past life could be rediscovered and preserved. If national literatures had been collected in Germany, Greece, Norway, and Russia, the same could be done in Africa, except that on the African continent, the collection of tales in the nineteenth century was done more out of colonial interest than nationalism.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, missionaries, anthropologists, and linguists began collecting large texts of folktales, riddles, proverbs, and

customary practices. For the missionaries and linguists, these provided reliable data for the isolation of sound units and grammatical structures, crucial in determining the linguistic and literary maturity of "primitive mind," and the capacity of primitive languages to express thought (Finnegan 1970: 30). Missionaries also needed to understand the languages of colonial subjects, because such knowledge was valuable in the studying of the spontaneous use of language in folktales. Anthropologists collecting such texts also saw in them a means of accessing the mind of their native subjects, and determining residues of past and present modes of life. In any case, the close interaction between folktales and related verbal genres made it unproductive to collect the tales exclusively; they were collected and compiled together with art forms such as riddles and proverbs. Thus, Sigismund Koelle in 1854 wrote on *African Native Literature or Proverbs, Tales, Fables and Historical Fragments in the Kanuri or Bornu Language,* while Richard Burton about a decade later wrote on the wit and wisdom of West Africa, in which he compiled 2,268 proverbs and riddles and anecdotes from the Yoruba, Efik, Ga, Twi, and Ewe (Burton 1865). Other major tale collections in the nineteenth century include Bleek's 1864 compilation of Hottentot tales, and Lord Chatelain's work on Angolan folktales (1894).

Operating against a background of Darwin's theory of social evolution, which locates the "primitive" man at the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder, where emphasis was supposedly more on communal than individual creativity, early scholars could not have unambiguously discerned esthetic merits in folktales from Africa. Ethnocentrism as well as miscomprehension of the African world led to a biased portrayal of the African tale as childlike. The comments of Henry Stanley in his collection of Central African narratives, in the early part of the twentieth century, attest to this. The very title Stanley gives to his compilation, *My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories*, foreshadows its content. Consider the following remarks in his introduction:

> Many of the stories related were naturally of little value, having neither novelty nor originality; and in many cases . . . the stories were importations from Asia; while others were mere masks of low inclination. I therefore had often to sit out a lengthy tale which had not a single point in it. (Stanley 1906: 1)

Despite the streak of cultural arrogance here, a few scholars admitted the artistic worth of African folktales. In a preface to his collection of Hottentot tales, Bleek, for instance, boldly admits that the literary capacity of Africans "has been employed in almost the same direction as that which had been taken by our own earliest literatures . . ." (1864: xii–xiii).

Some scholars thus applied to their African collections the label "literature" as far back as the nineteenth century (see Koelle 1854, Burton 1865). It is partly based on this recognition that the American Folklore Society published Chatelain's *Folktales of Angola* in its very first memoir in 1894.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the African folktale has been studied by scholars of various academic persuasions, largely anthropology, folklore, and literature. Anthropologists like R. S. Rattray (1930), Tremearne (1913), Herskovits and Herskovits (1958), Evans-Pritchard (1967), Finnegan (1967) have made landmark studies of the Akan, Hausa, Dahomean, Zande, and Limba imaginative tales, bringing into focus various literary manifestations of the trickster in Africa. Particularly remarkable is Rattray's pioneering study of Akan folktales, where the stories, richly augmented with illustrations, are presented first in the original language (as told) before their translation into English. This way the linguistic and literary flavor of the stories is partly preserved.

One important discipline that has paid close attention to the African folktale is the discipline of folklore. Since the 1930s, folklore scholars in their search for the origin and distribution of tales circulating in Africa have utilized the discipline's unique tools, systematically to classify component units of African tales under crosscultural categories, called tale types and motif indexes, an approach developed by Anti Aarne and Stith Thompson. Inspired by diffusionist scholars, also known as the historic-geographic school, this approach to folktale studies sought to determine the original source and geographic distribution of folktales through a comparison of tale variants from different parts of the world.

Diffusionists

Since the 1930s, a number of such studies on the African folktale have been undertaken in unpublished doctoral dissertations in American universities. These include Mary Klipple's study of African folktales with foreign analogues (1938), Kenneth Clarke's motif index analysis of West African tales (1957), Ojo Arewa's classification of folktales of Northeastern Africa (1966), and Lambrecht's tale type analysis of Central Africa (1967). In the past two decades tale and motif index analyses have been done on Malagasy tales (Haring 1982) and verbal traditions in the Arab world (El-Shamy 1995).

The application of motif and tale type analysis in the study of African folktales extends beyond studies in America. In Europe, this has been adopted by the French school of African narrative scholars at the Centre National

de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) later renamed Equipe de Recherche Associée (ERA). The group's membership consists of such linguists, oral literary scholars, and anthropologists as Geneviève Calame-Griaule, Gérard Dumestre, Veronika Görög-Karady, and Christiane Seydou. Having conducted fieldwork among several ethnic groups in West Africa (such as the Bambara, Fulani, Dogon, Shanga, Kru, Bete, and Zarma), the French school concentrates on the study of folktales, and has applied motif and tale type indexes for comparative purposes, apart from studying the folktale as a communicative process.

In 1981 and 1982, the French school organized two conferences in Britain and France, respectively, inviting other scholars from Britain. Proceedings of the 1981 symposium appear in Görög-Karady's edited volume, *Genres, Forms and Meanings: Essays in African Oral Literature*, which consists of ten essays on African oral narratives using comparative, literary, and anthropological approaches.

Formal approach

Closely related to the diffusionist-inspired use of tale type and motif indexes is the application of the formal (morphological) approach to the study of the African folktale. Developed by the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp in 1928, the morphological study seeks to identify the constituent motifs or building blocks of a tale and determine their relationship to the overall plot. Just as the grammarian studies the acceptable combination of words to form sentences, formalism is interested in the ordering of episodes to form a story.

In 1971, Alan Dundes applied Propp's formalism to the study of the trickster tales in Africa, and abstracted a characteristic pattern to which they appeared to conform. The tales, typically involving encounters between a smallish wily animal trickster and a bigger creature, revealed a recurrent pattern of the making and breaking of friendship. Dundes subsequently proposed the following sequence of functions, or "motifemes," as characteristic of African trickster tales: friendship, contract, violation, discovery, and end of friendship. Thus even though the trickster (say the hare) and his counterpart (the elephant, for example) initially find themselves wrapped in a bond of mutual trust, a series of incidents based on lust, selfishness, and insatiable greed on either side leads to a breach of faith, and eventual separation.

Almost at the same time as Dundes, Lee Haring (1972), using Propp's formalist approach, discerns in trickster tales told among people of African descent (in Africa, Jamaica, and USA) a formal pattern similar in essence to Alan Dundes's

observations. The sequence of motifemes was:

(1) False friendship, where the trickster feigns friendship with another character;
(2) Contract, where the two agree somewhat to particular terms of a contract;
(3) Violation, where the trickster violates the contract;
(4) Trickery, where one character tricks the other;
(5) Deception, which is the result of trickery; and
(6) The trickster's escape or reward, which ends the tale.

Ten years after his study of trickster tales, Haring combines Propp's morphological approach and Aarne–Thompson's tale type and motif-index scheme in the study of Malagasy tales (Haring 1982), where he classifies over 800 Malagasy texts into seven formal categories.

Earlier on, Marion Kilson, following Dundes (1971) and Haring (1972), had applied the formal approach in the study of Mende tales (Kilson 1976).

Literary esthetics

Studies of the African folktale presented so far have been largely text-centered, expressing little or no interest in the tale's social and creative dynamics. Not all studies of the folktale have been so inclined. Operating on the premise that the folktale is a living, dynamic art form whose esthetic value is best realized in performance, other scholars from a wide range of disciplines (literature, folklore, anthropology, linguistics) have undertaken combined studies of text, context, and performance. Such studies include Ruth Finnegan's work on storytelling among the Limba of Sierra Leone (Finnegan 1967) and Dan Ben-Amos's study of storytelling in Benin (Ben-Amos 1972, 1975), where interest has been shown in the narrators, as well as their styles and techniques of narrative expression.

Since the seventies, an influential school has emerged in Wisconsin, led by Harold Scheub, which has combined the study of literary esthetics with structuralism, narrative technique, and performance in the study of the African folktale. In his analysis of *ntsomi* among the Xhosa, Scheub, for instance, discusses the narrative technique of manipulating core cliché, song, and dance in pushing a plot forward to its denouement. Particularly important is his repertoire study of artists and their creative techniques (Scheub 1972, 1975). Interest in literary esthetics and narrative techniques can also be seen in studies on the Haya (Seitel 1980), Kikuyu (Mwangi 1982), Tabwa (Cancel 1989), Yoruba (Sekoni 1990, 1994), and Ewe (Konrad 1994).

The summary review above shows the broad range of perspectives from which the African folktale has been studied. The following section attempts to tie together the salient features of the African folktale from the viewpoint of content, style, and mode of performance.

Content

Even though the tale is told largely for artistic ends, performers and audiences hardly lose sight of its moral, whether it advocates patience, punishes greed and selfishness, or merely explains the source of the crab's fatty shell. In any case, themes in the folktale may be conveyed by a stock of characters with stereotypical traits belonging to the human, animal, and supernatural realms. Human characters range from infant heroes to maidens, young suitors, kings, and old ladies. Tales involving animals and tricksters are, however, the most prevalent. Such stories may juxtapose the brute strength of big and ferocious beasts like the leopard, elephant, and wolf, with the fragility of small but wily animals, known for their intrigues and enormous capacity to outwit bigger opponents, including supernatural beings. Such wily creatures are often heroes, tricksters, and culture-bearers.

The summaries below exemplify such tales. From the Agni-Bona of Ivory Coast comes the following tale with an infant protagonist:

> A wicked king once decided to rear a python, to deter his subjects from interacting with him. Over time, Python devoured all animals and children that came its way; and yet it was impossible for anybody to report this to the king. A woman then gave birth to a child one morning. The baby was abandoned inside a pumpkin; beside the pumpkin was the knife used to cut the baby's umbilical cord. At noon, Python went on the prowl boasting of his insatiable appetite in song, to which the baby would reply from a distance, singing its plight as an abandoned child. Out of curiosity, Python went closer and closer wondering whose voice that was, and went to lie near the pumpkin. As Python attempted to seize the baby, the latter took the knife and thrust it into Python's mouth, killing it. Following Python's death the people got greater access to their king. That is why the king no longer raises pythons.
>
> (Galli 1983: 27–31)

The story depicts the oppressive rule of a tyrant, which is foiled by the courage of a newly born child, where efforts of adults had failed. One cannot miss the irony here of a fearsome destructive beast yielding to none but a harmless infant, who single-handedly becomes responsible for restoring order in a chaotic terrain. The theme above is not different from the following, narrated by the

Kiganda of Uganda, where evil forces, out to devour a girl, are frustrated by the instinctive impulses of juveniles:

> An only child called Nnambi lost both her mother and father. She therefore went to stay with her grandmother who did not like her. One day, the old lady went to look for vegetables, and found a certain animal called Wante. Wante asked her what she would give back in return for a meat offer. The old woman said she would offer her child for meat, and that the child would be available when she went to fetch water at the well. The child went to the well with her friends, and anytime the animal met them and asked, "Who among you is called Nnambi," all the children replied they were called Nnambi. The animal returned to complain to the old woman. The old woman said, the next time round, she would let the girl carry a water pot with a chipped rim, which would easily identify her. When the other children saw Nnambi's chipped pot, they said it was very beautiful. Out of envy, they took stones and broke the pot. (Nabasuta 1983: 66–67)

The trickster

The most prevalent stories in Africa are, however, trickster tales. Characterized by Radin as "creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself" (1952: xxiii), the trickster appears in multiple forms in Africa, mostly as an animal, but occasionally as a human being or a deity.

In contemporary Egyptian culture, there are two trickster figures, both humans, who are believed to have existed in the past (El-Shamy 1980: 219–21). In Yoruba and Fon cultures the tricksters are deities. In several other parts of Africa the tricksters are animals. Among the Bantu, it is the little hare. The tortoise is the trickster in some parts of West Africa. Among the Ila of Zambia, hare and tortoise coexist as tricksters. The antelope, squirrel, weasel, and wren also occur as tricksters in other parts of Africa.

The spider, the best-known trickster in Africa, exists among the Limba of Sierra Leone, the Hausa of Nigeria, Gbaya of Cameroon, Sara of Chad, Luo, Azande of Sudan, and Ngbandi of Congo (Finnegan 1970: 315ff.). Among the Akan of Ghana and in parts of Ivory Coast, the spider is Ananse. The eminence of Ananse as a character in Akan and Ghanaian folktales in general is evident in the label *anansesem*, "matters of Ananse," which designates the folktale in general whether or not Ananse features. The impact of Ananse on Ghanaian cultures goes further. He appears in proverbs, songs, personal names, and Ghanaian idiomatic expression. When water simmers in the pot,

it is Ananse bathing his children, according to the Akan. When the foot goes to sleep, or there is a feeling of prickly pins in it, "Ananse has tied the foot." At the Ghana Cultural Center in Accra, where the public is treated to cultural performances, the theater's auditorium has been named *Anansekrom*, the metropolis of Ananse – the home of unlimited humor, delight, and fantasy. Ananse indeed embodies the quintessence of esthetic pleasure. This delight is achieved through cunning, trickery, humor, and the outwitting of physically superior adversaries.

Significantly, Ananse was transported to the African diaspora during the transatlantic slave trade, where it exists in Jamaica, Surinam, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Trinidad, Grenada, the Bahamas, and the St. Vincent Islands under derived designations like B'Anansi, Boy Nasty, and Gulumbanasi. Besides the presence of Ananse in Caribbean tales, the name evokes associations of farce, fiction, and entertainment. In the St. Vincent Islands, "Anansi story" stands for all amusements displayed during wakes, whether these are tales of the spider, riddles, games, or the European *Märchen* (see Yankah 1989).

I present below summaries of two stories where the trickster pitches his wits against powerful opponents:

> God and Kweku Ananse are great friends. One day, Ananse asks God, "Which is more painful, injury or false accusation?" God says injury; Ananse says false accusation. In an argument that follows, God takes a knife and inflicts injury on Ananse. Ananse heals the wound, and secretly persuades other animals to dig a tunnel under the kitchen of God's mother-in-law (the mother of God's newest and most beautiful wife). Ananse arranges to sleep in God's house, and sneaks to defecate in the kitchen. As God's mother-in-law sweeps the kitchen, she discovers feces. Who could have done that, she wonders. Just then, she hears a chorus of voices from underneath singing, "God has defecated . . . God has defecated . . . God has defecated." The news spreads all over. As God is exposed, he feels so embarrassed he makes a suicide attempt. Ananse then reminds God of the riddle he posed earlier. Truly to be falsely accused is more painful than injuries. Ananse is proved right.

The above story is a clear explication of the making and breaking of friendship with which trickster tales in Africa have been characterized. Here the trickster enters the sacred realm, fraternizes with the Supreme Being, with the sole purpose of proving his superior wits over Him. In the final analysis, God's hallowed image is defiled by worldly follies and intrigues masterminded by a subordinate "colleague." To the trickster, duping and outwitting need not respect supernatural boundaries.

Indeed, in most instances where God occurs in Akan folktales, there is a conflicting interaction between Him and Ananse. Thus while in cases where God interacts with other characters His intervention is solicited to resolve crises, Ananse's interaction with God always leads to a breach of faith.

The deterioration of friendship above is not different from the following story recorded by Lee Haring among the Akamba of Kenya, in which Monkey, the trickster, fools Crocodile:

> The crocodile asked the monkey to visit him. The monkey asked the crocodile, "How shall I reach your home when I don't know how to swim?" The crocodile told the monkey to jump on his back. On the way, the crocodile felt hungry and asked the monkey, "Can you give me your heart? Because I am feeling hungry." The monkey told the crocodile, "This is what we are going to do: we are going to go back, because when we become friendly to somebody we leave our hearts at home." Now the monkey told the crocodile, "You see, I am very weak, I cannot be eaten. So we have to go back and I will get you my heart." The crocodile agreed that they should turn back. When they reached the shore, the monkey climbed into a mango tree and picked a mango. He threw it and said to the crocodile, "There is the heart." But the mango got into the water. (Haring 1972: 165–66)

Performance

The artistic merits of the folktale are only partly realized in text. While the literary ingredients of irony, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, etc. can be discerned in a tale text, it takes a good performer to optimally portray the folktale as an art form. Thus even though the trickster in Africa is considered the best embodiment of fun, trickery, humor, and fantasy, this can be realized only through the agency of performance. In the case of Ananse, for example, he cannot be depicted effectively outside the culture's perception of his stereotypical trait as an anomalous speaker: he whines. Similarly he cannot be well portrayed in the West Indies without lisping, stuttering, or speaking "Black English."

It takes a good performance to bring a tale to life; and for the researcher, not even the most ingenious techniques in translation and transcription can fully depict the stylistic and dramatic nuances of the folktale performance.

That the folktale is considered in Africa as a source of esthetic pleasure can be seen in the formulae that frame a performance. The opening and closing formulas invariably depict the absence of truth in the tale. The opening formula used by Haya of Tanzania, "See so that we may see" (Seitel 1980), chanted by the audience, places a responsibility on the teller to portray vividly an imaginative

experience that fulfills the society's esthetic canons. The Gbaya of Cameroon open with a song by the narrator that enlists the audience's attention: "Listen to a tale"; and the audience responds with a phrase that establishes the tale's esthetic ideals: "a tale for laughter" (Noss 1977: 136). The Ashanti-Akan of Ghana use the introductory formula "we don't really mean it, we don't really mean it" (that the impending narration is true). Among the Fanti-Akan, the narrator's formula, "The tale is not meant to be believed," elicits the audience's response, "It is meant to be kept," once again emphasizing imaginative fantasy as the dominant esthetic. Indeed, among the Agni of Ivory Coast, the expression for telling a tale means "to lie" (Galli 1983: 22).

Even so, there are various levels of framing in folktale performance; for within the realm of fantasy, there is a notion of truth, which may be contested by the audience through playful interjections and dialogue with the narrator. The audience may inject reminders, request further explanation, or challenge an observation, to which the teller is obligated to react. In one narration I recorded among the Akan, the query "Did you see it with your own eyes?" was replied, "Yes with my own eyes, it's not a hearsay." To the question "Were you walking with them?" the raconteur said, "Yes, I was with them . . ."

Although participants are aware of the tale's world of fantasy, the narrators are also sensitive to their responsibility for boosting the telling with a measure of realism. So they co-operate in playing along, to sustain the dialog; if they renege, they violate the spirit of play and make-believe assumed in the opening formula.

In certain cultures, the performance is further boosted by the presence of an auxiliary performer, or intermediary, who receives the tale from the teller and passes it on to the wider audience. As in royal oratory (Yankah 1995: 19–24) and epic singing (Johnson 1986: 25), the respondent receives the narration in bits as it is told, and either repeats it literally or adjoins a phrase of assent. Such institutionalized mediations in tale telling are found among the Agni-Bona of Ivory Coast (Galli 1983), Mossi of Burkina Faso, Limba of Sierra Leone (Finnegan 1967), and the Nzema (Agovi 1973) and Dagare of Ghana. They also exist in certain traditions of storytelling among black Americans (Jones-Jackson 1987: 44).

In enacting the tale itself, the narrators rely on dramatic, literary, and linguistic devices, and indeed deploy every technique within their artistic reach. Even though they are instructing their audience about moral values, the esthetic factor is dominant, for the tale's plot may already be known. The story is appreciated, tasted, even "eaten" in some cultures if it is esthetically pleasing.

The storytellers' challenge is to use dramatic, linguistic, and literary techniques to enliven their narration. So they mime, growl like a leopard, whine like Ananse, and tiptoe their way to the kitchen of God's in-laws. Raconteurs indeed stretch every sinew to enact all roles in the plot single-handedly, and vividly portray a multisensory experience in word and action. Descriptive skills are inevitable here, and one important device narrators in Africa have used to good effect is descriptive adverbials, technically called "ideophones," which vividly depict multisensory experience: sound, smell, sensation, touch, color. Thus in jumping to snatch an orphan's food, an old lady in an Akan story strikes the meal with her buttocks, and the resultant sound was *hwan, hwom*, or *hwererere,* according to the narrator. In another section of the plot, when a benevolent crab bites the girl to cue her in solving the old woman's riddle, the resultant sound portraying the intense impact was *dwee* (see Yankah 1984, and also Noss 1972, 1977).

Song, dance, and music are indispensable in storytelling; and performances without these are considered drab. But one should distinguish here between the intranarrative song, which is an integral part of a tale's plot, sung by a character in the tale, and song spasmodically injected by the audience to arrest boredom.

The intranarrative song may be performed by a character in dramatic moments: as a dialogic device, to delay action, achieve a magical feat, or foreground emotion. Because of the importance of song in narration, a performer may apologize in advance if his tale has no song (Noss 1977: 138).

Even where there is no song in a tale's plot, any member of the audience, in certain cultures, may petition the narrator and lead a song, to arrest boredom. The *mmoguo* songs among the Akan are well known. Their very essence is discernible from the word's derivation. *Bo gu* means to reject, or shove aside. It marks moments in a narration where the privilege of authoritative diversion shifts into the hands of the audience. The song interjected may have no thematic relevance to the tale at hand; but like the plot-associated lyric, it is expected to compel total participation by petitioner, narrator, and the rest of the audience.

Songs in folktales have simple choruses, and lend themselves easily to communal involvement, drumming, and dancing. This compels total immersion by the entire congregation, who may provide background rhythm by clapping, or beating on improvised instruments. In certain cultures, the presence or absence of song in a story provides the basis for an ethnic taxonomy of narrative genres (Noss 1977: 138).

As the tale ends, the closing formula once again comes in to underscore the supremacy of the communal esthetic. The Akan say, "If my tale is sweet, if it is not sweet, take it back and forth." This is indeed a formulaic acknowledgment of the inherent hazards in exposing oneself to the evaluation of a critical audience, whose high expectations may have been upheld or disappointed.

It is not surprising that tale telling is depicted as a burden in parts of Africa; for after their turns, the narrators among the Gbaya set the "burden" under a tree (Noss 1977: 136), and among the Akan transfer the "burden" onto the head of a chosen performer (Yankah 1983: 12), who is challenged to equal or surpass the previous effort.

The folktale in Africa is a burden; but it is a burden gracefully borne by narrators and diffused to embrace the audience at large. As the Akan say, "When two people carry a load, it's no burden." The significance of the folktale may have slackened with the spread of literacy and urbanization in Africa; but it is still vividly narrated in rural domestic settings and educational institutions for purposes of entertainment. In parts of rural Africa, narrators in the past three decades have moved beyond casual telling and formed professional storytelling associations that entertain communities at wakes and other important events. Storytelling has also moved to the mass media in recent times, and may be heard or seen on radio and television, either independently or incorporated in popular culture. Within the realm of modern governance, the folktale has been helpful to musicians and raconteurs as a literary megaphone, enabling the voiceless to comment discreetly on contemporary politics, without fear of sanctions.

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3

Festivals, ritual, and drama in Africa

TEJUMOLA OLANIYAN

African performance traditions entered the orbit of European discourse – which, by virtue of language, supplies the operative terms "festival," "ritual," and "drama" – primarily as negative examples. As a result, the origins of that entrance were marked in the main by condemnation, inferiorization, and general disregard. It was asserted or implied that blacks either had no traditions of drama indigenous to them, or had traditions that, in comparison with Europe and Asia, were merely "proto-dramatic" or "quasi-dramatic," cretinous forms in a state of developmental arrest in terms of style, esthetic canons, formalization of technique, and mode of historical transmission. Wherever "properly dramatic" traditions were found, they were marked off as but products of the African encounter with Europe – a way of claiming that the "properly dramatic" traditions are nothing less than derivatives of western forms and traditions (Jeyifo 1990: 242–43). There is a larger context, of course, to these deeply ethnocentric claims. They were part and parcel of the implacable inferiorization of African corporeality and cultural forms that matured in Europe in the eighteenth century and remains a major constituent of Eurocentrism. In the operations of the discourse, the inferiorization of a cultural practice becomes a shorthand to the inferiorization of the bearers of that culture and practice.

This is not the appropriate space exhaustively to engage the Eurocentric archive in all its details and dimensions. I will, instead, exemplify the discourse with the work of the distinguished contemporary scholar Ruth Finnegan. The chapter titled "Drama" in her influential work *Oral Literature in Africa*, published in 1970, still remains for many the canonical survey. Her opening lines alone reveal her restrictive methodology:

> How far one can speak of indigenous drama in Africa is not an easy question. In this it differs from previous topics [treated in the book] like, say, panegyric, political poetry, or prose narratives, for there it was easy to discover African analogies to the familiar European forms. (1970: 500)

When concepts describing cultural practices or forms cross cultural borders without some form of domestication before speaking the realities of their new abode, some excess, misrepresentation, or violence, is produced. For Finnegan, it is only if Africa could supply indigenous "analogies to the familiar European forms" that it would be established as a continent with drama. There is no other way. So she keeps looking for European drama on the African continent: "what . . . *we* normally regard as drama" (500); what "*we* are accustomed [to]" (516). The "definition" of drama she proposes, in all its pedantry and formal rigorism, is designed to achieve little else if not failure:

> It is clearly necessary to reach at least some rough agreement about what is to count as "drama". Rather than produce a verbal definition, it seems better to point to the various elements which tend to come together in what, in the wide sense, we normally regard as drama. Most important is the idea of enactment, of representation through actors who imitate persons and events. This is also usually associated with other elements, appearing to a greater or lesser degree at different times or places: linguistic content; plot; the represented interaction of several characters; specialized scenery, etc.; often music; and – of particular importance in most African performances – dance. Now it is very seldom in Africa that all these elements of drama come together in a single performance. (501)

Her – undeniably productive – failure prepares and authorizes her thesis, even against acknowledged contrary evidence: "Though some writers have very positively affirmed the existence of native African drama, it would perhaps be truer to say that in Africa, in contrast to western Europe and Asia, drama is not typically a wide-spread or a developed form" (500).

It is important to understand Finnegan's concept of difference, given her insistence that Africans in Africa produce European drama. To the extent that we are all the same, her work becomes unnecessary. If it is difference that enables her project, then her insistence on its erasure becomes paradoxical. But we must not assume that this illogicality lacks any logic, or that it thus self-destructs in the realm of power. Difference here is not erased but whipped into conformity and *hierarchized* (see also Graham-White 1974; Havemeyer 1966). It is interesting then to note that Ibadan, where Finnegan stayed for a time while working on her book, and where she signed the preface, is one of the main centers of the still vibrant Yoruba traveling theater movement, with a recorded tradition going back to the late 1590s. Apparently, this theater refused to provide Finnegan with "analogies to the familiar European forms."

If, today, such ethnocentric demands have ceased being made on Africa, it is because of the gargantuan effort of a host of African scholars such as Joel Adedeji, Wole Soyinka, Oyin Ogunba, Bakary Traore, Ebun Clark, Biodun Jeyifo, Penina Mlama, and others, who gave voice to the varieties of dramatic traditions in Africa while also redefining "drama" away from its received, Aristotle-centered conception, to the great profit of world theater history scholarship.

Africa is home to several traditions of theater, conceived as an ensemble of culturally marked and consciously staged practices in space and time and before an audience. Many of these traditions are of ancient origin, while others emerged with formal European colonization of the continent in the nineteenth century and the subsequent imposition of western education, religion, and culture. The older traditions are mostly nonscripted, improvisatory, and performed in indigenous African languages. Their conceptions of theater space is fluid, and stage–audience relations are not governed by inflexible rules: any space can be turned into a performance stage, while the audience, within acknowledged boundaries, is free to interact with the performers and performance in a variety of ways and even move in and out of the theater space during performance. The performance is often public and the audience non-fee-paying, though performers could be rewarded in cash or kind for their artistry. On the other hand, many of the newer theater traditions are text-based, written in European languages or indigenous African languages of European alphabet. The plays are designed to be performed in more or less formal theater buildings with fixed relations between performers and audience. The audience is usually fee-paying though the theater may not be expressly commercial. In all cases, as indeed in all societies, the functions of the theater traditions are broadly similar in their mixing of the pleasing and the pedagogical: their representations provide the audience with pleasurable entertainments while simultaneously channeling its passions and sentiments in certain directions.

Theater in Africa could be categorized into four distinct traditions: festival theater, popular theater, development theater, and art theater.

Festival theater and ritual

In many African communities, the foremost indigenous cultural and artistic institution is the festival. Organized around certain deities or spirits, or to mark generational transitions or the passage of the seasons whether of climate or agricultural production, festivals are sprawling multimedia

occasions – that is, incorporating diverse forms such as singing, chanting, drama, drumming, masking, miming, costuming, puppetry, with episodes of theatrical enactments ranging from the sacred and secretive to the secular and public. Festivals could last for a few hours to several days, weeks or months. Each festival dramatizes a story or myth – or related sets of stories or myths – connecting the particular subject of the festival, be it a deity or the season of the harvest, to significant events in the life of the community and to its place in sustaining communal harmony, plenty, and stability. Artistically, the performances also serve to showcase the community's new artistic forms and talents as well as advancements and mutations in existing ones.

Festival theater is performed in an open space in the town square or a similarly appointed location. The audience sits or stands in rings of circles around the performers, and is able to drift in and out of the performance. The audience closes in or fans out depending on perceptions of the volume of space needed by the performers at particular moments of the action. There is a close relationship between the performers and the audience, with the latter even serving as chorus, but there are also distinctions, and it is treasured cultural knowledge to know when to and when not to interject in the performance. Esthetically, the performance is most often nonillusionistic, with acting or dancing occurring in the full range from realism to surrealism and spirit possession. This is partly why an empty space, with few prop or theatrical fripperies, is all that is needed for the communion between performer and audience on one hand, and the performance and society on the other.

There are two ways in which scholars have tried to understand African festivals. Some scholars label the festival as "pre-drama" or "traditional ritual" or "ritual drama," because of its expansive multimedia format, its firm integration of the dramatic amidst the other arts, and the presence of both religious and secular re-enactments (Echeruo 1981). The assumption of the scholars, whether acknowledged or not, is often that the twentieth-century western theater, with its packaged three hours, strict compartmentalization of the arts, and the virtual absence of the sacred, constitutes the norm of "theater." Other scholars have argued that the festival is full-fledged theater that is dynamic, spectacular, and inventive, and that the contemporary western theater could in fact be seen as nothing more than severely abbreviated festival. The argument of Wole Soyinka, Africa's leading dramatist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, best exemplifies this view. He insists that festivals be seen as constituting "in themselves *pure theatre* at its most prodigal and resourceful . . . the most stirring expressions of man's instinct and need for drama at its most comprehensive and community-involving" (1988: 194).

In one sweeping move, he turns a colonialist interpretation of the festival on its head: "instead of considering festivals from one point of view only – that of providing, in a primitive form, the ingredients of drama – we may even begin examining the opposite point of view: that contemporary drama, as we experience it today, is a contraction of drama, necessitated by the productive order of society in other directions" (195).

Even the sacred core of many festivals – much maligned as "ritual" or "pre-drama" – do have consciously staged performances in space and time, though before a more restricted audience, and in language that may be more arcane, composed of incantations and elliptic proverbs. In many instances, such performances could be produced with very elaborate plots and costuming, indicating that even within the sacred, the more secular concerns of the artistic and pleasurable are never short-changed. A few useful studies of festival theater and ritual in Africa include works by scholars such as Oyin Ogunba (1978), Ossie Enekwe (1987), and Nnabuenyi Ugonna (1983).

Popular theater

"Popular" is a much-debated concept in African theater studies. It is important therefore to begin with a working definition. "Popular" as used here refers to those theater forms that have large followings at the point of reception. This mass – and indeed, massive – audience cuts across class or status boundaries. One reason for such wide appeal is that the theater is most often performed in the indigenous languages, or hybrids of them designed to be understood across linguistic borders. Increasingly, many subtraditions are being produced in simplified forms of the European languages that came with colonization, or in "pidgin" – a distinctive mixture of one such foreign language and an indigenous language. The last two – simplified European languages and pidgin – constitute much of the language of urban Africa today.

Early dramatic forms that have their roots in sacred ceremonies and involve elaborate masking, such as the Alarinjo and Apidan theaters of Nigeria, are composed mainly of male performers. With the famous exception of the Ghanaian Concert Party, it is generally the case that more recent forms – such as the Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre, the Chikwakwa Theatre of Zambia, and the South African Township Theatre – are composed of both male and female performers.

The recurring themes in African popular drama are those with broad appeal, and are intimately linked with genre. Particularly common in comedies and melodramas are themes such as unrequited love, marital infidelity,

unemployment, pretensions to wealth, status, or sophistication, the conundrums of modern city life, dreams of travel abroad, and so on. Satires predominate and have targeted egotistical chiefs, the rich but miserly, the strange manners of Europeans (explorers, missionaries, or colonial administrators and their spouses), corrupt politicians, overly westernized African men and women, prostitutes, the rural village teacher, and so on. Matters of fate and predestination, and the mythological lives of deities, legends, and powerful historical figures have been explored in tragedies and other serious dramas.

Most popular theater forms are not scripted but based on improvisations, giving the performers much leeway but also demanding an unusual dexterity in speech, movement, and gesture. Partly for economic reasons (size of troupe) and partly for artistic preferences (most popular plays are multimedia performances), performers are often skilled in many aspects of the enterprise such as acting, singing, costuming, playing a musical instrument or two, set designing, and business management. The performers are in most cases organized as traveling troupes, performing in a variety of available spaces: open squares, enclosed courtyards of kings and chiefs, school classrooms, concert or cinema halls, bars or nightclubs, and well-equipped theaters. Troupes are either kin- or lineage-based, or composed of close friends or understanding partners and acquaintances. The performers are generally professionals and the troupes run as commercial enterprises. It is not infrequent, though, that performers hold other jobs such as clerks, traders, crafts makers, and sedentary herbalists during lulls or off seasons.

The economic fortunes of the troupes ebb and flow with the sociopolitical and economic health of their societies. In Nigeria with the largest number of professional popular theater troupes, the boom decades were the 1970s and 1980s. Figures such as Hubert Ogunde, Moses Olaiya, Isola Ogunsola, Ade Love, Lere Paimo, and others became very successful entrepreneurs and even went into filmmaking as a result, making their most popular plays even more widely available on celluloid. Those who survived the harsh economic climate of the late 1980s and through the 1990s have branched into video production as a cheaper and low-tech alternative to crosscountry road shows (with no guarantee of sizeable audience) and capital-intensive filmmaking. In South Africa, Gibson Kente reigned supreme from 1966 until his detention by the apartheid government in 1976. Popular culture in Africa is generally understudied, but African popular theater has been the subject of valuable attention by scholars such as Robert Kavanagh (1977), Biodun Jeyifo (1984), Kwabena Bame (1985), David Kerr (1995), Karin Barber (2001), and Catherine Cole (2001), among others.

Development theater

In certain radical or leftist traditions of African theater scholarship, "development theater" is also known as popular theater, but the conception of the "popular" in this case is vastly different from that in the preceding section. While in popular theater the "popular" is measured at the point of consumption or reception, in development theater, the "popular" is marked at the point of production; the theater need not be popular at all in terms of reaching a wide audience. In other words, "popular" here means produced by an alliance of discriminating and ideologically astute intellectuals, workers, and peasants and expressly constructed to advance the interests of the underprivileged classes in society. Because the underprivileged classes constitute the majority of the people in the society, the theater is also known more polemically as "people's theater."

The conception of the "popular" operative in development theater is inspired by the radical Marxist German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, who writes:

> "Popular" means intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their own forms of expression and enriching them/adopting and consolidating their standpoint/representing the most progressive section of the people in such a way that it can take over the leadership: thus intelligible to other sections too/linking with tradition and carrying it further/handing on the achievements of the section now leading to the section of the people that is struggling to lead. (1964: 108)

This form of theater is geared toward raising the consciousness of the exploited classes so they can recognize their interests, band together against their common enemies, and struggle for liberation. To liberate themselves, in the Marxist understanding, is also to liberate the productive forces of the society from private appropriation and so ensure genuine development – a development in which there is no private appropriation of public wealth. It is in this sense that this tradition of theater is called "development theatre." In addition to Brecht, other significant conceptual supports for development theater come from Latin America: Augusto Boal, whose theater experiments are documented in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), and Paulo Freire, adult educator and author of the famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

A minor form of development theater practice is the "guerrilla theater," in which committed activist groups emerge unannounced at carefully chosen public locations and stage provocative performances, usually against particular government policies, and disappear before the agents of law and order

appear. For a time in the early 1980s, the Obafemi Awolowo University Drama Department had a famous Guerrilla Theatre unit, under the direction of Wole Soyinka. However, not all forms of development theater are obviously ideologically charged. Many are designed as adult education programs to teach literacy, explain the political process to bridge the gap between the rulers and the ruled so people can better know their rights and responsibilities, communicate better agricultural techniques, teach new and improved ways of treating or preventing certain diseases, and encourage community mobilization for self-help projects and general rural development. In many instances where this is the case, the designation is the populist and less polemical "community theater." Workshops are held regularly by development theater practitioners to teach the people how to organize themselves to use the theater both as an expression of culture and as a tool for fostering social, political, and economic development.

Development theater practitioners are mostly professional intellectuals, often affiliated with a university, or educated individuals affiliated with a development agency or nongovernmental organization. They work with a variety of groups in mostly rural areas – areas that are in much of Africa the least recipients of the "benefits" of "modernity" and therefore the target of development schemes by states, nongovernmental organizations, as well as World Bank and United Nations agencies. Indeed, most – though not all – development theater practices in Africa receive funding from such institutions. The theater is noncommercial and most of those involved have regular occupations or are funded by grants. Given the direct, instrumentalist goal of the theater, the performances are often didactic and exhortatory, though the more skilled adult educators go to great lengths to emphasize esthetics and even incorporate popular forms from the people's indigenous performance traditions.

An important example of development theater practice is the Laedza Batanani of Botswana in the mid-1970s, which subsequently served as model and inspiration for similar experiments in Lesotho, Zambia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and especially the well-known practice at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria. Perhaps the most oppositional of the experiments was the Kamiriithu Education and Cultural Center, led by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the leading Kenyan writer. The center was so successful in mobilizing the community to explore critically their history and culture and contemporary situation through theater that Ngugi was imprisoned for a year without trial in 1977. By 1982, the Kenyan government had razed the center and banned all theater activities in the area. Scholars such as Robert Mshengu Kavanagh (1977), Michael Etherton (1982), Ingrid Bjorkman (1989), Penina Mlama (1991), David Kerr

(1995), Jane Plastow (1996) have produced illuminating work on development theater tradition in Africa.

Art theater

Art theater is the tradition of African theater most familiar to the outside world through the published works of the continent's notable playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Athol Fugard, Femi Osofisan, Ama Ata Aidoo, Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland, Ola Rotimi, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Sony Labou Tansi, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, Werewere Liking, and Tess Onwueme, among others. Art theater in Africa is of colonial origin; it emerged with the training of Africans in European languages and literatures and dramatic traditions, and it is most often written in the European colonial languages. The label "art theater" signifies the tradition's relationship to, and investment in, notions of "high art" or "great works" characteristic of western bourgeois cultural discourse since the nineteenth century.

The practitioners of art theater are usually professional intellectuals affiliated with universities or other institutions of higher education. Although the best dramas of this tradition borrow richly from indigenous performance forms, the overall "mold" of drama into which those borrowings are poured, as well as the languages in which they are written and performed, are European and greatly circumscribe their popularity with the majority of Africans who are not schooled in those esthetics or languages. After a successful career writing in English, Ngugi wa Thiong'o switched to his native Gikuyu language in the 1980s. The Nigerian dramatist J. P. Clark once considered the matter and observed that, in comparing the Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre with the art theater, "Some would say that the latter has its head deep in the wings of American and European theatre! The works of Mr. Wole Soyinka, Dr. Ene Henshaw, and my own plays, I am told, clearly bear this badge, but whether of merit or infamy it is a matter still in some obscurity" (1970: 85). Clark hints here at a charge sometimes leveled against African art theater: whether it could really be original and authentically African as long as it borrows esthetic structures from and speaks the language of Europe. Such a charge and its subtending purist conceptions of transcultural relations and of its vehicle, cultural translation, has never represented much of a handicap for the truly creative minds of African art theater. They continue to confront the colonial inheritance and revise it from a variety of perspectives, without any surrender of initiative. For them, the centuries of African unequal contact with Europe are undeniable, and cultural purism, absolutism or insularity are not

necessarily worthy coordinates of "originality." The Mexican writer Octavio Paz speaks for the writers of the ex-colonial world, from Africa to Asia and Latin America, when he argues that "The special position of our literatures, when compared to those of England, Spain, Portugal, and France, derives precisely from this fundamental fact: they are literatures written in transplanted tongues," but that they "did not passively accept the changing fortunes of their transplanted languages: they participated in the process and even accelerated it. Soon they ceased to be mere transatlantic reflections. At times they have been the negation of the literatures of Europe; more often, they have been a reply" (1990: 4–5).

The hub of art theater activity in Africa is mostly the urban areas, cities, and universities. This is also where most of the audience, those schooled in western languages, is located. Performance takes place in formal theater buildings, frequently with the proscenium stage that is hegemonic in Europe and America. Art theater is primarily state-subsidized and rarely self-sustaining as a commercial enterprise. Indeed, art theater is consumed more as dramatic literature – read widely in schools and colleges – than as theater.

Many practitioners of art theater have attempted to ameliorate the obvious elitism of the tradition by establishing community theaters or traveling theaters run by university resident professionals or drama students. These efforts, in less formal surroundings, make art theater performances – sometimes of plays in translations or in pidgin, or of text-based improvisations – available to audiences that would otherwise not have access to them. These projects designed to take the art theater to the masses of the people are often very expensive and have existed only intermittently. Some of the famous examples are the University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre (Nigeria, in the 1960s), the Makerere Free Travelling Theatre (Uganda, 1960s and 1970s), the University of Malawi Travelling Theatre (1970s), and the University of Zambia Chikwakwa Theatre (1970s and 1980s). There is the particularly unique case of the South African Athol Fugard, who broke for some time from his normal routine of formal playwriting in the 1970s to collaborate with the actors Winston Ntshona and John Kani. Their improvisations led to many well-received plays against the apartheid state and inaugurated a genre of popular theater labeled South African Protest theater. The most performed of such plays is *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1973).

Although the four traditions of African dramatic performance described above exist simultaneously and often share, or overlap at the level of, deep formal structures, it is nevertheless the case that the social relations among them is hierarchical. Festival performances are still going on, though the scale has

obviously been affected by the continent's economic downturn since the mid-1980s. More significantly, festivals no longer occupy a central position in civil society and are therefore no longer a preeminent instrument of sociopolitical and cultural socialization of the young. Since the last half century, that position has been taken over by cultural forms of westernization such as western-style schools and religious institutions and their myriad offshoots. The point is this: festival performance, the most widespread and truly mass African cultural form, no longer has the cultural capital it used to have, mainly because the cultural knowledge festivals impart no longer has much value in a person's quest for social mobility. Development theater is by no means widespread, and depends too much on institutional sponsorship, whether of a government or nongovernmental agency. In some instances, the charge that development theater is no more than elitist condescension to rural folks, a kind of "planning from above" to bring "modernity" to the "uncivilized," is not entirely unjustified. With the participation of a large number of western nongovernmental organizations in the last decade, including religious ones, it is also not out of place to query the level of agency rural Africans have in the development theater process. Because popular theater is basically commercial, it has to be close to urban centers where most of its clientele who can afford the price of tickets reside. Its thematic and esthetic choices are determined to a large extent by the preferences of its audience; and while many of its performances may have profound cultural significance for the collective, popular theater is not often catalyzed by any grand and well articulated idea of a cultural direction to which to steer the audience. Like all businesses, it does what it has to do to survive.

By far the most prestigious of the traditions is the art theater. Art theater tradition – scripted plays written in European languages or African languages of European alphabet, and made widely available by large and often multinational publishing houses – is the tradition by which Africa is known globally, and the primary bridge by which nationals of different African countries come into contact with one another's dramatic traditions. The practitioners of art theater are nearly exclusively the internationally well-known "African dramatists." Hubert Ogunde may be the father of modern Nigerian theater tradition, but it is Wole Soyinka who is known globally, the one whose works are easily available and weightily read as classic representations of Yoruba African culture to the world and in the world marketplace of cultural transactions. Because this tradition shares similar origins with the contemporary African state, and its bureaucracy and system of education – it is westernized and speaks a European language – it occupies a significant space in the ruling, dominant civil society.

Although many of the distinguished art theater practitioners are employees of one institution of higher learning or the other and few to none have lived solely on the proceeds of their writings, it is nevertheless the case that competence in this tradition is a sure means of social mobility in the larger society, and in the world. This, then, is the fundamental reason for the tradition's prestige.

We come to a profound irony, one that, after more than four decades, is only now being substantively addressed by the practitioners. Art theater may hold all the cultural capital according to the logic of what constitutes that resource in contemporary Africa, but it is the case that this would-be representative tradition speaks, by virtue of its predominant European language of expression, to only the small percentage of Africans who are literate in that language. The irony is made more poignant by the fact that art theater is the main tradition that most directly and persistently confronts the issue of colonial cultural deracination of African societies and the need for vigorous African cultural self-reclamation. It has performed that task by plumbing the depths of indigenous African performance traditions and both critically and creatively anchoring itself simultaneously in autochthonous forms as well as those borrowed from Europe. The tradition's deployment of the colonial languages goes beyond mimicry to contribute in very original ways to those languages. As early in Soyinka's career as 1965, a British reviewer of *The Road* wrote of the dramatist's use of English: "Every decade or so, it seems to fall to a non-English dramatist to belt new energy into the English tongue. The last time was when Brendan Behan's 'The Quare Fellow' opened at Theatre Workshop. Nine years later, in the reign of Stage Sixty at the same loved Victorian building at Stratford East, a Nigerian called Wole Soyinka has done for our napping language what brigand dramatists from Ireland have done for centuries: booted it awake, rifled it pockets and scattered the loot into the middle of next week" (Gilliatt 1965: 25).

But to return to the irony, the majority of Africans simply can not read or speak European languages. Art theater practitioners themselves have endlessly debated the issue (for a review of the question, see Ngugi 1986), suggesting solutions such as infusing the European languages with African imagery, writing in a mixture of African and European languages, translating between African and European languages, and writing in African languages. The more practical solution that is becoming widespread today is cross translation, as leading dramatists such as Soyinka and Osofisan have encouraged the translation of their classics from English to Yoruba. If this trend continues apace and becomes widespread, the art theater tradition will have done a lot to justify its throne of prestige among African theater traditions.

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4

Arab and Berber oral traditions in North Africa

SABRA WEBBER

Background and research trends

North African oral traditions have left early and powerful traces despite their apparent ephemeral nature. The *Golden Ass* by the Roman writer Apuleius, born in Algeria in the middle of the first century of the Common Era drew, in text and texture, on the North African oral culture of his era. Apuleius, whose first language was probably Punic rather than Libyan (Berber), nonetheless claimed membership of two distinct Berber communities. To these African connections were attributed both his strengths (a facility for verbal artistry, a seeming naturalness and lack of artifice in his writing, an infusion of the techniques of African oral literature and magical and religious traditions in his work) and his weaknesses (the same). His work, like other literary works of the "African School," enlivened Greek and Roman metropolitan literature – displaying vivid color, a fondness for allegory, and a grotesque realism harvested from, by that time in western North Africa, a rich blending of Phoenician and various Berber cultures and in eastern North Africa, ancient Egyptian culture. Until recently, the influences of the Berber or Egyptian languages and culture(s) on Punic, Latin, or Greek have remained mostly unconsidered (but see Scobie 1983 for a discussion of the influence of Berber nannies and their storytelling on the children of Phoenician or Latin-speaking households and Black Athena and the controversy surrounding it). Recently, scholars have attended more to the cultural backgrounds of Latin writers from ancient North Africa noting that, for example, "much of [the native North African writer, Macrobius's] treatment of gods is colored by Egyptian and North African mythology . . ." (Chance 1994: 69); and, "Most likely [Fulgentius] lived in Africa: he intended to use the twenty-three letters of the Libyan alphabet for the twenty-three books of *De aetatibus mundi* and mentions the alphabet in the prologue; in one manuscript he is identified as 'carthaginiensis . . .'" (Chance 1994: 97). Further, his style, like that of the "African mythmakers" Martianus Capella and

Apuleius, was labeled "tumor Africanus" for its "pompous elegance" (97). The work of the Carthaginian Martianus, then, with its "humanization and feminization of Mythology" achieved by tempering Greek and Roman mythology and religion with that of North Africa and the Middle East was enthusiastically received within old French, German, and Irish schools after the early fifth and the twelfth centuries (Chance 1994: 298 and 245). Again, verbal art was and is achieved in the Mediterranean region not only by a lively intermingling of languages and cultures, but by the interplay of the oral and written.

With the seventh-century Arab invasion more than one thousand years after the Phoenician invasion, Berber gradually gave way in the southwestern Mediterranean periphery and in the cities of the Maghrib to Arabic and then a substantial Turkish element (especially in Egypt), during the Ottoman expansion. French (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), Italian (Libya), and English (Egypt) during the 150 years or so of the European colonial presence became political languages of domination – again more dominant in the larger urban and southwestern Mediterranean periphery of North Africa, but these languages did not banish Arabic and Berber. Today verbal art continues to flourish in North Africa, still draws upon multiple linguistic sources of inspiration, now centrally Arabic and Berber, and still is a source of inspiration for written literatures that transcend national and regional borders. Tewfik al-Hakim draws upon children's rhymes to frame his play *Ya Tali al-Shajara* (Tree Climber), Tahar Ben Jelloun uses *Thousand and One Nights* themes in *L'enfant de sable* (*The Sand Child*), and Paul Bowles's work is infused with North African folktales, legends, and even personal-experience narratives. In general, as Mona Mikhail remarks of Yusuf Idris, they use the folktale form "to give shape to the content which is also inspired by the traditional lore" (1992: 86). Not only do the oral and written borrow across linguistic boundaries, interacting with and enhancing each other, but various verbal art genres (poems, proverbs, riddles, jokes) interweave – emerge from or are integrated into, combine with or are explicated – through folktales, epics or legends. And North African verbal artistry continues to contribute to the art scene north of the Mediterranean (and elsewhere) most notably today with the current powerful infusion of raï lyrics and music, a style that seems to have spread across the sea after its 1930s introduction to Oran by Berber and Arab Algerian rural women of the night who found it a useful performance tool to draw upon while trying to make a living. Lyrics, now performed more frequently by young men, mix Berber, varieties of North African Arabic, and French.

What follows reviews both the changing plurilingual language situation(s) in North Africa over the centuries and the shifting, especially European,

theoretical approaches to the study of these oral traditions emerging out of changing and inextricably linked political and scholarly trends. How and why particular genres have been foregrounded or ignored over decades and centuries by scholars and aficionados will be touched upon – all the while acknowledging the slipperiness of generic categories in any case and the tendency of verbal artists to trouble, refuse, or erase those genre boundaries. This chapter goes on to consider briefly a few North African oral traditions – riddles, poems, jokes, narrative forms, market cries, "politesse," children's rhymes, lullabies, word play, and song lyrics.

There have been Berbers (*Tamazight* is thought to be the indigenous term) in the northern part of Africa from the western Nile region to the Atlantic for thousands of years. Ancient Egyptians mingled with and fought with Berber tribes since at least 3500 BCE. Gradually, as other groups moved into North Africa (Phoenicians from the Greater Syria region, Romans, Greeks, and especially Arabs), numbers of Berber speakers have proportionally declined although they are still an important presence in the region. Today, there are several Berber languages in North Africa as well as in Mali and Niger with Berber speakers ranging from less than one percent in Tunisia and Egypt to around forty percent in Morocco and perhaps twenty percent in Algeria. Berber is predominantly oral, but there are examples of Berber writing from at least the fifth century BCE and it continues to be written today. Arabic is a relatively recent arrival to North Africa, spreading rapidly beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries CE with the Arab conquest of North Africa, displacing Berber as well as Punic, Roman, and Greek.

Until recently, even most scholars of North African oral traditions have considered literary forms artistically superior to verbal art forms for one reason or another – because they were later to evolve, were considered more complex, more durable, or more compatible with "modernity." And regional (usually spoken) Arabic has commonly been subordinated to classical ("correct" and usually written) Arabic since the latter is considered closer to early poetic and Qur'anic language and essential to pan-Arabism. Still, challenging the colloquial–classical hierarchy is not new to the last century. The much-traveled historiographer of North Africa, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406 CE) recorded lengthy examples of the oral epics about the Beni Hilal tribes in the three volumes of his *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena). He observed that, "Most contemporary scholars . . . disapprove of these types [of poems] when they hear them, and refuse to consider them poetry . . . They believe that . . . they are [linguistically] incorrect and lack vowel endings . . ." He insists, however, "Vowel endings have nothing to do with eloquence" (III: 4, 12–80).

Felicitously, the devaluing of the oral over the written (for Arabic and Berber) and the colloquial (regional) over the classical (for Arabic) has had the effect over the centuries of keeping various forms of verbal art culturally vital because it was not considered worthy of appropriation or manipulation for symbolic purposes by a central authority. As René Maunier remarked more than sixty years ago in his work, *Introduction au folklore juridique*, folklore is local not national, and when it is appropriated by larger entities, it becomes something very different. One could add that with centralization, it tends to leave behind its counterhegemonic dimension, its critique of sociopolitical realities, along with many of its creative possibilities. With notable exceptions (*malouf* and perhaps shadow puppet plays in Tunisia, public storytelling or street theater in Morocco and Egypt), oral traditions in North Africa have been largely free of the systematic appropriation and "folklorization" or sanitation by colonizers or by governmental and other officialdoms that have sometimes been the fate of folk genres elsewhere. And for Arabic, the situation of diglossia and concomitant privileging of classical Arabic combines with the domination of the region by Arabic speakers (despite the colonial presence) so that regional Arabic speech is particularly free to innovate. Further, there is no movement to keep colloquial Arabic "pure" because it has never been considered pure. Today, depending somewhat on the esthetic or social and political requirements of the genre of artistic speech, speakers flavor their local Arabic with words adapted from Berber, French, Italian, Spanish, English, Turkish, or classical Arabic and code switch with (seemingly) whimsical abandon. In Cairo and other North African cities and towns, for example, one hears jokes and speech play that hinge on an understanding of some mix of French, English, classical and colloquial Arabic (Webber 1987). Furthermore, oral and written, colloquial and modern standard Arabic are interwoven by the unlettered as well as among the lettered population. Excerpts from colloquial Arabic poems or plays like the Tunisian colloquial *Kalam al-layl* both draw from and are received back into the world of verbal art (Booth 1992b).

The creative possibility of mixing colloquial with classical Arabic or with other languages was exploited early. Historically, poets from Andalusia, influenced by Hispano-Arabic folk poetry, when reciting *Zajal*, a playful poetry, did not use grammatical declension but rather used colloquial language, mixing it with a classical or semi-classical register at times. When it was recited to a bilingual audience of Romance and Arabic speakers, the author could also include Romance terms in the compositions and this melange could also contribute to the hilarity the poet wanted to evoke. The *muwashshahat*, another form of Andalusian strophic poetry, would be in classical Arabic but the ending, the

kharja, could mix colloquial and classical Arabic with Romance languages. After those Jews now living in North Africa fled like the Arab Muslims from Andalusia in the fifteenth century, they continued to mix Hebrew and Spanish into their Arabic verbal (and sometimes written) art forms. Speech play interweaving French and Arabic is probably most common in the former French colonies. In the realm of 1940s Algerian politics, Malik Bennabi, among others, captured his despair at the state of party politics by using the term *la boulitique* for the French *la politique*. Playing on the pan-Arabic pronunciation of "p" as "b," the first syllable in French evokes the ubiquitous public bowling game for older men and, in Arabic, "piss." Thus, party leaders were playing a pissatic game of "defiling the public realm with private waste" (Christelow 1992: 72).

These often evocative and powerful linguistic concoctions as well as the interplay of Arabic and Berber esthetic speech need further attention. Finally, even though Arabic language purists do not consider that "good" literature can be in dialect or that dialect can be written, these "oral" literatures are not uncommonly written down, especially when the author wants to convey a sense of intimacy, informality or realism (Booth 1992a). Two obvious examples are local poetry and letters to family members and close friends. Today, e-mail is another medium that invites colloquial artistic communication.

Changing interests and theoretical foci of researchers over the centuries have influenced which oral traditions from various eras have been preserved. Researchers can expect that the more visible colonial period studies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be informed by European folklore theories of the time, or will find easily available collections, such as *Thousand and One Nights,* that appealed to European imaginings of a sensual, earthy, Orient. Interest in Berber verbal art, in particular folktales, often was focused on a search for remnants of ancient Roman, Greek, or Phoenician literature or religious beliefs. In the latter case these survivals in turn helped bolster justification for western colonization for, with few exceptions, scholars did not consider that the influence could have been mutual or might have moved from Africa north and west rather than from the Middle East and Europe to North Africa. As the self-proclaimed inheritors of Greek and Roman civilization, then, the French and Italians sometimes claimed that they were not occupying but returning to reclaim what once had been theirs. Berber studies were also encouraged by many western Europeans who considered Berbers more exotic, more "authentic" (native to the region, isolated, rural), more challenging linguistically, or less Muslim, than Arab populations.

Nineteenth-century scholars like Johann Gottfried von Herder and the linguist Jacob Grimm were convinced that the oldest (read "purest," "best") examples of any language could be found by seeking out the stories told by the oldest, least "contaminated" by other cultures and languages, speakers of language. These stories were found likely to contain even more archaic – purer, closer to origins – language than "everyday" speech. Thus, Arabic or Berber tales would be collected to provide insights into "authentic" Arabic or Berber grammatical or linguistic structures. An example of this motivation can be found in the careful work during the last years of the nineteenth century of Hans Stumme, where he included, along with careful linguistic analysis, tales in dialectical Arabic, plus transliterations and translations into German. Several of the many works of Ester Panetta, the Italian linguist and ethnographer/folklorist doing fieldwork in twentieth-century Libya, continue in this tradition, although her ethnographic interests in Libya ranged very broadly. At the same time, the European passion for establishing global classification systems sparked the collecting, sorting, and classifying of folktales by tale types and motifs. Panetta also classified folktales, loosely categorizing them using European genres such as fables, fairytales, and legends. In her work she also sorted out the recurrent themes found in the fairytales – for example, women dressing as men, a theme that continues in Arab literature of today. She matched Libyan examples to similar motifs in folktales from other regions, especially those of other regions of North Africa. She speculated about the social reasons informing the impulse to tell stories with these particular themes. Panetta, like many other European scholars, was particularly interested in Berber folklore, including folk narrative, and again this interest seems to stem in part from the link of the Berbers to pre-Arab (Phoenician, Greek, Roman) communities.

Scholars of the nineteenth century also sought to identify, through study of Arab or Berber culture's religious practices and folklore (assumed to be communally created among the rural and culturally less "evolved"), common evolutionary paths from savage to civilized among all culture groups. Joseph Desparmet (1932) observed that one reason to study the North Africans' orature was to catch the human spirit between savage and civilized, although he also speculated that Europeans had something of psychotherapy to learn from the Maghribians. The nineteenth-century searches for the "soul" of a people though their folklore, although no longer a major scholarly preoccupation (but see Paques 1964), continues to be used in popular writing as explanation for the importance of studying oral traditions in North Africa. Scholars were

also preoccupied with origins of lore, especially of folktales and myths, and with clarifying the roles of three variables – shared common ancestors, diffusion, and polygenesis – in accounting for the widespread commonality of tales and motifs. Other collections of verbal arts were intended to illustrate a common humanity emphasizing, for example, the similarity of certain proverbs or religious or mythical stories shared by European and North African cultures. Others studied Berber to determine the origins of the people (Henri Basset 1887) or for unabashedly political motivations. Henri Basset writes, "Si l'on parle leur langue, ils perdent beaucoup de leurs moyens de résistance; ils sont comme désarmés." "If one speaks their language, they lose much of their means of resistance; they are as if disarmed" (Basset 1920: 37). Knowledge among researchers of Berber and Arabic languages varied widely as independence became a reality in the region during the second half of the twentieth century. Many have had to rely heavily on translators (see Aubin 1904 and his translators such as Si Kaddour ben Ghabrit).

During the second half of the twentieth century, attention to process and structure in the study of oral literature as well as its rhetorical power as a kind of counterhegemonic discourse has been foregrounded. Attending to creative process in oral literature necessarily requires consideration of the cultural and situational contexts of that verbal art leading to interesting, though fleeting to date, study of similarities between the production of oral literature and of other cultural forms – carpets, vernacular housing, and so on (see Harries 1977; Webber 1991; and for an earlier example, Maunier 1926). Scholarly preoccupations at any one time or place affected, of course, what got studied and preserved, but so did the fact that certain genres of verbal art tended to be more culturally effective as commentary on particular social conditions and thus to be more visible at any given historical moment. Today, the joke, quickly adaptable to comment on changing political and social realities, seems to be the favored form in hectic cities, notably Cairo, where time for more leisurely verbal artistry is in short supply. Personal experience narratives and proverbs are all pervasive today – among country people and city people, among men and women. Performances of epics (in poetry or rhymed prose) and folktales are shortened and become fewer, even in rural areas, as the eight-hour day takes the place of the cycle of the seasons for many men and women. But any of these latter genres and others – from patter heard in markets and from door-to-door merchants, to verbal dueling, to love poetry to children's rhymes – can undergo a florescence that may be limited to a small group, a community, a particular class or occupational group, or an entire region.

Genres, their performers, and their audiences

Due to the particular and changing interests of collectors and scholars as described above, one finds examples of Arabic and Berber oral traditions either more or less abundant by region and by language over time. The following is a sampling of verbal artistry that can be located from Egypt to Morocco, but the richness of particular examples can only be appreciated by the microstudies such as those listed in the bibliography and the many that yet need to be done.

Narratives

C*ontes* or *Märchen*, whether in Arabic or Berber, can be identified as fiction by their introductory and usually concluding formulae. They tend toward vagueness as to time and setting, although "storied" settings such as Baghdad during the age of Haroun al-Raschid or a far away Persian city are popular options. It is not surprising to find cities as the final loci of stories about human characters – even if part of the action takes place in the countryside – but movement between city and country, Bedouin and settled settings is common. Boundaries between nature and culture, animal and human, and the natural and supernatural can become blurred so that humans may address the sea or talk to animals or ogres. Movement between the natural and supernatural, waking and sleeping, even life and death occurs without question. Women and girl characters are often educated, actively seek their own spouses, and travel to far and exotic lands. These stories can be presented orally by men or women and are also sometimes read aloud to entertain others who are doing sedentary chores – embroidering or applying henna, weaving mats, mending fishing nets, taking a store inventory – or who are simply less literate. Women storytellers (sometimes poor relations) in the past might live in the home of well-to-do patrons, providing a source of entertainment for the secluded women and the children.

The humorous trickster tales are very popular. The famous Juha (J'ha, Djoh'a, Goha) challenges all sorts of authority – religious, state, and class (although not commonly that of men over women) – shaking up, often rather more overtly than other folk genres, common cultural assumptions about the proper order of things. These tales are common throughout North Africa and among all faiths. Another subgenre, explanatory stories or folk etymological stories, can be about how a musical instrument or a place or a person was named. These narratives can be legends or tales depending on their presentation. Other kinds of fictional stories center on sea-lore, tales of generosity and hospitality, of the hazards of drink, and animal stories. Unlike *contes*, legends

do not have introductory formulae. They can be presented as local history legends or personal experience narratives (two genres lacking study as artistic communication until recently) and overlap with the category "epic." Legends, at least at their core, are believed to varying degrees, and often contain some reference to the supernatural. The protagonist figures are larger-than-life examples of the brave, the holy, the foolish, the verbally or physically adept. Stories of *awliya'*, or for Jews, *tsaddiqim* (both words having the implication of "friends" [of God]), and for Coptic Christians, *quddisin* (holy ones), and their deeds, during their lives and especially after their deaths, continue to be powerful resources for community and smaller group self-representation.

The stories themselves center on help given by the godly person during a personal or communal crisis, often when the person or community is relatively powerless vis-à-vis a seemingly more powerful figure – usually, but not always, an outsider. Legends include such subcategories as stories about the lives, miracles, or visions of holy people or the heads of Sufi brother- or sisterhoods, of famous ancestors, including famous musicians and the spectacular power of their music, or famous executioners. According to André Levy, Jewish Moroccans use stories of *tsaddiqim* to address and resolve their continued love for Morocco – despite their fall from privileged to minority status since decolonization. Oral stories about the perfidy of one confessional group vis-à-vis the others are common, though each group within its popular and local religious practices also makes room to honor particular holy members of other confessional groups in poetry and prose narratives. Stories of a glorious ancient heritage are especially common in Coptic verbal art repertoires as are the glorification of martyrdom and death for the sake of the religion. Local stories of hidden wealth also abound, since any number of people who have been forced to flee the area for one reason or another leave wealth behind. Certain monuments become rumored to be fake (Roman or other ruins or *zawiyyas*, shrines built for *walis*), built to conceal arms or wealth. There are also stories of neighbors who claim to be married to genies (*jinn*, feminine: *jinniya*).

Market cries and other public patter

In the weekly markets of North Africa as well as among the street vendors or buyers, a well-turned phrase or a lengthy verbal concoction can grease the wheels of commerce or simply brighten an encounter between strangers. Sometimes what are sold are artful words, as in the case of the itinerant female fortune tellers that city and village women sometimes invite into their homes. Still today, one finds women fortune tellers who in the warm months travel

together or with their husbands and children, sleeping out, and being ushered up to patios, porches, or verandas as a source not only of artistically, poetically presented information about the future, but of stories, poems, jokes, or songs. Other times door-to-door sellers of herbs or spices, beauty aids for women, or fresh water also are known and loved for their artistic speech. The street sellers are artistically invested in the shouting of their wares and also might offer along with their customers a gift of an appropriate riddle or joke. Until recently, some men acted as town criers, shouting out the news near gathering places, cafés, or marketplaces.

Riddles and proverbs

Riddles can stand alone, be told in sets, or be incorporated into legends or stories. Both Berber and Arabic riddles have a poetic form and appeal that has been likened to haiku – short, powerful images usually of everyday objects or phenomena. For example the Tunisian riddle *"It's about silver ground and a golden plow, the seeds speak, what a miracle"* evokes an appealing image that doesn't depend on its answer (paper, pen, and the letter itself) for its charm. Riddles often rhyme and possess assonance, have a deceptively simple vocabulary, and offer the created words and the syntactic layering more common in poetry than in prose. Riddles fall between definition and description as they attend to the sensory or the affective. Riddles can be quite difficult to master. Neither in Arab nor Berber culture is the riddle strictly a game or pastime for children, although children have guessing routines in both languages and rewards for guessing correctly and punishments for not guessing or for taking too long. The ancient neck riddle continues to be told (Webber 1999).

Proverbs are probably the most consistently practiced verbal art among adults today in North Africa. Men and women from all walks of life have a repertoire of proverbs in active use. Unfortunately, there are no studies that actually address this art in situational context, although there are dozens of publications simply listing proverbs from particular regions or ethnicities.

Jokes

Jokes are a particularly powerful form of counterhegemonic discourse. They seem especially favored in cities, among students and intellectuals, and frequently comment harshly but extremely wittily on corruption among the moneyed classes and on government ineptitude and more gently on country bumpkins. They also are a means of defusing tensions among the conflicting groups – religious, national, ethnic, rural/urban – that encounter each

other in large cities. As one Cairene remarked to me, "When the joking stops [between these groups] it is time to worry." The joke *"A Saidi girl is walking with her boyfriend when they see her father coming toward them. 'Oh no, Papa,' says the girl. 'Don't worry,' comforts the boy, 'just tell him I'm your brother,'"* quickly sums up a host of contemporary communal concerns – changing male–female courtship practices, city–country tensions as country people move to Cairo and other big cities, and generational issues, to list only three.

Poems

Poetry tends to be foregrounded as a cultural source of pride for Berbers and Arabs, considered superior to other forms of verbal art. Topics range from falconry or war to love, or longing for a lost home (e.g., Andalusia). Professional folk poets, "merchants of art" (Slyomovics 1987), are scarcer today. They need a means to travel and reach people if they are to be heard. Traveling poets or poet-musicians of a certain reputation could, in the past, travel from place to place being taken in by the rich (perhaps to settle in as a resident entertainer) or performing in marketplaces or at weddings and festivals. Historically, these bearers of songs and poetry as well as of stories and heroic epics often accompanied their performances by a flute or tambourine carried in the hoods of their burnooses. Verbal artists could also be pious travelers, men or women, whose graves eventually become the sites of pilgrimages or small teaching centers, especially during the colonial period, for children of the urban poor or those located in the most rural areas. Until the mid-1800s criers, *l'ait*, are still reported, the famed poets of the battlefield celebrated since the Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic) period. "Voices like copper," Auguste Margueritte reports (1869), putting fear into the enemy and urging his or her tribe on to victory.

Other bearers of folk poetry (antigovernment, anticolonial, humorous, predictive, or bawdy) are water carriers – known in small towns or the neighborhoods of big cities during the colonial period as purveyors of enigmatic anticolonial poems; dervishes ("wise fools"); women – often bearers of prurient or comic poems – brought into the home to build clay ovens or to assist in the preparation of foodstuffs for storage; travelers; or salespeople. To find active bearers of oral traditions, one needs to look for those whose occupation/lifestyle results in contact with various households and both men and women. Over and over again the singers or tellers of the epic legendary biographies (*sira/siyar*) of the ancient Arab heroes like those of the Banu Hilal tribe are referred to as "gypsies." While they may in fact have homes (some

towns or villages all over North Africa are known as the homes of fortune tellers, poets or musicians – Tella, al-Bakatush, Jahjouka, for example), it is true that to have an appreciable audience most verbal artists have to move around.

Politesse

Polite phrases are a central, but not much studied, genre of North African verbal art. Children and newcomers are quickly initiated into the intricacies and creative possibilities of polite speech – a conversational genre that depends on an appealing phrase, well placed, well timed, and effectively and appropriately delivered. Even poor speakers of colloquial Arabic who have a grasp of the basic politeness formulae will be complimented on how well they speak Arabic. Artful and less perfunctory politesse is truly foregrounded – noticed and remembered. Speakers choose from a panoply of vocabulary even for the simplest of greetings, "good morning" and "good night," so that those required greetings, esthetically pleasing, cleverly personalized to listener and context, can become long-remembered and repeated compliments. Aside from the "obligatory" phrases to (or by) beggars such as "may God provide" (uttered by the petitioner when refusing a petition), to parents regarding the health and success of their children (in school, in marriage), to workers encountered in the street, particular phrases relevant only to the person addressed and the situation addressed are especially valued. Reminiscences about a particularly well-turned compliment or conversely a pithy critique of a mannerless clod also are traditional artistic speech – celebrating the speaker, no matter how otherwise socially marginal, as well as the speech, and creating a sense of connection or community. Some very nice insults for those with no table manners can be found in Daumas 1864. For example, to be said to the greedy, "*From the rate at which you are making that goat disappear, one would think that while living it gored you*," or (to the sloppy eater) "*In light of your familiarity with [the cooked goat meat] you would think his mother nursed you*." Daumas also mentions over fifty ways to wish a person well in Algerian Arabic as well as numerous creative phrases to offer when someone is sick or wounded, when a loved one dies, when someone loses money, marries, has a child, or brings good news. Besides "*Good morning*," one can wish another "a day of *dates and milk*," or "*sugar and honey*," for example, or, for the fishermen on the island of Kerkennah, Tunisia, a good early morning greeting is "*[May you have] fish up to your armpits*." It remains for future studies to determine how flexible these polite phrases and reproaches can be and how much they vary from region to region.

Song

Sung narratives or poetry are common in Arabic or Berber. Similar poems or rhymed prose pieces are put to a spectrum of tunes depending on region and personal preference. Lullaby lyrics are set to various tunes depending on region and family practices. Touareg poetry in Ahaggar (Berber) might be recited, but can be sung (accompanied by a violin or sometimes a small drum) to any of several tunes that correspond to the particular rhythm of the "text." And any one of a number of rhythms can be chosen. Among other groups a flute might be used (the Jurqra of the Kabyles). Women's nonprofessional singing tends to be in private (Abu-Lughod 1986), except at traditional weddings. They sing while at work – spinning, weaving, grinding wheat – and when their words waft into the nearby community they subvert in interesting ways the public–private dichotomy, by making "public" emotions and opinions commonly considered suitable only for private utterance. A lullaby recorded in western Tunisia is simultaneously a song and warning to a nearby lover. Women and children also have songs and rituals to bring rain. In parts of North Africa, these rituals and songs are thought by some to be playful adaptations of Punic human sacrifices to the goddess Tanit. Religious ballads about the life of the Prophet or other important Islamic figures both construct and reveal a local, authoritative, "lived" religion, a very lively counterpoint to the textual tradition. Coptic Christians in Egypt have rediscovered the art of hymns – songs about Jesus, the church, or saints – sung in homes and at informal family gatherings. These two examples underscore most emphatically the importance of studying any of the North African religious traditions as lived traditions, often orally constructed and transmitted.

Although there are master poet-singers, long remembered and quoted, informal poetic compositions are set to music and are very widespread across classes and among men and women, young and old. As is the case with much folk speech by definition, only the author or close associates can understand allusions, omissions, additions to or rearrangements of verses. Often singers draw upon a specialized poetic vocabulary. As is the case with Arabic poetry, sung poetic duels can occur, including those by young mothers debating the merits of girl and boy babies. There is popular and some scholarly belief that this kind of dueling harks back to conflicts during which each side fought with the words of champion poets as well as with warriors.

Malouf (perhaps from *alifa*, "familiar" or "customary"), like the *sira* genre of legend, is an art form that has been tampered with by institutions. This song and musical style is said to have been brought from Andalusia by Muslims

and Jews who were expelled during the fifteenth century, but it is far from clear that this is the case (see Guettat 1980; Abu-Haidar 1993). In any event, it became a form shared by both religious brother- and sisterhoods (where it is often considered chanting, not music) and by secular performers, whether dedicated amateurs, usually with some status in the community, or by professionals, both Muslims and Jews (of a lower class until the second quarter of the century). Some of the religious groups would also perform during weddings or circumcisions, even in street processions and in cafés. The texts, a combination of literary Arabic art forms – *qasida*, *muwashshahah*, and *zajal* – with (often very) local dialects are transmitted orally, as is the accompanying music. Leaders of local groups could alter the words or music, and borrowing occurred among religions and from sacred to secular and vice-versa. Until the last sixty years or so, secular *malouf* seems to have been performed either by Jewish performers or lower-class urban or middle- to upper-class rural Muslims. In *zawiyyas* all members chanted with the leaders changing words or melodies as necessary. Melodies could be traded between popular and sacred texts so that Jews on the island of Djerba, in Tunisia, borrowed from popular music texts in Arabic to sing *piyyutim*, or Hebrew poetic texts performed on religious occasions. Innovations, including the addition of western instruments continue to occur. Institutional, governmental or academic, interference has resulted in the following: a rupture between younger and older players, an attempt to codify and "correct" words, a downplaying of the religious *malouf* of Sufi brotherhoods, and a freezing in place of words (and music) choices by poets or musicians who tend not to be well-versed in *malouf*.

Lullabies

As in other parts of the world, lullabies can be any songs that appeal to the singer – often love songs. North African lullabies specifically for girls have focused on imagining the tender and supportive relationship the young girl will have with her mother, her future stunning beauty as a young woman, her success in the "womanly" skills of embroidery, fancy needlework, and weaving, and her successful marriage. For boys, the lullabies attend again to a close relationship with the mother, but imagine him coming to her from school, how desirable he will be to young women – "*One said, 'I'll marry him,' one said, 'I yearn for him,' one said, 'I swear I dreamed of him while he was still in his mother's womb,'*" – how successful and generous he will be as a man. Both lullabies and nursery rhymes refer back to the time that young men were conscripted into the Ottoman army ("*and Haneena is crying, her son is in Istanbul*"). The child and mother and father are likened to precious metals

or the moon or stars – families of related symbols. The mother moves from one lullaby to another, often connecting them by drawing on the same tune. Lullabies are much less likely to involve linguistic code-switching, perhaps because they represent such a private moment between parent and small child.

Coded speech/speech play

"Small" artistic strategies such as multilayered, extended metaphors, naming practices, use of diminutives, and "secret" languages are important to the underpinnings of orature, but also embellish everyday speech and conversational genres like riddles, proverbs, and jokes. Henri Basset (1920), among others, mentions the artistic speech of women and children, remarking that among the Kabyles there are women who can speak so that men don't understand and that children's language is also specialized. Children's games, lullabies and rhymes are especially full of diminutives, although Arabic employs diminutives to great effect in various sorts of verbal art – stories, legends, proverbs, and so on – and they may also be nuggets of artistic speech embedded in everyday talk. Jeanne Jouin (1950) uses the Moroccan example of a double diminutive: *bint* (girl) to *bnita* (little girl) to *banutta* (little, little girl) or, alternatively, *binti* (my girl), *binati*, *binuti*, in Tunisia (Webber, personal observation). The pattern differs from place to place, but the concept is widespread.

Children's rhymes and games

Little rhymes and games for children (clapping rhymes, naming, or counting rhymes using fingers or toes, rhymes for learning to walk, rhymes in the ceremony for loss of the first tooth) also employ the diminutive and fantastic talk. The fingers become little people or the castle of a sultan; the armpit becomes the cave for a little mouse creeping up the child's arm in a game similar to "this little piggy went to market." But a rhyming or clapping game chanted in sing-song voices or sung can also simply be the story of something close to home. *"Daddy brought a little fish, we'll fry it in a little oil . . . What did daddy bring us? He brought us henna, I'm going to put some on, and I'll share it with Shoshena"* (probably a young, brown-skinned, servant girl). Creative pet names are common for children and often cannot be understood without reference to family or even Arab or Berber world history and relationships. Rhymes by children are extremely creative, often mixing multiple languages.

Today research into North African oral traditions represents a lively field of investigation – both for Berber and for Arabic. Researchers are once again requiring of themselves knowledge of local speech and seem willing to celebrate

life at the margins, the interstices of verbal art and material culture, verbal art and written art, Berber, Arabic, and French at a minimum and so on. There is also in a postmodern era a willingness (not previously entirely unknown, of course) to explode western genre categories and an openness to attending to and (re-)appreciating cultural difference.

Finally, recognition by scholars of North Africa of the political dimension of artistic speech, standing alone, or in conversation with written texts, or with visual art or material culture, has resulted in powerful critical analyses that speak not only to local or regional concerns, but offer important insights into crosscultural relations writ large. Scholars of North Africa, like scholars of Africa in general, have often led in their understanding of the need to take into account the power of oral expressive culture in the contexts of both local and regional studies – political, literary, cultural, and religious. Now, however, what was once an artistic medium relegated to the simplest of building blocks for more important genres and media is broadly recognized as a highly complex and absolutely central resource in the critical need for understanding across cultures the powerful affective dimension of communities anywhere and everywhere.

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5

Heroic and praise poetry in South Africa

LUPENGA MPHANDE

Praise poetry is central to any delineation of southern African literature since praising is an important part of the peoples' political and literary expression. The genre of praise poetry called *izibongo* in Zulu (used in its plural form) is a political art form found in southern African societies like the Nguni- and Sotho-Tswana-speaking peoples. The term refers to the form of poetic expression that defines and names an individual, and is characterized by bold imagery expressed in carefully selected language. This type of poetry applies to the personal set of praise names of individuals, comprising cumulative series of praises and epithets bestowed on them by their associates, from childhood onwards, interspersed with narrative passages or comments. These praises, composed and recited by professional bards, often embody concise allusions to historical incidents and memorable achievements or characteristics connected with each family, and may amount to verses of considerable length and excellence. Among the Nguni linguistic groups, the characteristically colorful heroic praise poetry has a rich body of collected literature dating back four hundred years, and such poetry is treasured by people in this subregion as their highest form of literary expression. The major function of praise poetry is to conserve and transmit social consciousness, while simultaneously entertaining the audience. Because it deals with happenings in and around the individual being praised, informing the audience of his/her political and social views, praise poetry is documentary, and speakers of many (and similar) southern African languages have retained this cultural expression to aid them in remembering their past.

Research into heroic praise poetry is still relatively scanty. The first recording, in the southern African region, was published by Eugene Casalis in 1841: *Etudes sur la langue Sechuana*. This was in reality a grammar of southern Sotho, and not of Setwana as the title suggests. Casalis published another collection in 1859, *Les Bassoutos*, which was translated into English in 1961 as *The Basutos*. In 1882 the "Song of the Assega," the *izibongo* of Lobengula of the Zimbabwe

Ndebele, was published by H. Depelchin and Croonenberghs in *Trois ans dans l'Afrique Australe: le pays des Matabélés, débuts de la Mission du Zambèse*. These publications did not include texts in the source language. The first praise poem published in an African language was Thomas Arbousset's praise of King Dingana of the Zulu in *Relation d'un voyage d'exploration au nord-est de la Colonie du Cap de Bonne Espérance* published in 1842, and translated into English in 1852. Some of the early recordings of praise poetry were published in newspapers before being re-issued in the form of anthologies. In 1906, *Zemk'iinkomo Magwalandini* containing, among other things, praise poems gathered from Eastern Cape newspapers by well-known Xhosa authors such as S. E. K. Mqhayi and J. T. Jabavu, and edited by W. B. Rubusana, was published. Similarly, in 1915, A. M. Sekese published *Lilotho tsa Sesotho*, a collection of praises in Sesotho taken from *Leselinyana la Lesotho*, the journal of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society. Zulu praise poems were published *in Ilanga laseNatali*, a newspaper started by J. L. Dube in 1903. After the First World War there followed a remarkable outburst of heroic praise-poetry publication in African languages, including those in southern Sotho (Z. D. Mangoaela 1921), Zulu (James Stuart's five collections, 1923–26, C. L. S. Nyembezi 1958), Xhosa (H. M. Ndawo 1925, 1939) northern Sutho (D. M. Phala 1935), and Malawi Ngoni (M. Read 1937).

In the 1920s, D. C. T. Bereng published praise poems of the Sotho King Mshweshwe, depicting him as the founder of the Sotho nation, and interspersing his description of heroic battles with passages of personal reflection, thought, and experiences. The end of the Second World War saw the publications by E. M. Ramaila (1935) on northern Sutho praise poetry, and the momentous annotated volumes of the Oxford University Press series "The Oxford Library of African Literature" that includes I. Schapera's volume for Setswana (1965), Trevor Cope's volume for Zulu (1968), D. P. Kunene's (1971) and M. Damane and P. B. Sanders's (1974) volumes for Sesotho, and Margaret Read's volume on praise poetry of the Malawi Ngoni (1956). In 1932 Cambridge University Press also came up with *The Growth of Literature*, in three volumes, edited by Chadwick and Chadwick (1932–40).

Later publications on praise poetry have been of a more critical nature, and these have included C. L. S. Nyembezi's "The Historical Background to the Izibongo of the Zulu Military Age," in *African Studies* 8 (1948): 110–25, 157–74; Harold Scheub's *The Xhosa Ntsomi* (1975); Jeff Opland's *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (1983); David K. Rycroft's *The Praises of Dingana* (1988); the seminal work by Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History* (1991); and Elizabeth Gunner and Mafika Gwala's *Musho! Zulu Popular Praises* (1994). The *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History*

(1991) takes a subcontinental view of the occurrence of heroic praise poetry and analyzes examples of such poems from Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, and South Africa to describe and substantiate the esthetics of praise poetry. The authors also deliver a powerful indictment against the anthropological theories that dominated earlier research in oral expression because of their reinforcement of an evolutionist attitude toward Third World cultures as primitive, and criticize the subsequent emphasis on the internal form of oral expression which results in a neglect of pertinent questions about the content of oral expression in its social setting. Lupenga Mphande's "Ngoni Praise Poetry and the Nguni Diaspora" (1993) extends the study of praise poetry to those Nguni communities that left South Africa during the *mfecane* and settled in lands as far away as East and Central Africa. David Copland, in *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of Basotho Migrants* (1994) examines aspects of hybridity in praise poetry in an urban setting and the artistic repertoire of migrant workers in southern Africa.

The word *izibongo* comes from the Nguni verb /-bonga/, "to praise, give thanks, express gratitude, worship, pray to, offer sacrifice, give and be appreciative by evoking the clan name of the one being praised," etc. Thus the word has social, political, and religious connotations, all of which are important in its interpretation. The Zulu word also refers to the "praise name(s)" that an individual is given or gives himself/herself, and means to "praise," "laud," "extol," "utter praises of." Naming means "identifying," and the "praise names" are meant to give a concise description or epitomization of an event or action in the person's life, his achievements or failures, or a peculiar physical characteristic.

A praise name is different from a clan name, which usually is the name of the founder of the clan, and, as such, represents social identity and is often used for tracing genealogy and kinship relationship. Because praise poetry expresses publicly, and therefore reaffirms, social identity whenever it is performed, *izibongo* never take place in isolation but are always embedded in social life. Although the types of praise poems vary widely from birth praises, wedding praises, dirges, beer party praises, workers' praises, war praises, love praises, political praises, topical praises, to heroic praises, they all unite in naming, identifying, and therefore giving significance to the named person or object. The language used in praise poetry is characterized by the use of formulaic poetic devices (e.g., repetition, linking, parallelism, etc.) and by an accentuation of rhythm that leads the performer to chant rather than recite the poem, which in turn helps the audience to participate and remember. What distinguishes praise poetry from everyday speech is its unlimited use of the common euphonic qualities of alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia,

buttressed by extended simile. The most formalized language, and thus the one indicating the highest social significance, is reserved for heroic praise poems, which are like eulogies, odes, and epics in that they project their subjects in a favorable light and record historical events. Unlike epics, which are projected as complete historical records, heroic praise poems deal with current, and therefore partial, historical events. While odes are inclined to reflect on philosophy and philosophical theory, heroic praise poems are based on social theory and action, and this multifunctional, multifaceted aspect of the heroic poetry art form makes it difficult to define because it incorporates a spectrum of political, poetic, and literary qualities. The praises of the rulers have a special status because the political leader is traditionally conceived as the center and symbol of unity of the community, and must thus be portrayed in the most impressive way. The greater the social significance involved, the greater the skill of praising needed for an adequate representation. Consequently, the *izibongo* of rulers constitute esthetically the most highly appreciated subgenre.

In southern African societies, social power relations intertwine with inherent oral art forms, so that if the object of praise is a ruler, the art of praising inevitably becomes the art of criticizing. In this regard, *izibongo* are central to the local language of politics, not only because of the esteemed genre of verbal art, but also because they are recognized as an important medium of political discourse that reflects the current political atmosphere in the community. In heroic praise poetry, praising always incorporates some negative characteristics into their subject's praises, marking what is laudable and what should be condemned. The praise poet applauds, and if necessary criticizes, political leadership in accordance with established values of the community. Therefore, even praise poets of the most powerful rulers cannot be regarded as mere flatterers at court because although they compose heroic poems as eulogies to powerful people, their compositions also have other social significances. Besides legitimating and entrenching the rule of the powerful ruler, heroic praise poetry provides a rallying point for communal identity and solidarity. For this reason, the political aspect of *izibongo* is itself part of its esthetics.

The basic structure of heroic praise poetry is a succession of praise names, arranged in such a way that there is a statement, extension, development, and conclusion. When reciting praises, the pauses that the artist makes after a praise name create the basic units of verses and stanzas. The most distinctive characteristics of heroic praise poetry in Nguni languages are its various structures of repetitiveness, such as alliterations, assonances, and parallelisms. Assonances, the means by which praise names are extensively linked to various

human actions and qualities, usually dominate the *izibongo* literary text because of the characteristically elaborate noun-class system in Bantu languages. The subtle interplay of such linguistic features that comes about by the act of "nominalizing" things or actions by changing the prefix of the word to the noun-class produces a fascinating and much appreciated harmony and acoustic impact on the audience. The lyricism thus created is then synchronized with the repetitions at the content level to produce audial-rhymes so characteristic of poetic speech. The created harmony is just as important for an appreciation of praise poetry as the semantic import since praise poetry, like oral poetry as a whole, is performative. The performative nature of this genre of oral art also means that the whole range of "body-language," evident during recitation, is part of its normative form that underlines the narrated meaning in tone, mime, gesture, as well as audience responses. This wide range of stylistic repertoire in lyrical presentation of the individual praised is what makes praise poetry the highest form of literary expression among the Nguni-speaking people.

Praise poems are composed not only about chiefs, famous warriors, and prominent members of the nobility, but about ordinary people also, including women and herdsmen. There are, in addition, praise poems of clans and subdivisions of clans, of domestic animals, of wild animals, of trees and crops, of rivers, hills, and other scenic features, and of such inanimate objects as divining-bones. In modern times praise poems have even been composed about schools, railway trains, and bicycles (Schapera 1965:1). One of the most popular songs at workers' rallies in southern Africa today, "Shosholoza," is based on a praise poem to a train that used to transport migrant workers from the far outposts of the southern African subcontinent to the South African gold mines. There are praise poems to ancestors, and when praise poetry evokes the names of ancestors it provides the medium of communication between the living and the departed, and between the natural and the supernatural. Thus, naming of the ancestors in the praises is not simply an act of commemoration, but also a moment of invocation, a way of making them present.

Generally, praise poetry tends to have gender-specific themes, men's praises preoccupied with themes of war, honor, devotion, courage and bravery, chivalry, daring, adventure, combat, confrontation with the wild, manhood, etc., and women usually narrating themes concerned with domestic matters, womanhood, filial relationships, jealousies, but also with peace, courtesy, agricultural chores, futility of war, and so on. Elizabeth Gunner (1979) recorded many praises among Zulu women dealing with themes of identity, social status, and achievements articulated in discourses structured in traditionalist, polygamous households in contentious social relationships. Such poetry is

regarded as a socially acceptable way of giving public expression to personal emotion.

The formal occasions at which praise-poetry performance has ceremonial functions include harvest festivals, weddings, and times of initiation. Because its esthetics are intrinsically linked to history, which is dramatically re-enacted in performance, praise poetry cannot be viewed in isolation from its social meaning. At each performance, therefore, the poet's words turn the physical presence of the praise poet and the audience into a metaphorical re-creation of history. Although we have no way of knowing when or how heroic praise poetry originated, it is likely that the recitation of praise names and praises was part of the socialization process, and that it was used to construct individual and collective identities. Supervisors of rites of passage ceremonies, regiment commanders, chiefs, princes, and princesses must have been largely responsible for the creation and memorization of praise poems. In the modern-day context, chiefs, kings, and politicians play an important role in the composition and recitation of heroic praise poems. Some heroic praise poems, such as "Praises for Mandela" by Zolani Mkiva which were performed during Nelson Mandela's inauguration as South Africa's first black president in May 1994, were composed in the recent past, as shown in their content. In contrast, however, others are generations old – for example, "Praises for first Zulu kings," recorded by James Stuart in *uKulumetule* (1925), A. T. Bryant in *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929), "Praises to Lobengula," first recorded by H. Depelchin and C. Croonenberghs (1882), and "Praises to Zwangendaba," first recorded in the 1930s by Margaret Read and published in *The Ngoni of Nyasaland* (1956). New praise poems are being composed all the time, especially by political functionaries, and in many cases variant forms of a particular poem exist, sometimes changing with location or generation. The differences in versions of the same poem come from the fact that praise poems are not static compositions; they are always revised and reformulated to incorporate new material relevant to the community for which they are composed, or to suit the changing times.

Heroic praise poetry can belong to literate peoples as well as to those lacking a written form of expression; it can be factual or fictional, modern or traditional. It is not of concern whether such folk narratives are based on some historical event or whether they are credible, though a great many do have value for the student of history. What is important is that they represent a form of art, and that they arise directly from the cultural bases of the communities in which they are found. While admitting that oral literature is not different from other forms of literature, Ruth Finnegan states that oral literature is

"characterized by particular features to do with performance, transmission, and social context" (1970: 25). Mazizi Kunene says that heroic poetry such as that found in the Zulu language, being communal, requires a special method of presentation: "The poet does not just recite his poetry but acts it, uses variations of pitch, and aims at communicating his poem through the simulation of all the senses. He produces at one level a symphonic chant, at another, a drama, and at still another, a dance" (1970: 12).

Praise poetry, as folk narrative, is hardly distinguishable from a dramatic presentation and its rendering in written form falls short of achieving its goal of representing oral traditions. The praise poem is usually an act dramatically presented to an audience that frequently is itself part of the act. In interpreting the praise poem, therefore, the whole social context of the performance must be understood because the actor is performing within the confines of space, time, and social context. The fact that he belongs to a particular sex, age, and social group influence his narration, his narrative, and its reception by his audience. Although praise poetry contains all the elements generally found in the folk narrative, it is a highly stylized poetic form rendered by the speaker in chant rather than an ordinary speaking voice and accompanied by rhythmic body movements or even wild jumps during which stabbing movements are made with a spear or wooden staff. On the whole, words and acts complement each other in the recitation of praise poems. While heroic praise poetry like that of the Nguni- and Sotho-speaking peoples is historically based and event interpretive, it is not strictly a historical account, but a eulogy.

Scholars have viewed heroic praise poetry from different perspectives: historical, personal, social, political, and religious. David Rycroft, for example, states that the Zulu praise poems "play an active and essential role within traditional religion as a medium of communication between the living and the dead" (1988: 25). He refers to the special ceremonies held in the cattle byre (*kraal*) and involving the whole family, when praises are recited by the family head, and says that the appeal or prayer to the ancestors is expressed by the offering of the sacrificial beast. Thus, according to Rycroft, the poet/performer "becomes the intermediary between the ancestors and the people present." The problem with this historical perspective is that it puts orality and performance off stage from the contemporary political discourse.

The second perspective from which praise poetry is viewed is that which projects praise poetry as something "personal" to the poet/performer. Herbert Dlomo offers an idealized version of this view when he states that "praise poems were used as an urge to courage and endurance" (1947: 48), and

that no one wanted to fall short of his "praises," in the sense that praise poems were bestowed on the heroes, thus "people would rather die than lose them." The advantage of this perspective is that it avoids the overemphasis on the text to the exclusion of all other features of praise poetry as was the case with the first perspective, and it projects the poet at the center stage of the contemporary social engagement. The weakness, though, is that in highlighting the individual it ignores the collective social function of praise poetry.

The third perspective emphasizes the social/political function of praise poetry. Trevor Cope states that *izibongo* are "the expression of public opinion, and provide an effective means of social control, for they are shouted out for all to hear" (1968: 21) and E. Krige states that they "are an important instrument in the educational system. Not only do they act as an incentive to and reward for socially approved actions, but their recital is a reminder to all present what qualities and conduct are praiseworthy" (quoted in Cope 1968: 21). The advantage of this perspective is that it focuses on the function of praise poetry, and projects praise poetry as part of the dominant culture and its performance as part of the process of socialization. But this perspective ignores the poet as an active agent in this process, and the poet's ability and capacity to manipulate the process for specific ends. It also neglects to acknowledge the possibility within the socialization process of resisting domination and the capacity of the poet to mediate between the dominant and dominated.

When analyzing heroic praise poetry, it is important to remember that orality and performance have to be approached from a balanced perspective that avoids projecting orality as a fossilized artifact, or the performer and audience as passive, disengaged bystanders. The perspective adopted by Vail and White (1991) situates the heroic praise poetry analysis within the theory of power relations and the dynamics of political dominance. Such a perspective has several advantages for analyzing praise poems – for example, it explains the logic of their organization: why they are the way they are, socially, culturally, politically, and religiously. It helps answer the question: why is it that some praises are peculiarly male, and what are the material justifications for that situation? It also highlights and explains the social control function they perform, and offers an insightful approach by creating a convergence of three perspectives: that from poet as agent, that from audience as object, and that from the praised as subject. This perspective has to be structured around and respond to the total performance as context; it enables us not only to say that heroic praise poetry in societies where it occurs is performed for heroes and chiefs, but also to explain that its performance is organized hierarchically

because those societies are organized hierarchically. Thus the most famous recorded Zulu and Ndebele praise poems are about Shaka and Lobengula, respectively, because these Nguni societies are patriarchal and praise poetry is employed to both maintain and challenge the existing social structures. Therefore, although many cultures have praise poetry, we must examine how and by whom these are performed.

Praise poetry, as an institution, has long been part of the rural community in southern Africa. Vail and White state that praise poetry is a special form of expression among southern African societies whose oral performance is used in political discourse, and they declare it:

> is the region's oral poetry, subject to the esthetic we have described as poetic license, that gives access to the past and present intellectual life of the communities we describe. The poetry is the arena where competing "histories" clash, subjected not only to political revaluation but to moral and spiritual reassessment. (1991: xiii)

Singing praises of rulers and ruled has been a way of consolidating power and regulating the community. Traditionally, heroic praise poetry was performed only at court, usually inside the kraal, by a man recreating the battlefield, with a staff and/or shield, and before chiefs, kings, and the nobility. It was recited to a varied audience, of men and women, that included elders, important dignitaries, judges, and children. Nowadays, praise names can be recited to one's age group, and heroic praise poetry is also performed at festivals. The staff that the poet carries and the costume he wears help create the praise poetry tradition as well as a mystic aura. The praise poet, who is usually given enough space at performance site to allow movement, usually walks up and down when reciting, staff in hand. He shouts out the praises at the top of his voice as fast as he can, as if trying to cast a spell on the audience with a shower of words. Today praise poetry can also be performed in any of the modern sites of political life, including school halls, stadiums, trade union meetings, and parliament.

Praise poets enjoy considerable privileges since chiefs and those praiseworthy usually have a lot of wealth at their disposal. As a result, praise poets are usually employed by the rulers they praise and from whom they earn their income and receive gifts and major assets such as cattle and land. This fact may raise a serious question about their credibility: if they are recorders of history, whose history do they record? Praise poetry is performed for social maintenance, and the chiefs and politicians use praise poets to make claims to power, and thus legitimize their power against other claimants. From this

standpoint, the advantage of studying heroic praise poetry from a "political dominance" perspective is that it forces us to focus on the language used in the performance, and enables us to re-examine traditional cultures and interrogate how ideas become hegemonic.

In studying praise poetry, it is as important to pay attention to the moment of its production as to its reception. The former helps us to tie the past to historical interpretation, while the latter helps us to understand how the past is recovered in the context of present demands. In terms of its production, praise poets are trained, within their cultural environment, by more experienced poets who provide the model and supervise the rehearsals. A praise poet may be recognized as such from early childhood, and may then be entrusted as an apprentice to an experienced poet from whom he learns the traditional way of presenting the art form. The initiate and experienced poet train and rehearse in relative seclusion, and many poets learn the art of reciting praises within their families before they can perform in public. Praise poetry involves public rendition because although there are domestic praises performed, the most memorable ones are done at large events before a substantial audience. The trainee recites the praises, including the accompanying nonverbal behavior, and trainers discuss the performances and make comments. It is here that the initiate learns the appropriate voice qualities for effective performance, learns how to hold the traditional poet's staff, how to jab with it, how to stomp and pace the ground with his feet, how to position his body, and what costume to wear at what occasion. The young poet also learns the language of praise poetry: what form to use, what epithets, what imagery, what mnemonic devices to employ, and how to improvise. In the case of southern African societies, during the process of training and learning, full advantage is taken of the strong rhythmical patterning of Bantu languages, which is characteristic of the diction of praise-poetry presentation.

A praise poet, known as an *imbongi* in Zulu, can be a man or woman, ranging from twenty years to middle age. The poet has to be a person of repute because one of his tasks is to create solidarity within society by presenting himself as a "negotiator" in the power discourse between the ruler and ruled. This show of solidarity is intended to entrench political power, and is achieved through the imposition of the official transcript of history. However, there is always resistance to such imposition by the subordinate class, and the praise poet is deployed to negotiate such tensions in society. The structure and function of the praise poetry institution is not fixed but is highly flexible and adaptable, and the poet's qualities as performer include an ability to adapt to the immediate sociopolitical environment. Therefore, the poet is able to criticize the ruler

when it is most appropriate to do so, and praise him on other occasions. In other words, the poet has to adapt, reconfigure, or compose afresh whenever he is in a new space.

Any discussion of praise poetry would be incomplete without further examination of the institution of the praise poet, who is, after all, the composer of praise poetry. For effective performance, the praise poet, appreciating the immense value of the visual image in bringing home a scene to the general audience, makes a note of any authentic details in the people's experiences that he can discover which are likely to assist in creating a visual image – names of rivers and mountains, position of the sun, weather condition, appearance of characters, etc. – things probably of little consequence in themselves. These are observations of the visual detail of history that the praise poet musters and puts to imaginative use. The details about the people's migration and adventure, about geography, community, history, mothers and herdsboys are all selected, organized, and related to the story of the hero being praised in such a way as to illuminate, in an elevated style, the essentials of his life, personality, and achievements. These poems, then, collectively constitute an epic celebration of the hero, and illustrate the relationship between literary or esthetic sensibility and history. In the vast knowledge about the hero that the praise poet has accumulated over the years, he or she selects a few striking details that light up praises about the personal appearance and characteristics of the hero, projected against a great event of history. The praise poet is thus interested not in history but in the reformulation of culture based on historical knowledge; the poet makes the imaginative leap that all literature must perform to strike through the surface facts to some deeper, less expressible truth about life and death, and the reality of imagination.

In his or her function as a historian, the praise poet attempts to mediate, within the historical field, among the unprocessed historical record, other historical accounts, and an audience. The structure of praise poetry, therefore, can be defined as belonging more to that of a chronicle than a story. "Chronicle" differs from a "story" in that, according to White (1973: 6), the latter traces the sequence of events that lead from inaugurations to termination of social and cultural processes, whereas the former is open-ended: it has no inauguration; it simply begins when the praise poet starts recording events. In other words, a chronicle has no culmination or resolution, and can go on indefinitely, and the task of the praise poet is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the stories that lie buried in chronicles. The basic difference between "history" and "fiction," therefore, resides in the fact that the historian has to "find" his stories, whereas the praise poet "invents" his.

It is the characteristic of the praise poet as a "negotiator and catalyst" that renders the praise poetry genre easily adaptable to other uses, and a popular feature of modern-day political performance. The ambiguous political role of the praise poet facilitates this process, because not only is he or she privy to strategies of encoding and decoding of both the powerful and the powerless, but both groups acknowledge to a greater or lesser extent his/her role as a performer of the negotiation. The praise poet, as an intermediary between the ruler and the ruled, redraws the boundaries of experience according to the spaces in which he or she works, and according to the power dynamics at work in those spaces. The poet's position in the community relies on his or her ability to gauge the political currents in the community, to extemporize and compose, and to use the esthetics of persuasion to sway audiences with his or her performance. It is precisely these qualities that make the praise poet (and praise poetry) susceptible to appropriation by powerful forces in society, such as chiefs, politicians, and organizations. In the southern African case, with the vast migrant labor system that came with industrialization and urbanization, many of the cultural activities of the rural communities followed the migrant worker into the city. Because they were performing now to a more diverse audience, the praise poets were also being asked to create and recite in English as a lingua franca.

The recitation of heroic praise poetry among the Nguni-speaking people opens and closes with an antiphonal call-and-response formula: for example, *Wena we ndlovu,* "You of the elephant," at the beginning, and *Bayeede! Ndabe zitha,* "Hail to the king!" at the end. These are not just opening and closing devices, they are also meant to enlist audience participation in the performance. The style employed in performing heroic praise poetry depends on many factors. The sex and age of the performer, for example, determine the vigor of the performance and the costume used: younger performers tend to be more vigorous than older ones; and male performers wear skins, carry long sticks, spears, and shields, while their female counterparts wear colorful beaded cloths, carry shorter sticks, leaves, or fly whisks. In the more traditional setting, there are no restrictions on the performer's movement, but in an urban setting, because of the use of microphones and public address systems, praise poetry performers tend to be rooted in one spot on the stage during performance, usually near the microphone. The restrictions in movement of the urban performer may seriously limit his ability to deploy some nonverbal features, such as gesture and pacing, as effective tools in the execution of his performance.

As regards its reception, the performance of heroic praise poetry is a display of the people's linguistic and literary culture, and exposes the

younger generation to their cultural heritage. One of the functions of praise-poetry performance is entertainment: the sheer delight and beauty of praise poetry is regarded by Nguni-speaking people as their highest form of literary expression. Praise poetry also teaches the young, and reminds the old, of their past: their history, heroes, culture, and identity. Furthermore, praise poetry instructs about nature, human destiny, human relationships, and the relationship between man and nature. It expands the audience's worldview and ensures that children have access to their rightful heritage.

Use of appropriate and effective language is of paramount importance to the praise poets in executing their trade because they have to create an emotional atmosphere and touch the imagination of their audience. Praise poetry uses cadences and tonal fluctuations characteristic of the southern Bantu languages, and the linguistic features of alliteration, rhyme, symmetry, parallelism, harmony, repetition, simile and comparison, and idiomatic and symbolic language. If the execution is successful, there is always the sheer delight of the rhythm of the praise poem for the attentive audience. The following is an example of a praise poem, "Praises of Nzibe, son of Senzangakhona," recorded by James Stuart (1925: 238–39):

"Praises of Nzibe, son of Senzangakhona"

Unombambamajozi, kaQengwa!
Ubhukudi's abantu esizibaneni,
Ize bashone nezinjotshana zabo;
Umsuka wezul' eliphezulu.
Usompomp' odlel' endlebeni yendlovu
Unyakawumbe uzodlela kwengonyana.
Usokhethabahle naseMnyameni.
Zidla la bekudla khon' amadube nezindlovu.
ZinjengezikaNgudu emaMbatheni.
UNingizimu-vimbel'-nyakatho;
Ugcwayis' iziziba.
Inkom'-ekhal'-ehlungwini, kwaMlambo;
INgweny'-edl'-umuntu, inxe imlinde;
USihlangu sibukelwa undiyaza;
UGogod' -oyihluzayo.
UNkhon' -unamagabel'-amanxeba;
UMzimb'-unabenge lazitha.
INkayishan' encinyane, kaMenzi;
Uchachaz'-amathaf'-akulingene.
(WuNzibe-ke lowo)

Grabber-of-broad-stabbing-spear, son of Qengwa!
He plunges people into a river pool,
Until even their little loin-cloths disappear;
Msuka of the high heavens.
Bold-speaker who eats in the ear of an elephant,
Another year and he will eat in a lion's.
Chooser-of-handsome-ones even at Mnyameni.
The-one-whose-cattle-eat-on-the-Lubombo-mountains-without-falling,
They eat where zebra and elephants were eating;
Resembling Ngudu's cattle, of the emaMbatheni.
South-wind-opposing-the-North-wind;
He causes the river-pools to fill up.
Cow-lowing-in-the-burnt-veld, at Mlambo
Crocodile-that-mauls-a-person, and stands guard over him.
Shield watched only by the Ndiyaza trees;
Clean-licker-of-the-pot who reduces himself.
Forearm-with-wounds like the hide-strips on a shield;
Body-like-a-heap-of-meat-strips of the enemies.
Tiny fearless bird of Menzi;
Trampler-of-dry-river-beds.
Fast-runner-over-plains-that-are-your-equal.

(That is Nzibe)

In this poem we can see how praise poetry displays a wide range of stylistic devices and encompasses a variety of layers of meaning. Nzibe, who died young, was King Mpande's younger brother, and was brother also to Shaka and Dingana. The poet contrasts the images of gruesome destruction and the bloodbath wrought by the young Nzibe with those of a more settled existence that would perhaps have been more fitting for the young prince. Nzibe is described as a ruthless, merciless warrior: a courageous fighter, a bold speaker, a "crocodile-that-mauls-a-person, and stands guard over him," and a "fearless bird," and these qualities are declaimed with boastful relish: "He plunges people into a river pool / Until even their little loin-cloths disappear." This bold imagery of the ruthless killing of rivals is contrasted with a description of a serene landscape of another more peaceful period in history when these same battlefields were grazing grounds for "zebra and elephants." The poet does this by use of vivid imagery drawn from sharp epithets, simile and comparison.

In southern African languages, praise poetry also enables the display of fascinating language features, such as clicks and laterals, peculiar to Southern Bantu languages that add melody and luster to praise poetry performance.

The poet's task in reciting praise poetry, therefore, is to use tone and pitch in a way that maximizes the advantages of these linguistic features in creating an emotional atmosphere and touching the imagination of his audience. It also enables the younger members of the audience to expand their vocabulary and master the figurative use of the language.

In discussing heroic praise poetry context is indispensable; without it certain critical aspects of praise poetry's interpretation would be missed, and context provides the distinctive controlling motifs that determine its structure. In early Nguni praises, like the praise to Nzibe above, it is easy to see how praise poetry, as a mode of performance and a form of cultural production, is profoundly embedded in the historical context of its production. For an accurate interpretation of heroic praise poetry of that period, an awareness of the impact of the *mfecane,* or the scattering of the various Nguni and Sotho ethnic groups over the broad range of southern, central, and eastern Africa, is absolutely crucial. It is generally agreed that this "scattering" of people resulted largely from the rise of Shaka Zulu in Natal, and his attempts to forge a Zulu nation out of the fragmented social landscape of the time. From oral tradition, Shaka was a junior son of Senzangakhona, ruler of a small Nguni chiefdom known as Zulu, who wrested the throne from his father's nominated heir by brilliant military innovation and ceaseless conquest. Between 1818 and 1828, Shaka Zulu welded several Nguni clans into one powerful Zulu nation, while dispersing his enemies across the subcontinent as far afield as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania. In 1828, Shaka was assassinated by his half-brother, Dingana, who then took over as the ruler of the Zulu nation until he too was ousted by his other half-brother, Mpande.

Some of the most colorful Nguni heroic praise poems are about Shaka and those of his contemporaries who participated in, or were affected by, the *mfecane*, depicting their military campaigns and string of victories in their efforts to subdue their rivals and legitimize their claim to power. Both the adulation of Shaka as an early African (and Zulu) nationalist, and the resultant migrations and movements of the Nguni and Sotho peoples have been richly recorded in a fascinating corpus of heroic oral poetry. The following, for example, is a praise poem to Shaka recorded in Mzimba district, northern Malawi in 1996, and performed by J. C. Dlamini, one of the three official praise poets of the current Zulu ruler, King Zwelethini Zulu. The praise poet had accompanied the king's sister, Princess Thembi, on her official delegation to the Northern Ngoni of Malawi, descendants of Zwangendaba, one of the war heroes of the *mfecane* who had broken away from Shaka in 1820 and migrated

northward with his followers. The poem was first recorded by James Stuart and published in 1925:

"Izibongo kaShaka (Inkondlo yenkosi Ushaka)"

Wena wendlovu!
Wena wendlovu!
Bayeede!

Udlungwane luka Ndaba
Oludlunge emanxulumeni
Kwaze kwasa amanxuluma esebikelana

Ilembe eleqa amanye amalembe ngoku khalipha
Unodum'ehlezi kaMenzi
Usishaya kashayeki
UShaka ngiyesaba nokuthi uShaka
Ngoba uShaka kwakuy'inkosi yaseMashobeni

Uteku lwababfazi bakwa noMgabi
Obelutekula behlezi emlovini
Bethi uShaka kayikubusa
Bethi kayikuba yinkosi

Kanti kulapho ezakunethezeka khona
Umlilo obuthethe kaMjokwana
Umlilo obuthethe osh'ubuhanguhangu
Oshise izikhotha ezisedlebe
Kwaze kwaye kwasha neziseMabedlana

Inkomo ekhale emthonjaneni
Izizwe zonke ziyizwile ukulila
Izwiwe udunga wase yengweni
Yazwiwa umancengetha wakwaKhali
Okhangele ezansi kwama Dungelo

Izinkomo zawosihayo zamlandela
Uye walandelwa ezakwa Mfongosi
Ezazisengwa lindiki okwakungela kwaMavela

UNgamende odle amabele engakadliwa
UNdabezitha wamaShongololo
Bampheke ngembiza ebipheke amakhosi akwaNtombazi
Bazi ukuthi uShaka akancengwa
Wazilanda izinkomo zazilandwe nguMakhedama ekhaBonina
Izulu elidume enhlakomuzi nasekuqabekeni
Lidume lazithatha izihlangu nezaMaphela kwaduma amahlanjwana
Ezalwa uZwide eMapheleni

Wadla unqabomi ezalwa uZwide eMapheleni
Wadl' unkondo kwela kwaZwide eMapheleni
Wadl' uMdadlathi kwabakaGagca
Wadl' unoziGcabo kwabakaNtatho
Wadl' uNkayitshana kwabaseCocweni
Wadl' uNkayitshana kwabaseCocweni

Odade ngankhalo obunye ngankhalo
Odabule emathanjeni
Abantwana bakwaTeya
Ababegodola kwabakaMacingwane lapho engonyameni

Inkonyane ekhwele phezu kwendlu kaNtombazi
Bathi iyahlola kanti sekuyibona abahlolayo
Indlovu ethe ibuka babehlokovukela abakwaLanga
Indlovu ebuyise inhloko yadl'amadoda
Usishaya ndlondlo kaMjokwane
Ubusika nehlobo kwehluleke abakwaNtombazi

AbakwaLanga bathi behlezi phezulu
Banquma ukuba abakwaNyuswa
Kwaku ngalutho nabaNyuswa
Kwakuzinqakuva nje!
ZiseManxiweni
Zizinteke-nteke zizidlel'amajuba

Inyathi ejame ngomkhonto lapho phezu komzimvubu
AmamPondo ayisabile njengenyoka yehlela
nani boGambushe
nani boFaku
Nize ningamthinthi nomntakaNdaba
Kuyothi kubanimthintile nobe nithinthe ithuna nathinth'uMageba
Usiba gojela ngale Nkandla
Lugojela njalo ludla amadoda namadojeyana
UGasane olwakithi kwaBulawayo
Kade kwasa lugasela imizi yamadoda
Lugasele uPhungashe ezalwa kwa Buthelezi
Lugasele uMacingwane engowa seNgonyameni
Lwagasela uGambushe engowa seMampondweni
Lwagasela uFaku engowa seMampondweni
Yayingasakhali inkomo yakwaNtombazi
Inkomo yayisikhala inthi
Nani bakwaBulawayo uhlanya lusemehlweni lwamadoda

Inyoni kaNdaba ethe isadl'ezinye yaphinde yadl'ezinye
Yath' isadl'ezinye yabuye yadl'ezinye

Yath' isadl'ezinye yabuye yadl'ezinye
Yath' isadl'ezinye yabuye yadl'ezinye

Hlanga lomhlabathi

Wena wendlovu!

(Translation by Phiwase Dlamini)
You, (born) of the elephant!
You, (born) of the elephant!
Hail to the king!

Dlunga, descendants of Ndaba
Who rises from poor heritage
Like waves that rise above all others
Who overtakes all others because of his intelligence
You are popular posing as you do, son of Menzi
They are trying to defeat you
But nobody calls Shaka's name in vain
Because Shaka you are a king of Shobani

The women ridiculers of Mgabi
Women ridiculers of Emlovini
Who said Shaka will never rule, will never be king
Yet now they are the ones proven wrong

Fire that caught quickly of Mjokwana
Flames that leapt suddenly
That burnt the overgrowth of Dlebe
And reached Mabedlana

The bull that bellows at Mthonjaneni
All the nations heard that bellow
Dunga heard it from Yengweni
Mancengetha from Khali heard it
Who gazed down at the Dungelo

Then Sihayo's cattle followed the bellow
Mfongosi's cattle did the same
Milked by initiate from Mavera

The Ngamende who ate the sorghum before it was ripe
The prince of the Shongololo
Who cooked him in a pot where by the kings of Ntombazi are cooked
Knowing that you Shaka is not coaxed
He collected his cattle of Makhedama of Ekhabonina
The thunder that roared from outside the village at Qabekeni
It roared and smashed the shields of Maphela

There roared/scattered little leaves
Born from Zwide at Mapheleni
Seized Nqaboni born of Zwide of Mapheleni
Seized Nkondo in Zwide's land at Mapheleni
Seized Mdadlathi from the Gagca
Seized Lady Zigcabo from the Ntatho
Seized Nkayitshana from Concweni
Seized Nkayitshana from Concweni

Odade ngankhalo obunye ngankhalo
Odabule emathanjeni
Abantwana bakwaTeya

Who were feeling cold of Macingwane there at Engonyameni
The calf that climbed on top of the house of Ntombazi
They said it was an omen and yet they were part of its revelation
The elephant that when it looks, people of langa flee for their lives
The elephant that brought sense to men
The one that defeated the python of Mjokwane
In both winter and summer it felled people of Ntombazi
People of Langa as they sat on top (proudly)
They resolved to call themselves the Nyuswa
It meant nothing to be a Nyuswa
It is people deserving no respect at all
They are like waste left at the ruins
These weaklings who cannot even catch a pigeon

The hippo, poised to fight with a spear there on top of an alligator
They feared the snake slithering down the descent
You too the Gambushe
You too the Faku
Do not provoke the son of Ndaba
Otherwise you lead yourself into the grave

You provoke Mageba
The feather that destroys beyond Nkhandla
It destroys everything, it captures men, useless men
Gasane is one of us in Bulawayo
He has forever been attacking villages of men
He attacked Phungase born of the Buthelezi clan
He attacked Macingwane who is from Engonyameni
He attacked Gambushe who is from Emampondweni (Pondoland)
He attacked Faku who is from Emampondweni
He was bellowing so loud, the bull of Ntombazi
Then the bull bellowed thus:
To you people of Bulawayo the madman is before the men

The insatiable bird of Ndaba that eats others, and again eats others
While eating others it comes back to eat more
While eating others it comes back to eat more
While eating others it comes back to eat more

The reed of the soil
You of the elephant!

As can be seen, the historical context of *mfecane* in interpreting this poem is indispensable, otherwise references to the brutal clubbing of Shaka's enemies would be rendered incomprehensible, as would the catalogue of rival players and clans, and phrases like "To you people of Bulawayo the madman is before the men." The multiple repetition in reference to "The insatiable bird of Ndaba that eats others, and again eats others" is shorter than the one found in Cope (1968) and contains an ambiguity central to the discussion of the political/social mediative function of the praise poet. The reference to his insatiability could not have been said with such bluntness before Shaka himself, but since this poem is recited before a present-day Malawi Ngoni audience, themselves victims of Shaka's ruthlessness, the audience is likely to interpret the poet's words as vindicating them: that their ancestors were right to leave South Africa almost two hundred years ago because Shaka had gone crazy and become "insatiable" for human blood. Shaka's bravery, strength, power, and ruthlessness can, in this depiction, be said to be lauded as well as indirectly criticized. Since the Ngoni audience's own identity is partly based on Shaka's depiction as an insatiable killer as a plausible justification for their leaving South Africa that long ago, the past becomes a re-usable capital by both the performer and the audience, an important function of praise poetry, a strategic gesture of the bond between the Nguni in the diaspora and those who were left behind.

Similarly, praises of the Sotho King Mshweshwe display the same characteristic preoccupation with the *mfecane*. D. C. T. Bereng's praise poems, for example, derive their strength not only from the description of Mshweshwe as the founder of the Sotho nation, but also from a memorialization of the numerous battles fought, and victories won, by gallant Sotho soldiers fleeing Shaka's invaders. As an instrument of history, heroic poetry reveals an interesting correlation between the imaginative function of literature and the use of narrative in the construction of a collective identity. A study of the *mfecane*-related heroic praise poems reveals how the literary tradition substantiates history, and clarifies the nature of the interplay between the history of migration and the literary expression. It also reveals the social-historical forces

that led to the construction of myths from historical realities, and enables us to examine the basic functions of praise poetry in society (i.e., as a source of collective identity), the changes in these functions that may have occurred over time, and the extent to which praise poetry performance is a forum for the articulation of power politics.

Going farther afield from the immediacy of the South African praise poetry landscape, the case of the Ngoni of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia offers the best example of how this genre of literary expression can be adequately organized around the theme of migration, partly because these groups traveled the longest distance from their original "base" in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa to Lake Victoria in East Africa. Because praise poetry is set within a clearly identifiable time scale and deals with acknowledged historical events, it is quite feasible to organize it within specific controlling motifs. The first such organizing motif is the theme of the "diaspora," which can be defined by differentiating it from the word "migration," a word that researchers have used to describe the migrating Nguni and their heritage. The movement of a population from one geographical area to another, in this sense, the movement of the Nguni people out of their original area in KwaZulu-Natal to their various new locations throughout the subcontinent, can be described as migration. But migration presumes no continued relationship, physical or abstract, with the original base. Diaspora, on the other hand, not only refers to the dispersal of a population from its original base, but also the population's continued connection, physical or spiritual, with its "homeland." This relationship can also manifest itself in the imaginative expression – art, music, dance, song, poetry, and other cultural forms – some of which might revolve around the very theme of the diaspora. Therefore, the use of the term diaspora helps us to describe and explain the complex series of events and processes of migrations, but also assists in bringing about a cognitive grasp of what caused the departure from the original base, and the impact the rupture has had on the people who participated in it or those with whom the migrating groups came into contact.

The second organizing motif in Nguni and Sotho heroic praise poetry is found in the underlying theme of departure, so that there is constant reference to forced departure, as we find in the Zimbabwe Ndebele and Malawi Ngoni praise poetry. This theme of departure shows two aspects of migration: the actual, physical departure from South Africa, and the symbolic departure from the "homeland." The actual departure of the Ndebele and Ngoni from South Africa is depicted in their praise poetry as having been a very traumatic experience, one that tore them not only from their native soil, but from their

kith and kin. In "Praises of Lobengula" and "Praises of Zwangendaba," there is a description of pillage and destruction of wars, and the language used is lofty, symbolic of its patriotic appeal. The poet chooses the language designed to engage the audience in the people's heroic struggle to defend themselves against formidable odds posed by Shaka's armies. Thus the language reflects not only the Ndebele and Ngoni splendor and ceremony as ruling classes in the respective communities where they eventually settled, but also the history of hardships they endured as a consequence of the upheaval caused by the *mfecane*.

There is another aspect of the departure motif, particularly relevant to Ngoni praise poetry, which comes from their symbolic break with their "homeland" symbolized by the crossing of the Zambezi River. This event, more than any other, seems to have had the deepest impact on the Ngoni creative imagination. The crossing of the Zambezi has also a religious value in the sense that it becomes a landmark and a point of transition in Ngoni history and subsequent social organization. The Ngoni had lived in Zimbabwe for about eight years, and had no doubt kept abreast of what was happening in their "homeland" across the Limpopo, particularly in matters relating to their kith and kin. With the crossing of the "mighty" river, that umbilical cord was being finally severed, with clear psychological consequences to the individuals. In many of the praise poems composed by the Ngoni on the crossing of the Zambezi River, the praise poet, as chronicler of events, picks out the threads that link this event to other different historical factors, identifying and tracing the threads outward into the natural and social space within which the event occurred, and both backward in time to the *mfecane* in order to determine the "origins" of the crossing, and forward in time, in order to determine its "impact" and "influence" on subsequent events. The following poem, describing how the Malawi Ngoni crossed the Zambezi, reveals how traumatic this event must have been for them as a final break from their "homeland":

Siwel' IZembezi sawela ngenthambo
    Samwela ngenthambo
    Samwela ngenthambo
Mnawo yayoya
    Sekwahlw' emini
Mnawo yayoya
    Se kwash' ubhani

When crossing the Zambezi we crossed with a rope
    We crossed it with a rope
    We crossed it with a rope

The sky darkened at day time
The lightning flashed.

The repetition of "We crossed it with a rope" highlights the means by which such a break was accomplished, and emphasizes the significance of rope in Ngoni society. Rope is the means by which things are bound together, it is the means by which people construct bridges that link areas on either side of a river. But the term "rope," is ambiguous, for it stands for the means by which desperate people commit suicide – a means by which a final break is made! Rope in the poem above is, therefore, symbolic of the new umbilical connecting all the Ngoni in a new community, and their final break with the past.

Because the Zambezi River is such an important landmark in the people's collective experience, there are many stories among the Ngoni about how they crossed the mighty river, and this multiplicity is a reflection of the ambiguity of poetic language – a single word can mean different things to different people in different situations. Where several versions of the same incident exist, what the ordinary person says about such an incident becomes crucial to its interpretation. Sometimes separate poems on the same event are composed which may eventually merge into one, but often one composition may crystallize into different versions, depending on the performer and situation. Although it remains an analysis of a specific Ngoni event situated in time and place, the incident involving the crossing of the Zambezi is a good example of multiple narration in praise poetry. Ngoni chronicles, as alluded to in the poem above, claim that soon after crossing the Zambezi sudden darkness descended on them and that the sun disappeared at midday: "The sky darkened at day time / The lightning flashed." This reference to the darkening sun has been attested by the recording of the total eclipse of the sun in November 1835, and this has helped historiographers date the time of Zwangendaba's crossing of the Zambezi – thus raising this incident out of its oral timelessness. Therefore, the praise poem's image of the crossing of the Zambezi has been explained by astronomy, and, in a measure, the historicity of praise poetry has been vindicated.

Wandering and adventure form the third major motif of the heroic praise poetry of the Ngoni. The Zwangendaba Ngoni could be said to originate from their crossing of the Zambezi, and that, from then onward, Ngoni history (and therefore Ngoni memory) becomes divided into how they refer to the people they left behind and the people they met, and how these two facts impacted their culture and way of life. Ngoni language, through heroic praise

poetry, is called upon to mediate these two dialectically opposed references. To the Ngoni, the separation from their kind was not just a reminder of the dangers of their wandering and bitterness of their suffering, but was also a mark of the resilience of their culture, the survival of their traditions etched in the folds of the fondness of their imagination. This self-confidence gave the Ngoni the ability to integrate into, and absorb, other cultures – a point of loss and gain. Praise poetry thus fulfills an ideological function in the Ngoni society: it rationalizes Ngoni conquest and legitimizes Ngoni chieftaincy and the political system of dominance.

The religious beliefs of Africans and the lofty and persuasive nature of their language and poetry made it more tempting for the Christian missionaries to appropriate and adapt the praise poetry for their proselytization. Margaret Read recounts a typical example of the process of appropriation of African cultural expressions such as praise poetry by European colonizers. She says when "the party of Europeans . . . watched the rhythm and dignity of the dances they were so favorably impressed that they asked the Paramount Chief to send senior men to teach the songs and dances to the boys in the mission schools." After that, she continues, "the songs were used in the churches of the Scottish mission with different words written for them" (1956: 45). The points of appropriation of these indigenous cultural expressions were the sacred places, such as the kraal at the chief's court, which is the usual site of Ngoni praise poetry performance. It is important to note here that, in this appropriation process, the chief's "senior men" do not have to be converted to Christianity before their culture can be taken over – the initial aim is not to convert, but to take over the cultural production and through it establish domination.

It is not just Europeans and the Christian missions who have learned how to dominate and control indigenous African people through their cultural expressions; African leaders themselves also practice a degree of appropriation for their own political capital. With rapid social and political change in Africa, it was soon recognized that here was an art form not typical of Eurocentric culture, one deeply ingrained in black cultural power. Politicians realize that the praise poets are a vital feature in the rejuvenation of African traditions, and systematically use them to re-valorize the precolonial "authentic" cultural values, and also utilize selected phenomena taken from their traditional cultures to legitimate their power through the orally transmitted recitations of their various accomplishments. Therefore, in southern Africa praise poetry continues to function in that contentious space between politics and power. Many scholars have lamented the "decline" or disappearance of praise poetry

due to the invasion of modernity in the political sphere, but such a lament is premature and ignores the capacity of the praise poetry institution to adapt to new situations. This capacity is based, among other things, on praise-poetry flexibility in content and form.

The adaptation is also evident in modern literary expression. To give but a few examples, in Xhosa praise poetry tradition, poets David Yali-Manisi and S. M. Z. Burns-Ncamashe, following the example of S. E. K. Mqhayi in the 1920s, use praise poetry to foreground issues of desegregated educational opportunities. In the Zulu tradition, praise poets such as J. C. Dlamini have found themselves entrapped in sectarian politics that have pitted the African National Congress (ANC), whose government pays their king and chiefs, against the forces of Inkatha who want to use the praise-poetry tradition to rekindle passions of past Zulu glory and claim more regional autonomy. Alfred Temba Qabula devotes his praise poems not to the eulogy of Xhosa chieftaincy, but to the trades union movement that is now depicted as the true "protector" of the workers as the traditional Nguni chiefs were the protectors of their subjects.

Praise poetry can be studied because of the insights it offers into the topic of oral heritage that continues to flourish in written literature today as regards the thematic and stylistic foundations. It would be nearly impossible to study and comprehend Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*, for example, without a full understanding of the structure, functions and meaning of Zulu praise poetry. In fact, Kunene's work demonstrates that, in southern Africa at least, praise poetry is not something of the past, but has a vibrant coexistence with modern African written literature.

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6
African oral epics

ISIDORE OKPEWHO

The study of the African epic was born in denial. In the third volume (1940) of their classic *Growth of Literature*, H. Munro and N. Kershaw Chadwick, discussing the "distribution of literary types" across the world, conclude there is no "narrative poetry . . . at all in Biblical Hebrew or anywhere in Africa." Assuming a difference between such poetry and "saga," by which they mean a narrative form with an admixture of prose and verse, they conclude the latter is found in "several African languages" (1940: 706).

In his equally epochal book, *Heroic Poetry* (1952), C. M. Bowra also has difficulty in recognizing the existence of epic or "heroic" poetry in Africa. Adopting an evolutionist approach in his discussion of "the development of primitive narrative poetry" across nations, he concludes, on the one hand, that, in cultures like Africa, heroic poetry had not quite graduated from a tradition of predominantly panegyric forms to one of sustained heroic narratives, and, on the other, that such narratives of heroic pretensions as might be found on the continent were centered around figures who achieved their feats more by magic than by force of sheer physical might. Bowra's language is particularly alarming: in discussing pieces of historical panegyric and lament songs from Uganda and "Abyssinia," he observes that in spirit they are "close . . . to a heroic outlook" but that "the intellectual effort required" to advance such texts to the level of heroic poetry "seems to have been beyond their powers" (1952: 10–11)!

A third notable disclaimer came from Ruth Finnegan. In her groundbreaking book *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), she presents the most extensive challenge to claims made by various ethnographers and researchers before her of the existence of epic traditions in Africa. To begin with, she follows the Chadwicks in dismissing these claims on the basis of the form in which the available texts were presented by editors: they do not really qualify to be called "epics," because they have been transcribed mostly in ordinary prose, with occasional snatches of song. For this reason, according to her, they do not have the sustained formal characteristic of the established European traditions.

Secondly, the African texts seem to exist in independent episodes, though efforts have been made by scholars to put these together into coherent wholes of considerable length; there is little to show that they were ever "conceived of and narrated as a unity prior to . . . recording (and perhaps elaboration) in written form." Finnegan recognizes the presence of certain texts like the (then) "less celebrated *mvet* literature" in areas like Gabon and southern Cameroon, a tradition of musical performances that "seem to include some historical poetry not unlike epic." She is also aware of "the many Arabic-influenced historical narratives in the northerly areas of the continent and the East Coast." But she remains convinced that the evidence is not conclusive enough, and more work needs to be done, to establish the claims for "epic"; until then, she says, "epic seems to be of remarkably little significance in African oral literature" (108–10).

The fact is, by 1970 when Finnegan published these views, there already existed enough texts of "epic" qualities to excite the curiosity, not dampen the interest, of a discerning mind like hers. For instance, by 1949 P. Boelaert had published the "Nsong'a Lianja: l'épopée nationale des Nkundo," and before he published *The Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga* in 1969, Daniel P. Biebuyck had drawn attention, in journal articles, to epic traditions of various Congolese peoples. In 1963, the Nigerian poet-dramatist J. P. Clark[-Bekederemo] gave notice in an article entitled "The Azudu Saga" of the text of an Ijo tradition he had collected from a stupendous performance lasting seven days; he was later to publish the text in a massive volume of face-to-face Ijo and English translation under the title *The Ozidi Saga: Collected and Translated from the Oral Ijo Version of Okabou Ojobolo* (1991 [1977]). There was also the extensive text of Fang epic published by Stanislaus Awona as "La Guerre d'Akoma Mba contre Abo Mama" (1965–66). Admittedly, some of these texts were presented in prose-verse form, entirely the choice of the editors; but closer examination of them could have made their generic claims easier to concede.

Further into western Africa, Amadou Hampaté Bâ and Lilyan Kesteloot had published texts of Bambara (1966b) and Fulani (1968) heroic narratives, giving due notice of long-established traditions of the epic in the vast Sahelian region. Although the verse forms of these texts seem to have been subject to some ordering by the editors, they nevertheless reflect the prosodic influence of the musical format in which these Sahelian traditions have traditionally been performed. No doubt also, they give an early indication of the form in which versions of the Sunjata story – first brought to our attention by Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century and in the early twentieth by Léo Frobénius, but raised to the status of a classic in Djibril Niane's *Soundjata, ou*

l'épopée mandingue (1960) – was traditionally performed by bards in the region. Shortly after Finnegan's disclaimer, from the 1970s, there appeared a spate of epics from West Africa confirming the vibrancy of the tradition. Besides other versions of the Sunjata story, the best of which was recorded from the Gambia by Gordon Innes (1974), there were others like the hunters' epic from Mali, *Kambili* (1974), recorded by Charles Bird and colleagues, and more Bambara texts recorded by Bâ and Kesteloot (1966b). Texts of epic traditions from other regions of Africa, north and south of the Sahara, have also been published.[1]

With so much that had come to light, the claim by European scholars that the epic did not exist in Africa was obviously due for a re-examination. A survey of known traditions had, in fact, been published by Jan Knappert in an article titled "The Epic in Africa" (1967); although she was aware of it, Finnegan chose to subsume it in her general view that existing claims were not conclusive evidence of the existence of the genre. However, the first real challenge to Finnegan's position came in my article titled "Does the Epic Exist in Africa?: Some Formal Considerations" (1977), which, while directing attention to issues of the physical form in which texts of African epic were presented, suggests larger formal and cultural questions about the tradition as a whole. These issues, addressed from the perspective of a literary scholar, are more fully addressed in my full-length study, *The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979). In 1978 anthropologist Daniel Biebuyck published a more extensive survey of published epic traditions (1978b). In 1980 John W. Johnson, a folklorist, published another response to Finnegan, "Yes, Virginia, There is an Epic in Africa." By the 1980s, the subject of the African epic had earned a solid niche in investigations and teaching of African literature.[2]

What is the nature of this African epic? In *The Epic in Africa*, I offer the following definition of the genre: "An oral epic is fundamentally a tale about the fantastic deeds of a person or persons endowed with something more than human might and operating in something more than the normal human context and it is of significance in portraying some stage of the cultural or political development of a people. It is usually narrated or performed to the background of music by an unlettered singer working alone or with some assistance from a group of accompanists" (1979: 34). The crucial ingredients of what has come to be known as "epic" are clearly outlined in this definition: the extraordinariness of the events; of the characters engaged in them; of the scale or circumstances in which the events are waged; and the historical, cultural, and political import of the events to the people who tell or own the tales about these events. The second sentence of the definition gives some recognition to the very act of *performance* of the epic. This recognition is quite significant,

because in the final analysis it suggests that, whatever the known facts of a tale might be, the results of any presentation of them will depend to a greater or lesser degree on the competence of the storyteller and the situation enabling the presentation. Let us see how the available texts of the African epic support the definition of the genre presented above.

We begin with the characters who perform the actions described in the tales, who are, in significant ways, hardly the kinds of people we meet in our daily lives. First, many of them come from privileged (royal) families and simply continue the line of rulership from which they come; others may not exactly be born into so much privilege, but in the end they rise to the position of leadership that rewards their achievements. Whatever the case may be, there is often something out of the ordinary in their birth, development, and overall career. A few examples will do.

In the tradition of tales relating to Sunjata,[3] he is said to be the son of a Mande king, Nare Makhang Konate, and a woman of Do who has the mystical powers of a buffalo; thus, from his mother, Sunjata will be blessed with some mystical powers that put him above the human rank and file. Unlike normal children born after nine months, Sunjata stays in his mother's womb for many years. He is finally born at about the same time as the king's first wife delivers her own son; news of the latter is announced to the king first, thus robbing Sunjata, who according to the king's fortune tellers will inherit the kingship after his father, of the right of succession. According to one version, the child is so angry that he decides to crawl on all fours for many more years. He is finally forced to rise when his mother, who has appealed to the king's first wife to lend her baobab seasoning for her stew, is insulted with the condition of her crippled son. Crushing huge rods of iron fashioned by smiths to help him to his feet, Sunjata simply leans on a stick brought to him by his mother, walks over to the massive baobab tree, uproots it, and replants it in his mother's backyard so she may have all the seasoning she will ever want. By this time, Sunjata's father has died and been succeeded by the rival son. Sunjata's mother, seeing there will only be trouble between the two branches of the family should she and her children (including Sunjata's sisters) remain, decides to take them with her into exile.

The Mande kingdom is soon annexed by Sumanguru, powerful king of the Susu kingdom who has been overrunning several kingdoms in the region; so finding a place of exile is not easy for Sunjata and his family. But they finally settle in the kingdom of Mema, where Sunjata is able to put his mystical as well as physical powers to the proof, earning himself honors from the host king for his extraordinary feats in hunting and war. His mother finally dies

in Mema and, after initial difficulties with his host in procuring a burial plot, Sunjata at last lays her to rest and prepares to answer the call of his people to come over and recover the Mande kingdom from the hands of Sumanguru. The war between the two men turns out not to be easy, because they are both armed with mystical powers, involving disappearing acts at certain stages of the conflict.[4] Sunjata is finally able to overcome Sumanguru because one of his sisters, finding her way into Sumanguru's camp and feigning a love affair with him, is able to gather from him the secret of his magical powers: the spur of a white cock, mixed with gold and silver dust and attached to a weapon. With this, Sunjata is able to destroy Sumanguru and return as king of the Mande. From here, he and his generals move on to other conquests that unite the surrounding regions into what ultimately amounts to a far-reaching empire.

The extraordinariness of the events narrated above may seem tame, but that may be due to the constraints imposed on the narrative imagination partly by the sparse Sahelian ecology and partly by the restraining influence of Islam. The epics from the luxuriant and largely "pagan" communities in the tropical rain forests are, on the contrary, far more stupendous in scale. In *The Ozidi Saga* from the Ijo of the Niger Delta (Nigeria), the hero (Ozidi Junior) is born after his father (Ozidi Senior) has been killed by rival war generals in his community, and is reared by his grandmother, the powerful sorceress Oreame, with extraordinary magical powers. Thus, even as a little child, he is already beating children much bigger than himself, scaring off a leopard in the jungle, cutting down and lifting a massive tree to his mother's doorstep when she complains she has no wood to cook with, and performing other extraordinary feats. It is also Oreame who procures for him, through the services of a forest wizard and a smith conjured from the earth, the tools with which he is to fight the battles of his career: a potion compounded from forest fauna and herbs and hurled into his stomach, and a seven-pointed sword that hurtles out of his stomach and into his grip as the combined screams of the ingested fauna summon the killing rage within him.

Oreame has fortified Ozidi with these overpowering resources because she can see the boy faces equally daunting dangers from a community that is determined to wipe out whoever in his family is likely to inherit the paramountcy earlier held by his father. True enough, as soon as word of the young hero gets around, he is challenged by a whole string of opponents: not only the men who killed his father but even nonhuman figures of monstrous physical features – one has seven heads, another has twenty limbs, another walks on his head, another is a half-man head to foot, another has an egregious scrotum, and so on – who are determined to nip the young pretender in the bud.

In these interminable contests, waged both inside and outside environments known to man,[5] we can clearly see that it is Oreame who engineers the hero's triumphs, a token perhaps of the mystical role of the female in the traditionally matrilineal Ijo society. But it is equally clear that here magic and the supernatural serve basically to ritualize the extraordinary potential and estimation of the heroic personality. Ozidi destroys every one of his opponents, including the "Smallpox King" who in the tradition symbolizes the cleansing rite that terminates a career of blood, and lays down his conquering sword presumably in readiness to assume his hard-earned paramountcy over his people.

Among the Fang of Gabon, southern Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea there is a cluster of *mvet* epic traditions. Of these, the best known and in some ways central figure is the hero Akoma Mba, who is conceived of incestuous relations between a brother and sister and born after staying in his mother's womb for one hundred fifty years.[6] A rather interesting tale in this cluster concerns a long drawn-out war in which the human community of Oku, under its leader Zong Midzi, is determined to steal from the community of Engong, led by Abo Mama, the resource of immortality possessed by them. Zong Midzi launches the war under the pretext that a certain Angone Endong of Engong does not let him breathe freely. The conflict between Zong Midzi and Angone Endong soon becomes complicated with the entry of a woman into their relations: the beautiful and much sought after Nkudang commands the attention of Angone, yet is obsessed with love for Zong whom she has not even met. Along the way a young man, Nsure Afane, wins the favor of Nkudang and comes between her and Zong; in an ensuing encounter, Zong kills Nkudang and later engages Nsure in a fierce battle. Nsure wins the support of Engong warriors, who are equipped to fly on iron wings and have almost captured Zong, when the latter suddenly disappears under the earth where his ancestors equip him with magic weapons. Though he is captured by the Engong, he is still able to make his escape back to his ancestors, who this time try to make him immortal like the Engong.

Akoma Mba uses magic to see these events from a distance, and is able to prevail on the ancestors to halt their transformation of Zong. As a compromise, the ancestors equip Zong with a magic gun whose bullets trail their target wherever it goes. But the Engong warriors neutralize this by latching a magnetic shield to Zong's back and firing a shot that propels him all the way to the privy council of their land, where he is stripped of his charms by Akoma Mba and killed.[7]

Our final example is the Congolese *Mwindo Epic*, recorded by Daniel Biebuyck and his assistant Kahombo Mateene. Briefly, Shemwindo, king of

Tubondo, is anxious that none of his wives bear a male child to succeed him. But one, named Mwindo, is finally born to the king's favorite wife. A mysterious child who chooses (after various escapades in his mother's womb) to come out not through the womb but the middle finger, he is born equipped with a magic *conga*-scepter and shoulder bag, has the gift of premonition, and can already walk and talk. His father tries to kill him by (among other devices) having him locked up in a drum. When Mwindo will not die, his father flees into the underworld, with Mwindo in pursuit. Aided by the lightning god Nkuba, husband of his aunt Iyangura, and his magic scepter, Mwindo executes many Herculean tasks set him by supernatural beings, finally capturing his father and returning him to Tubondo. The quarrel between them is settled by having the kingdom divided into two between them.

But Mwindo's problems are hardly over. While they are out hunting, his subject Pygmies are swallowed up by a forest dragon, Kirimu. Armed with his *conga*-scepter, Mwindo kills the dragon and frees his pygmies. Unfortunately, that rouses the anger of his erstwhile ally Nkuba, god of lightning who is patron also of the dragon. Mwindo is consequently translated to heaven, where he is severely chastised during a one-year sojourn, but finally restored as king of Tubondo.

The above is a very small sampling of the vast number of heroic narrative traditions that have been brought to light since serious collection and study of them began in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Europeans were the first to show interest in this enterprise, the zeal with which indigenous African scholars have lately gone into the field does say something about the significance of the texts as an index of national identity. There has, of course, been a great deal of controversy as to how seriously tales with such fantastical content should be taken in the reconstruction of a people's past history or their social and cultural traditions. But there has been no lack of painstaking effort by social scientists wading through the dense imagery of the texts for such purposes. Nationalist ideology has, at any rate, embraced the tales either as evidence of past glory or as charter of present conduct, or both. For instance, the story of Sunjata has been shown to be an account not only of the greatness of a Mandinka warrior-king of the thirteenth century but of his role in the dispersal of branches of the ethnic family especially west of their original homeland. Today, oral artists who narrate the story of Sunjata trace the roots of several Mandinka legacies to the days of Sunjata, and the Mali nation has enshrined the spirit of the hero in its consciousness in many ways, not least by adopting praises of the hero for its national anthem.[8] The Ozidi story among the Ijo does not lend itself to anything like dependable dating. But an

examination of its mythic images and nomenclature does indicate marks of the stresses between some elements of the Ijo ethnic stock and the powerful kingdom of Benin, in the days when the kingdom was building itself up as an imperial force in the region. The epics from other tropical forest cultures, like the Fang and the Nyanga, are no more helpful as evidence of datable history. But the wars and conflicts they narrate evidently suggest the dynamics of fragmentation of politically uncentralized groups across the region.

Whatever difficulties these epic texts may pose, however, they contain large amounts of cultural data that link the past to the present and bear witness to the significance of the traditions to societies that have continued to keep them alive. Something of this significance may be seen in the very practice of performance of the epics. There may be no special terms for these epics in many African societies; despite claims that have been made about the terms *jali* and *griot* – used for the performers of these epic tales among the Mandinka of West Africa – there are often no special titles for the narrators either. But they appear to occupy a special place in the estimation both of themselves and of their fellow citizens. Each one of them is blessed with an innate skill in the oral arts, which is then augmented by training, formal or informal, in many cases lasting many years. The uniqueness of their position may be underlined either by the circumstances and processes of their preparation, by the objects they wield to identify them with the personalities they celebrate in their texts, or by the roles assigned them in the society. For instance, as part of his preparation the bard may be attached to a cult devoted to the worship of the spirit connected with the epic, as bards of the *Mwindo Epic* are to the cult of the god Karisi.[9] The *mvet* performer among the Fang is given certain magic objects designed to stimulate his imagination and to guide his performance successfully. In the course of the performance the bard may also hold certain objects peculiar to the hero he celebrates: thus the narrator of the *Ozidi* story often holds a sword (the hero's main weapon) in one hand and in the other a fan (wielded by the sorceress Oreame); the *Mwindo* bard holds in one hand a scepter representing the hero's *conga*-scepter. In terms of social position, the *griots* of the Sunjata tradition come from a caste recognized solely for their proprietorship of the oral arts, which in the past gave them the special privilege, as guardians of the wisdom of the past, of advising the rulers of their people. But even in the noncasted societies there was always some reverence shown for those who had the skill for weaving the traditional lore into words of uncommon impact and appeal.

The circumstances in which these narrators tell their tales are not exactly uniform. Some may be so accomplished in the craft that they both tell the tales

and play the musical instruments that accompany them. More often, the main performer is accompanied by at least one apprentice who does any number of services: playing the accompanying instrument (for example, a stringed harp or wooden percussion), singing choral refrains, aiding the master's memory by whispering the odd forgotten detail, or generally encouraging the expansion or curtailment of episodes depending on the interests of the audience. There is, indeed, no doubt about the centrality of an audience to the processes and success of a performance. For instance, in a performance of one of the Sunjata versions recorded by Gordon Innes in the Gambia, considerable space is devoted to celebrating certain families that trace their descent from one of Sunjata's major generals, Tira Makhang, who was responsible for spreading the Mandinka empire to this region; the effort was suggested by the narrator's accompanist, who must have seen that a large proportion of the audience would be cheered to hear the names of their families mentioned in this roll call of honor. In other instances, the performance may be so rousing that members of the audience are inspired to ask occasional questions of the bard, provide random comments and reactions to details of his performance, even assume roles to lend dramatic effectiveness to certain episodes: such was the atmosphere in the performance of *The Ozidi Saga* that has made it an outstanding classic of the African heroic epic. Performed in a town far away from its Ijo homeland, it brought so much patriotic pride to the Ijo members in the audience that they aided the narrator and his accompanists in realizing the full theatrical impact of the story.

To give a good account of himself as a performer, the narrator depends not only on his music but, in some cases, on movements made with appropriate parts of his body to dramatize certain situations, to indicate the nature of an object or event, or to mimic the peculiarities of objects or characters in the tale. If the audience is drawn to laugh at these things, he has made his point! The epic being a tale of considerable scope, and the audience right before him, the narrator is also invariably forced into a performative mold that enables him to sustain material of such a scope. For instance, he utilizes a structure of repetitions for narrating details and episodes that have such a close resemblance to one another that he does not need to think up new words to describe them whenever they occur. From their researches into traditions of epic storytelling by Homer and Slavic *guslari* in former Yugoslavia, Milman Parry and Albert Lord have, in their publications, used the terms *formula* (for a limited unit of description, for example, a phrase) and *theme* (for a larger unit, for example, a scene or event) for these functional repetitions. These devices are also present in quite a few epic traditions in Africa.

Take the theme. In the Fang story of the conflict between Akoma Mba and Awo Mama recorded by Stanislas Awona (1965–66), each time a character has to make a quick dash on an errand or in flight, we are told he

> dashed like the branch of a broken tree,
> Like a young antelope in furious flight,
> Like a bird that takes off without bidding the branch goodbye
> (lines 59–61 = 190–92 = 364–66 = 526–28, etc.)

In the hunters epic *Kambili* recorded by Charles Bird and colleagues in Mali, various characters executed by Samory Toure are said to have had their heads "cut off by the neck," while their "shoulders became inseparable friends" (lines 397–99 = 435–57 = 505–07, etc.). Although the Chadwicks and Finnegan do not think that stories transcribed in "prose" qualify to be called epics, repetitive units of description abound in *Mwindo* and *Ozidi*. In the former, when a magical weapon (scepter or belt) is sent to punish the embattled Mwindo, he is brutalized in very much the same way each time: his mouth is crushed to the ground (or tree); he is breathless; and his urine and excrement are forced out of him, with no one around to help him clean up (for example, pp. 99, 100, 102). But it is in *Ozidi* that we find that tales of epic combat are constructed basically on a repeated sequence of moves. The confrontation between the hero Ozidi and an opponent usually begins with the opponent threatening to put an end to the career of the upstart hero, who is soon drawn into the opponent's presence; although Ozidi's powers initially destabilize the opponent, the early stages of the fighting go in favor of the latter, forcing the witch Oreame to scour the environment for herbal and other kinds of antidote to the opponent's powers. The fighting eventually turns in Ozidi's favor, and when the moment for disposing of the enemy comes, all those animals used in concocting Ozidi's charms erupt in a tumultuous howl; the conquering sword hurtles out of Ozidi's mouth, the "slaughter song" resounds, and off goes the opponent's head, which is right away dumped into the hero's shrine. His strength now augmented by the enemy's appropriated powers, Ozidi is driven by so much killing urge that he levels the vegetation in his homestead; his idiot uncle Temugedege, who has been cowering in the nearby bush, is so frightened that he pleads that the community put an end to the mad youth so the old man can live in peace.

Whatever the pragmatic value of this repetitive design in epic narratives, it nonetheless bears witness to the rhythmic basis of their composition: in other words, there is a certain lyrical impetus driving the sequence of narrative episodes. The tale is in essence a narrative song – Lord has called such a

storyteller a "singer of tales" – and discerning members of the audience are often touched emotionally upon recognizing how skillfully a familiar move has been adjusted to fit a new episode in the development of the tale's plot. Narrators of epic tales are generally subject to such formal organization of their material, but the skill of each will depend essentially on how well he balances the imperative of form with the appeal of the various textual (affective diction) and paratextual (music and body movement) devices that constitute his performance.

Considering that physical form has been a major factor in the generic assessment of these African traditions, let us now examine to what extent some of the editions have done justice to the epic as an artistic vehicle of a people's cultural record. The documentation of African epics has been carried on by essentially three schools of endeavor – history, anthropology (including linguistics and folklore), and literature – and so far the record has been a little uneven. Niane's edition of the Sunjata story may be seen as representative of the historical interest and especially rooted in the preoccupations of the time. As a scholar, Niane was influenced by the ideology of Negritude that was embraced by the creative writers of his generation, in effect using his work on Sunjata as an opportunity to justify the historical achievement of an African people. The text he collected from his Guinean narrator, Djeli Mamoudou Kouyate, was not only hand-copied but reconciled with other sources. Although it bears many of the characteristic marks of the heroic narrative tradition and is no less valuable to us in assessing the heroism of Sunjata, we rather suspect that the bard's frequent emphasis on his role as "historian" is largely a product of Niane's editorial control. And although Niane has succeeded in recovering some of the atmosphere of the recording event, the resultant text reveals itself more as a historical novel than as a transcript of an oral performance, thanks to the anxiety of the historian Niane to present a *coherent* narrative.

A parallel weakness may be seen in the anthropologist Biebuyck's edition of the *Mwindo* story. Like Niane, he and his assistants hand-copied all the versions of the epic so far presented. Again, while these versions have provided valuable material for understanding the nature of the African epic, the "prose" form in which they have been transcribed hardly does justice to what was evidently a rousing musical event. There is evidence enough of the context of the narrative event – especially in the bard's comments on the dancing and other exertions of himself and his accompanists – and the occasional songs no doubt represent authentic musical interludes in the performance. But more energy seems to have been invested by the editors in achieving a coherent narrative that

highlighted the functional relation of text to culture than in providing a text truly representative of the physical results of the performance. The least of Biebuyck's achievement, however, is in the English translation of his texts which, as I have demonstrated in my essay "The Anthropologist Looks at the Epic" (1980), have often sacrificed the esthetic merits of the artist to the functionalist project of the anthropologist.

Like Niane and Biebuyck before him, the Nigerian poet-playwright John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo has presented his edition of the Ijo epic of *Ozidi* in the "straight prose" (as he tells us in his introduction) in which he believes the story was told. But his results are rather different. It must be granted that, here and there in his translation, he has taken undue poetic liberties with the indigenous Ijo text in order to render the frequent Ijo ideophones into what he considers to be English of corresponding appeal. He has not – as I argue in my introduction to the 1991 edition of the work and as the (Ijo) linguist Teilanyo has more exhaustively demonstrated (2001) – been quite so successful in that effort. But *The Ozidi Saga* has emerged as the most convincing record of an African epic narrative performance so far published. Despite the prose form of the work, we do not miss the sheer musical infrastructure as well as accompaniment to the event. And it is to the credit of Clark-Bekederemo the dramatist that the full effect of the dialogue of emotions between the performing team on the one hand and a fully responsive audience on the other is conveyed. In his introduction Clark-Bekederemo recognizes the performance he recorded as more a multifaceted theater, an "opera – especially the Wagnerian type," than literature as conventionally understood. The result is a text in which we hardly miss anything that happened at the scene of the performance: from the narrator's self-conscious comments on his daunting task (the performance lasted seven days, as demanded by tradition) and the menace of the tape-recorder; to the call by the hostess Madam Yabuku for more songs from the performers; to the often motivating but sometimes disorienting interventions of Ijo members of the audience, especially challenging the narrator's preference of English loan words over indigenous Ijo forms for various items.

In a seminal paper he published in 1977 on the business of transcribing the texts of oral performance, Dennis Tedlock has argued that "prose (as we now understand it) has no existence outside the printed page" and that "spoken narratives are better understood as 'dramatic poetry' than as the analogue of our written prose fiction" (1977: 513; see also Tedlock 1983). It is true that verse has more frequently been used in transcribing the texts of heroic narratives collected in recent times, thanks perhaps to the growing recognition of the musical texture and contexture of the performances. But there are still rather few

transcriptions that bear signs of the "dialogic" interaction (to invoke Tedlock 1977 once again) between the various persons present at the scene. Although the concept *epic* as denoting "large scope" has become fairly accepted in our understanding of the genre, somehow transcriptions of epic narrative performances remain constrained by the old etymology of *epos* as "word"; hence editors are narrowly concerned with the bare text of the story told by the narrator (often only the *main* narrator), leaving contributions made by other persons present – members of the audience making contributory comments, even the narrator's accompanist(s) offering helpful asides – totally out of the picture. Admittedly, in performances recorded especially by non-native investigators the atmosphere might be rather subdued, largely out of deference to the presumed seriousness of the recording process. But we really should do more to put the performers at their accustomed ease, and recognize that within the collectivist ethos in which epics are traditionally narrated, the *epos* is as much the total verbal input of everyone gathered to recreate the cherished cultural legacy of the community as the specialized reflections of the spotlighted performer.

It is no doubt fitting that the continuity of Africa's traditions is guaranteed not only by oral performance and improved methods of transcription and translation but especially by their incorporation into modern-day artistic creativity. Although Niane's edition of the Sunjata epic was an effort to inscribe the oral traditions into the historiography of the Mande, he has in fact rendered the story in the form of a historical novel, under the inspiration of the ideology of Negritude. A more conscious literary reconstruction of the story may be seen, however, in Camara Laye's *Le maître de la parole* (1978, trans. as *Guardian of the Word*, 1980). Other literary exploitations of this tradition have been reported by various scholars (e.g., Diawara 1992 and McGuire 1999). J. P. Clark [-Bekederemo] indeed made a play (1996) out of the Ozidi story before he finally published the Ijo and English versions of the performance he had collected on tape in 1963. The traditions relating to the Zulu leader Shaka have long been the source of creative reconstructions by various nationalist writers on the continent. Of special interest are Senghor's poetic drama on the subject (1964) and Oswald Mtshali's tautly drawn heroic portrait of the leader in the poem "The Birth of Shaka" (*Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, 1971). In his long poetic statement, *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), celebrating Samora Machel's declaration of a state of war against Ian Smith's Rhodesia, Wole Soyinka presents the Shaka of history and the (Yoruba god) Ogun of myth as poised to lead a united African challenge to white supremacist rule in the continent. Finally, in the area of music technology, Robert Newton

has reported (1997, 1999) the growth of a vast industry of audiocassette and compact-disc recordings of epic and other oral traditions in the Mande.

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As scholars, we need to free ourselves from narrow-minded attitudes that have marked much of the scholarship on this subject. One of these involves the investigative or discursive strategy to be adopted in our study. Ever since my publications – especially *The Epic in Africa* – contesting claims by earlier scholars that the epic did not exist in Africa, a few protests have been raised against my comparative approach whereby I sought to demonstrate that, despite obvious cultural differences, there were epics in Africa existing on *essentially* the same principles as the well-known Indo-European classics, and that indeed certain *performance* qualities discernible in the African epics would help us better understand tendencies in some texts like Homer's that have been subject to some misapprehension. It seems to have been forgotten that the word *epic* is not even an African word; if we *all* use it in describing these magnificent heroic tales we find on the continent, we already adopt a comparatist mindset whatever the level of our discussion. In other words, *the study of the African epic is of necessity a comparatist enterprise*. Those who resist this imperative either do not really understand the Indo-European traditions they so eagerly separate from the African, or are not willing to do the demanding work entailed by this field of study. To insist that the African epic should be studied only on its own terms is to promote a narrow-minded ethnocentrism of dubious merit and intent.

More seriously, however, the study of the epic in Africa seems today to be going round in circles, and has not begun to address issues of contemporary African life in which such a study is inevitably imbricated. Very few of us involved in celebrating the great epic traditions of Africa have reflected deeply enough on the political ramifications of the texts, especially their status as charters for certain power configurations both within and beyond the geographic zones within which they are traditionally set. Nor have we examined seriously enough the processes by which the heroes we admire acquire their authority or the mechanics of empowerment their careers may seem to legitimize: who gets to be favored, and who rejected; how just are the considerations on which these decisions are based; and what legacies of social engineering have such political acts bequeathed to the communities that uphold these iconic figures as their culture heroes?

Let us examine a few details from the Sunjata story, no doubt the most celebrated of the traditions of the African epic. Most of the known versions state that Sunjata's mother Sogolon, the Buffalo Woman from the royal house

of Du, is given to two itinerant hunter brothers of the Taraware clan as a reward for subduing her and terminating her ravages in a kingdom that has denied her her rights. But then the story makes them surrender the woman to Nare (Fa-)Maghan Konate (or Keita), for whom the woman has been destined to bear a son who will rule over the Manding nation after his father. In his rather insightful discussion of "The Buffalo Woman Tale" (1990), Stephen Bulman tells us the woman becomes Nare Konate's wife so that Sunjata will be shown to have descended from royalty on both his father's and his mother's side. But what does this say of the Tarawares? Bulman suggests that "the epic" presents them as mere itinerant hunters "with no overt royal connections." But this is not the picture we get from Bamba Suso, one of the bards in the Innes edition of Sunjata versions (1974), nor from Fa-Digi Sisoko in the Johnson edition (1986), both of whom present the Taraware clan as nobility. So what, beyond the myth of manifest destiny, justifies the surrender of that prize to a king about whose personal merits the tradition is largely silent?

Political alliance, perhaps? This may well be so, for later on in the Sunjata story we find the embattled hero putting the highest premium on Tira Makhang, a prince of the Taraware clan, as his most dependable ally in the war against Sumanguru. So where does that leave Faa Koli, an outstanding warrior of the smith caste whose defection from Sumanguru's side is no mean factor in the weakening of the Susu resistance? Faa Koli, of course, protests the prejudice, as do the other allies. Having defeated Sumanguru, Sunjata plans other wars, the best known being his attack of the Jolof king for ridiculing Sunjata's request for horses. In Johnson's edition, both Faa Koli and Tira Makhang vie for the honor of leading the campaign against the Jolof; again Tira Makhang is favored over Faa Koli, and for the rest of the Sunjata legend little is heard about Faa Koli. One is left to wonder whether Faa Koli's status as a "smith" cost him the estimation of his upper-caste leader. The logic of political decisions in these traditions leaves one wondering about the fate of the social structure.

Sometimes these decisions are so arbitrary, so capricious, as to be entirely indefensible. For instance, in Niane's edition of the story, Fran Kamara, king of Mema, first makes the exiled prince Sunjata his viceroy, then names him successor to the throne if Sunjata would decide to remain in Mema rather than press plans to return to Manding. Kamara's advisers endorse the offer, clearly because it has been announced as a royal fiat that may not be gainsaid, and we of course wonder on what moral or constitutional ground a king would award succession to his throne not to a qualified native (his son, perhaps) but to a total outsider, however well endowed. Then there are those panegyric epithets, recited by Banna Kanute in Innes's edition of the story, to the effect that as a

result of Sunjata's frequent war-mongering, his people revolted against him, whereupon

> He waged war against Manding nineteen times,
> He rebuilt Manding nineteen times.
> (Innes 1974: 237, lines 2062–63)

The great hero and king, making war on his own people just to safeguard his paramountcy?

These are not idle questions. Even if we allow that there is no more than a mythic or symbolic import to many details in these traditions, we are at any rate justified in questioning the logic of the powers claimed by our epic heroes and the fate of communities that find themselves at the receiving end of their whims. We are justified because, in the post-independence record of indigenous African governance of nearly every African nation, we find the same capriciousness in our real-life leaders that we find in the legendary ones, and wonder by what unkind fate the lines between myth and reality so easily blur in Africa. The problems we all face, whether we are scholars reflecting on epic texts in the comfort of our study or peasants on whom the cost of our leaders' whims rests far less easily, are too real for us to pretend the epics we celebrate have no bearing on our present condition. This does not mean we should stop collecting epics. It only means that, in studying them whether as literary or cultural legacies, we also ask questions that might help our people address problems of today created by the fault-lines of history. The fault may lie with outsiders who imposed certain systems and outlooks on us. But it may also lie with ourselves.[10]

Notes

1. Sunjata seems to account for the largest amount of documentation so far: see Bulman 1997. Of North African epics, examples may be found in Reynolds 1995 and Slyomovics 1988.
2. There have been various regional and continent-wide discussions and surveys of African epic traditions by various scholars, such as Amadou Hampaté Bâ and Lilyan Kesteloot (1966a, 1966b, 1968), Robert Cornevin (1966), Christiane Seydou (1982), and Stephen Belcher (1999). Anthologies also exist in translation, such as those edited by Kesteloot and Dieng in French (1997) and by John W. Johnson, Thomas Hale, and Stephen Belcher in English (1997).
3. Several versions of this name exist in various regions where his story is told: Soundjata, Son-Jara, Mari Jata, etc. We shall restrict ourselves to "Sunjata" in this essay.
4. In Djibril Niane's version, Sunjata and Sumanguru are said to be taunting each other, before the start of hostilities between them, through their personal owls!

5. One of Ozidi's opponents, Ofe, disappears in the earth for a good while before reappearing to continue the fight with Ozidi.
6. *Mvet* is the name for both heroic tale and the accompanying stringed instrument. The story of the birth, heroic development, and career of Akoma Mba appears in Awona 1965.
7. This account, in Fang and French translation, is contained in Pepper 1972.
8. The continuity of the tradition is also guaranteed by a ceremony, held once every seven years in the town of Kangaba, Mali, in which a House of Speech (*kama blon*) is re-roofed and the story of Sunjata narrated by bards from the Diabate family of Kela, who are said to possess the story's official version. An account of this ceremony is contained in a lengthy article by Germaine Dieterlen, "Mythe et organisation sociale" (1955, 1959).
9. Divine inspiration has also been claimed by narrators of both the Mwindo and Ozidi traditions of the epic: see Biebuyck and Mateene, eds. (1969), *The Mwindo Epic*: 12, 14 and Clark (1963): 9.
10. See Okpewho 1998b for a discussion of these ethical issues.

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7
The oral tradition in the African diaspora

MAUREEN WARNER-LEWIS

Orality is the exercise of human verbal communication. Orality transmutes into orature, oracy, or oral literature when either unconsciously or deliberately couched in esthetic forms rather than when deployed in perfunctory manner or primarily for content transmission. Chirograph-centered analysts such as Walter Ong (1982: 11–14) consider the term "oral literature" an oxymoron. However, if the concept of "literature" is not indivisibly tied to language inscription, and its esthetic function foregrounded, then it equates with "verbal art." Esthetic structures are culture-specific to the extent that they are grounded in the sound, syntax, semantic and idiomatic configurations of a particular language system, but such structures occur universally and attract hearer attention within each language community. Among these structures are syntactic and semantic parallelisms which produce rhythmic phrasing; stock attributions and idioms, and their converse – syntactic inversions and unexpected semantic manipulation; imagery, metaphor, and simile; rhyme and alliteration; irony in plot or word-choice; dialogue which advances plot and consolidates character and setting; witty verbal exchange producing humor or surprise; conflictual situations; opposed character traits; the evocation of contrasting moods. These are also the very structures employed in scribal literature.

Given the traditionally limited use of literacy in most African societies (see Gregsen 1977: 174–93; Gérard 1981), orature genres, themes, styles, and performance techniques have historically been primary vehicles of communication, enculturation, entertainment, and societal acclamation. As cognitive and performative skills, these verbal traditions were among the few but highly significant possessions brought to the Americas by the enslaved survivors of transatlantic crossings.

Conversation and song

One of the distinctions of African and diasporan conversation is its contrapuntal patterning (see Reisman 1974). These conversations, like Suriname Maroon

discussions, "are punctuated by . . . listeners, who offer supportive comments such as "That's right," "Yes indeed," or "Not at all" (see Price and Price 1980: 167). "Okay," and the vocables "Uh-huh," "Eh-heh," intoned on contrasting pitches and glides are among African American and Caribbean equivalents, indicating that the listener is emotionally responsive. This antiphonal pattern of verbal interaction leads to the observation of "frequent role-switching between soloist and other participants." In storytelling sessions, similarly in song, dance, and drum performances, this structure balances "the complementary values of communal participation and individual virtuosity" (Price and Price 1980: 168).

The link between speaking/narrating conventions and music is *a propos*. One of the distinctive structures of African song is its call-and-response patterning. Correspondingly, when Akan speech-makers declaim, "heralds" echo their words, and in Mandinka epic performances, back-up vocalists/instrumentalists hum at the beginning of the lead singer's lines and then intone the line-endings, the humming allowing them time to anticipate the lead artist's completion of the breath-group (see also Akpabot 1986: 104–05). Indeed, the responsorial structure often overlaps with unison singing when the solo melodic attack precedes the conclusion of the choric line. One manifestation of this performance concept in African-influenced modern pop music is the presence of a back-up chorus whose role is not confined to a stanza-end refrain, but more to intercalating rhythmic or melodic phrases with the lead singer's lyrics.

Another call-and-response mechanism is the alteration of pitch ranges within the same song. Because responses may traditionally have been sung in a higher octave than the solo in certain types of African music, African American female singers have startled audiences by their wide pitch variations in differing segments of a rendition. Similarly, African American male vocalists often change their normative vocal range to a falsetto. In the Caribbean, solo performers of African songs may move between three octaves from stanza to stanza. This is their way of replicating the tonal shifts that differentiate soloist from respondents.[1] Yet another musical characteristic is extempore composition within performance. Improvisation produces heterophony since singers may follow the lead melody for the most part but depart from it when tones are too high or too low, or when any singer wishes to create special emphasis, or wishes to introduce harmonic variation (see Southern 1983: 197). Improvisation continues to be positively valued in African and diasporan musical culture, being contemporaneously demonstrated in both jazz and gospel singing and instrumentation. Another musical characteristic is the downward glide or "flattening/bending" of notes, and the treatment of sustained notes by

melisma – the extension of a syllable over a widely ranging series of notes. An associated device is tremolo, a wavering note produced by glottal constriction. It is typical of Arabic music, is used in the Senegambian region, as well as in Yoruba *apala* songs, divination and *eso* chants, these being of a philosophical or sacred nature, and thus conveying emotional and mental intensity. The microtonality of the tremolo, "the use of passing notes of unequal weighting, with elongated, trailing notes at the end of the piece" gives these songs "a haunting, meandering effect" (Warner-Lewis 1991: 147). The tremolo in the Suriname Djuka singing style was also used in Trinidad stickfight songs (Whylie and Warner-Lewis 1994: 142).

In the case of the calypso, the textual fixity induced during the twentieth century by composer literacy and less spontaneous performance events has made extempore performance rare, though still highly regarded. This improvisation is enabled by resort to predictability of theme, phraseology, and melodic patterns. A similar methodology was used in creating new African American spirituals since several prior song texts could be combined to produce a new one (in much the same way as is done with folktales), or known melodies were modified to accommodate new verbal texts (see Southern 1983: 172). Similar tendencies are at work in Jamaican dance-hall and African American hip-hop music: as an innovative rhythm gains ascendancy, new lyrics are composed to "ride" that rhythm, while melodic phrases, along with vocal and enunciatory techniques are intertextually appropriated.

Thematically, African and diaspora songs have inclined in the direction of work accompaniment, social commentary and derision, historical markers and reminders (see Price 1983: 25; Warner-Lewis 1994), dirges, incitement to dance and reproductive activity (see Edwards 1982: 181–92), invitations to make merry and deflect sorrow and anxiety, praise of the art form itself and self-praise of the singer, celebration and supplication of human antecedents and spiritual forces (see Price 1983: 8; de Carvalho 1993; Warner-Lewis 1994; Hart and Jabbour 1998). On the other hand, the cultivation of love and nature lyrics seems, in Africa, to have resulted from Arab contact, perhaps the same source which led via the Crusades to the growth of medieval Europe's courtly love tradition and the consolidation of the love theme in European, American, and Latin popular music into the present. As for nature poetry, Africans have tended to lyricize those plants and animals that hold for them supernatural power and/or economic value. However, Caribbean musical genres such as calypso, reggae, and their antecedent folk musics have tended to shun nature paeans as well as the theme of sentimental love, acknowledging rather love for mother, and treating heterosexual relations with disillusionment, as pragmatic

alliances, or as sexual delight. In the case of the last, discourse has traditionally been metaphoric, but more recently – in the case of Jamaican dance-hall lyrics and American hip-hop – unabashedly direct. No doubt reflective of the overcrowding, educational marginalization, social malaise and economic unemployment produced by intense urbanization, these two musical genres have largely devoted their attention to social and interpersonal violence, leading to an antiromanticization of life and sex. Calypso on the other hand has so far retained the tradition of indirection with regard to sex, employing ambiguous pronunciation, or metaphors of agriculture, sports, doctor–patient relations, and automobile care to camouflage and/or humorously encode sexual allure and intercourse. Meanwhile, love songs of sentimental joy and heartbreak characterize rhythm-and-blues music of the United States and the anglophone Caribbean, as well as the Martinique/Guadeloupe beguine and zouk, Dominican Republic merengue, Cuban rhumba, mambo, and so on. Social and political critique has been carried in the old harvest songs of the United States, the later jailhouse blues, the folk and popular songs of the Caribbean (see d'Costa and Lalla 1989; Parrish 1992; Elder 1994), among them Eastern Caribbean calypso (see Rohlehr 1990), Jamaican reggae, and Haitian rara (see Yonker 1988).

Songs have had overlapping functions, as work songs could also be songs of ridicule, against employers, the other gender, and the deviant within the in-group. But there was also solo singing of lament and self-pity. Such songs tended to use the minor key and carried plaintive cadences, much like dirges; melodies and themes of this genre are no doubt the models upon which the African American spirituals and blues emerged. *Moans* are either precursors to and were certainly concurrent with the rise of spirituals; they still surge, unaccompanied by instrumentation or words, as groans and tremulous melodic snatches of spirituals from the scattered independent voices of older folk in southern black churches before the service begins; these overlapping doleful wails, outside of church use, are intoned to signal some inner grief.

The blues were a secular outgrowth of the spirituals, conveying similar feelings of "rootlessness and misery." They were first noted at the end of the nineteenth century being sung by wandering, often blind, performers whose themes bemoaned "the fickleness or departure of a loved one" (Southern 1983: 331), perhaps an extension of the kinless "motherless child" trauma of slavery. The spirituals themselves had first attracted attention early in the nineteenth century, having developed out of the often covert Christianization of the American slave population. Like the "ring shouts" which slaves sang in their "praise houses" till they were possessed by the Holy Spirit, some of the

themes of these religious songs were hymn-based, some bewailed a luckless destiny and longed for release in death, others compared their slavery with the "experiences of frustration and divine deliverance, as set forth in the stories of the Hebrews in bondage" (Thurman 1990: 14). The Old Testament prophets and warriors along with the New Testament Messiah therefore became the inspiration for their delivery from an oppressive slavery (see Roberts 1989: 134–66):

Ride on, King Jesus
No man can he hinder thee

Indeed, in a Christian context, singing about the biblical heroes represented "a way of invoking a sense of the slaves' own collective past" in their self-identification as "the oppressed children of God" (Roberts 1989: 159); but this remark also held for the power icons represented by African divine forces. In Haitian *vodun*, Brazilian *candomble*, Trinidad's *orisha* or *shango*, and Cuban *regla de ocha* and *palo monte* (see Simpson 1970; Cabrera 1986), deities and ancestors were and still are invoked for help and guidance. The conviction that the body may be hurt but the spirit strengthened by trials and eventually freed by death led to the bewildering bravado and defiance on the part of rebels about to be hanged or tortured:

O-o freedom . . .
An' before I'd be a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
An' go home to my Lord
An' be free

In the United States the influence of orthodox Christian hymnody on African diasporic music was extended by the practice of non- or semi-literate congregations having to wait for hymn lines to be called out. One consequence was prolongation of line-end words. The result was the nineteenth-century birth of gospel music, since the "combination of the very slow tempo and surging melismatic melody gave the impression of a music without rhythmic patterns" (Southern 1983: 447). This type of singing was also known as *sankey*, after Ira Sankey, an American evangelist who with others published a hymnal in 1875 (see Southern 1983: 445). This singing mode spread to the anglophone Caribbean through nineteenth-century African American proselytizers and the mode is still used in Caribbean Afro-Christian churches (see Seaga 1969; Henney 1973; tracks 23, 33 in Hill 1998; Glazier 1999). By the early decades of the twentieth century instrumental accompaniment was allowed in some of

the United States churches, and the employment of piano, jazz-linked wind instruments, and tambourines introduced a new "rhythmic intensity formerly associated with dance music" (Southern 1983: 448). These *jubilees* or *holy rollers* were the origin of the ecstatic, highly melismatic gospel music that, now a specialty of the US music industry, has spread beyond color, denomination, and geographic boundaries.

Formal speech

Witty speech is "an important way in which one distinguishes oneself in public" (Abrahams 1974: 241). Oral performance in conversation becomes then a means of self-dramatization, display, and garnering "reputation" (Abrahams 1974: 243). The significance attached to words in both primary oral and orally oriented societies[2] underlies the admiration extended to individuals who display talent and artistry in their deployment of words and their perlocutionary force.[3] In African societies a connection exists between oratorical skill, public respect, and access to political, judicial, and religious power (see Albert 1964; Finnegan 1970: 448–52; Boadi 1972).

Various texts remark on eloquent, even grandiloquent speech among Caribbean-based Africans and their descendants during plantation times (see Abrahams 1983; Abrahams and Szwed 1983). Such grandiloquence must have sprung from an African sensitivity to the role of words in giving definition to moments in the time continuum by formalizing these occasions – the use of Austinian "performative language" (see Finnegan 1969); it also represented the exhilaration at acquiring new language/s. As such, these newly learnt phrases and vocabulary were often inappropriately applied in relation to social context and semantic intent. Malapropisms made for comedy to those who discerned the disjuncture between language style and speech event, but to the audience of formally unlearned and semiliterate gatherings at weddings, festivals, debates, and other public occasions, the speakers won admiration for their bombastic use of strange polysyllabic words and glibly delivered idioms: "Ek-kee homo, behold the man; Ek-kee homo, here I stand: I will now rise from my esteemed seat and I will say Bon Swar or Good Evening to the ladies and gentlemen of this nocturnal congregation" (in Lynch 1959; see also Abrahams 1977).

Other favorite techniques of public speaking have been rhyme, rhythmic parallelisms, and punning. These characterize the structure of the informal "dozens" as well. Such verbal strategies were honed at barbershops, verandahs, and drinking sessions in the United States and the Caribbean, and in a

more technological age have come to be displayed by radio and dance-hall disc jockeys. But the formal addresses of some of the best exponents of African American public speaking demonstrate these arts as well. Gullah public prayers were "expected to be elevated and elaborate," incorporating "hymns, scriptural passages, and traditional expressions" heard and memorized by church deacons with little formal training (Jones-Jackson 1982: 26).

Characteristically, preacher/politician Jesse Jackson established enthusiastic rapport with a Jamaican audience,[4] not only by his speech's content, but also by the wit of his formulations:

> We're on a journey, an incomplete voyage, somewhere between slave ship and Championship . . .
>
> My mind is a pearl;
> I can learn anything in the world . . .

He then galvanized the audience to say after him:

> I am – somebody
> Respect me
> Protect me
> Never neglect me . . .
> If my mind can conceive it
> And my heart can believe it
> I can achieve it.

In a more meditative delivery at a graduation ceremony in Jamaica,[5] Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed the theme of sociohistorical transition, using the Revelations text "The former things are passed away . . . Behold I make all things new." He juxtaposed "the dying old [order] and the emerging new," urging therefore that "We must all learn to live together in this world or we must all perish together as fools" since

> We all are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny, and whatever affects one directly, it affects me indirectly . . . I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality. Canon John Donne caught it years ago and placed it in graphic terms: "No man is an island . . ."

But, he warned with the quasi-proverbial truth of observation: "It's just a practical fact that he who gets behind in a race must forever remain behind or run faster than the man in front," and counseled that "The time is always

right to do right." Again playing on semantic polyvalency, he critiqued with an aphorism: "The old insight of an eye for an eye ends up leaving everybody blind," and in a longer commentary: "We have spent far too much of our national budget establishing military bases around the world rather than bases of genuine concern and understanding." Then, in one of his signature concluding crescendos he urged excellence:

> If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper,
> sweep streets like Raphael painted pictures,
> sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble,
> sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry,
> and like Beethoven composed music . . .

His delivery had been slow, with pauses after "and . . . " and "because . . . "; nouns, verbs, and adjectives had been stressed; the wealth of images and literary quotations had been dazzling; and the cultivation of a repeated pattern of falling cadences marking the end of breath-groups, together with sustained phrase-endings like held notes in a voice resonant and quivering, constituted the structural and paralinguistic magic of his oration. This shading of speech into song at which King's style had hinted is in fact one of the stylistic elements of African American sermonizing. Indeed, the slippage from one medium to another remains in the vocal mimicry of musical instruments in African and diasporan song, and in the scattering of nonce syllables. The performance of the epic of the thirteenth-century Mande king, Sunjata, is itself characterized by three delivery modes: speech for narrative segments; high-pitched recitative for philosophic comment as well as declamation of ancestral and clan relationships; while song is the channel for summary and commemorative eulogy. All these modes carry stringed and percussive xylophone accompaniment (see Innes 1974: 17–20). The form of present-day Jamaican dance-hall music and African American hip-hop, characterized by rhythmic speech over ostinato instrumentation and occasional melodic interludes, represents an unconscious return to this aspect of orature tradition.

Proverbs

In African speech culture appropriate use of proverbs and riddling idioms is a hallmark of high rhetoric. The centrality of European languages in the transatlantic diaspora has deprived proverbs of pride of place in formal address, nor do they operate as mechanisms of argument and precedent in European legal systems as they do in African indigenous courts (see Christensen 1958;

Messenger 1959). But proverbs still function in the diaspora as discursive summaries, evidence of precedent, warnings, child-rearing strategies, and arsenals in verbal attack. Competitive games of rapid proverb exchange at social events in some African societies seem a pastime that has faded out in the West Atlantic, though practiced into this century at funeral wakes in Guyana. But in many Caribbean territories where proverb use is patently alive, proverb retorts add pungency to verbal sparring. While proverbs in the Americas derive from multiple cultural heritages, cognates exist throughout the Americas. This suggests intraregional diffusion, on account of the extensive movement of Africans during the slavery era, as runaways, sailors, or in the company of their masters' migratory, business, or vacation travels. But there is also evidence that many of these proverbs calque those in several African cultures, carrying both semantic resemblance and image correlation. In Africa, shared cultural traditions and ethnic mingling have produced cognate proverbs among contiguous peoples, and it is therefore likely that many West Atlantic proverbs have multiple African sources. Among parallels between Caribbean and Nigerian proverbs are (see Ojoade 1987): "Doh cuss alligator long mout' till yuh cross de river" – Tiv and Jukun; "Dog sweat, but long hair cover it" – Igbo and Yoruba; "God fan fly fi 'tumpa tail (stump-tailed) cow" – Kuteb, Igbo, and Yoruba. Yoruba and Caribbean people advise against substituting a serviceable item for a less utilitarian one despite surface similarity: "Don't swop black dog for monkey"; and Yoruba reference to the hawk or crow that seeks to hide intentions under the excuse of fortuitous circumstance is rendered in Jamaica: "When jonkro (vulture) wan' (want) go a gully/grasspiece/ windward, he say is cool breeze blow him there" (in Ajibola 1969); similarly "While the master of a house is alive, the front garden will not lack attention" (in Ajibola 1969:52) becomes in Jamaica "When man dead, grass grow at 'im door." The Efik observation is Caribbean-wide: "The higher monkey climb, the more his ass/tail is exposed"; and the Edo, Jamaicans, and Guyanese warn of the inevitable combination of maturity and disillusionment: "Pig ask 'im mooma 'Wha' mek yuh mout' so long?' Pig mooma answer 'Yuh a grow, yuh will learn.'" Several Igbo proverbs reproduced in Achebe's novels are paralleled in Jamaica: "He who will swallow udala seeds must consider the size of his anus" is reproduced as "Cow must know 'ow 'im bottom stay before 'im swallow abbe (Twi for oil palm) seed,"or "Jonkro must know what 'im a do (is doing) before 'im swallow abbe seed"; "The fly who has no one to advise it follows the corpse into the ground" becomes "Sweet-mout' fly follow coffin go a (to) hole"; "The sleep that lasts for one market day to another has become death" contains the same metonym, "Take sleep mark death (Sleep is a foreshadowing of death)" (see Achebe 1975: 226).

The query "Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies?" is a rhetorical rendering of "When plantain wan' dead, it shoot (sends out new suckers)"; "A man who makes trouble for others is also making one for himself" (Achebe 1969: 59–60, 88) echoes "When you dig a hole/ditch for one, dig two." The Akan "The offspring of an antelope cannot possibly resemble a deer's offspring" (in Danquah 1944: 197) is one of several African cognates for "Goat don't make sheep." The Caribbean awareness of unequal power relations, "Cockroach nuh business inna fowl fight," replicates the Congo "In a court of fowls the cockroach never wins his case" (in Weeks 1911: 33) just as: "Teach a child before it goes to the dance not after it has come back" (in Claridge 1969: 251) is echoed in Jamaica's "Learn to dance a yard (at home) before you go a foreign (abroad)"; and advocacy of patient judgment: "It is best to let an offence repeat itself at least three times; the first offence may be an accident, the second a mistake, but the third is likely to be intentional" (in Claridge 1969: 252) has its Jamaican reflex: "One time a mistake, second time a purpose, third time a habit."

Banter and abuse

The best known of a bewildering array of African American terms for double-talk is *signifying*, speech whose essential element is indirection (see Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 315, 316, 326), a significant communicative strategy in sub-Saharan Africa (see Piot 1993). But this is not the only African American term for this form of interaction. Terms not only change over time, but vary from one locale to another, and there is tremendous semantic slippage and overlap among them (see Abrahams 1974). A similar situation obtains for Jamaica, a much smaller space, since there are generational and regional differences in referents. In Trinidad, with half of Jamaica's population, there is less an issue of regionalism than a slippage of semantic range between *fatigue, heckle, tone, mamaguy,* and *picong.* In the Trinidad instance semantic indeterminacy also stems from a layering of terms from indigenous languages such as Spanish, French, and English. *Fatigue*, *heckle* and *give tone* mean "to tease," "to harrass by poking fun at"; *mamaguy* means the same, except that it embodies flattery with the intent to mildly embarrass the addressee and even deflect an anticipated taunt; while *picong* may function as a synonym for *mamaguy*, but often touches on an annoying (possible) truth or rumor that leaves the addressee peeved at the possibility that what had been said in jest was a concealed deprecation. *Mepwi* (from French *mépris*) was a once common term for taunt and insult, either directly or through metaphor and name-substitution.

In general, however, within African American signifying modes, one may distinguish the "clean" and "dirty" *dozens*. These may take the structure of rhymed couplets, but must necessarily contain an extravagant simile (see Labov 1972: 274). In a *clean dozens* exchange at a Southern rural workcamp, one man claimed, "Ah seen a man so ugly till they had to spread a sheet over his head at night so sleep could slip up on him," which another *capped* with the comparison: "Those men y'all been talkin' 'bout wasn't ugly at all . . . Ah knowed one so ugly till you could throw him in the Mississippi river and skim ugly for six months." Yet another rejoined: "He didn't die – he jus' uglied away" (in Hurston 1970: 94). By their obscenity and surface misogyny, *dirty dozens* resemble the male contests in derogatory songs and utterances during certain Ghanaian festivals (see Abrahams 1970: 40–41; Labov 1972: 274; Agovi 1987).

African American *loud talking* (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 329–30) is commonly known in the Caribbean as *droppin'/throwin' word(s)'*. *Drop word* takes place when an unfavorable comment is made by X to Y within earshot of Z for whom the remark is actually intended. Another type of indirect speech, its aim is to offend, and if Z responds, a full-blown *quarrel* or *cuss out* may ensue, with X and Y defending themselves with proverbs such as "If me throw stone inna pig sty, the one that bawl out is the one that get lick [hit]," or "Who the cap fit, make them wear it," and "Me throw me corn, me na call no fowl."[6] Rather than reply to offending remarks, Z could begin loudly singing hymns that function as indirect critiques of and threats to the aggressor, or the aim may be to drown out further belittling remarks: "At the Cross, at the Cross / Where I first saw the light," or "When God get ready / You got to move."

Caardin', *ribbin'* or *mout'in'* in Jamaica is comparable with *tantalize* in Guyana (see Edwards 1978) and witty clean signifying or *rappin'* in the United States (see Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 322–26). As either flattery or a back-handed compliment, this activity shades into Jamaica's *lyrics/lyricisin'*, or Trinidad's *sweet mouth/talk*. This category of comments is an important interactive medium of playfulness among an in-group, particularly young people at street corners, in classrooms, or at the workplace. But these types of comment, repartee, and dialogue can transmute into ritual insults very similar to the *dozens*, or to antagonistic *'busin' out* or *war* in Guyana (see Edwards 1978: 195, 196, 204, 206), *cussin'* and *meli* (from French *mêlée*) in Antigua (see Reisman 1974: 119–22), *tracin'* in Jamaica. Such boundary crossing may be signaled by the onset of obscene language. Verbal aggression involves each side in hurting the other by exaggerated accusations of ugliness (see Samarin 1969); promiscuous, unorthodox, or ineffective sexual performance; unhygienic habits; poverty; and possibly derogatory comments about the opponent's antecedents and relatives.

Middle-class verbal assaults take on a more logical and explanatory tenor called in the anglophone Caribbean *quarrellin'* and *tellin' off*. Whereas these are heated exchanges, Jamaican *runnin' up one's mouth*, or *makin' up fuss*, similar to Euro-American "blowing hot air," implies that a speaker is continuing a monologue of complaint or even issuing threats, but these are treated dismissively by the object of the complaint and other hearers.

Boasts, the epic, and narratives

In Trinidad *makin' gran' charge* – originally a French-inspired military image – infers a promise or boast that is hardly likely to be effected. When its tenor is defiance or challenge, it becomes *robber talk*, named for a carnival masquerade called "the robber." The robber reels off grandiose boasts of his terror and invincibility: "when I clash my feet together the earth crumble, famine follow. Wherever I stand, grass never grows, sun never shine, far more for mankind to go . . . I bite off bits of the moon to lengthen the days and shorten the season . . . There's no gun, dagger made of steel, can make me feel or heal . . . " (in Crowley 1956: 264 fn. 125). This language style closely resembles that of a masquerade in Achebe's *Arrow of God*:

> There is a place, Beyond Knowing, where no man or spirit ventures unless he holds in his right hand his kith and in his left hand his kin. But I, Ogalanya, Evil Dog that Warms His Body through the Head, I took neither kith nor kin and yet went to this place . . . the first friend I made turned out to be a wizard. I made another friend and found he was a leper. I, Ogalanya . . . made friends with a leper from whom even a poisoner flees. (Achebe 1975: 48)

Apart from its masquerade connections, the discourse of awe-inspiring self-projection is known as *ese* in Ibibio and *ase* in Efik. This is a spoken poetic "(auto)-biography or commemorative toast of an heroic nature . . . narrated at funerals but also occurring during male drinking sessions" (Ikiddeh 1966: 21), a genre continued in the African American toasts and boasts which project a central character such as Stagolee or Toledo in physical, mental, sexual, or verbal situations during which he outshines others (see Abrahams 1970: 43–49, 88–96).

Folk narratives

These form yet another orature category that are in large measure inherited from Africa. Yet because of the cultural disruptions characterizing the

transatlantic migration, no epics have evolved. While slave entertainment defied the plantation regime, confining itself to after-work night spaces and holidays, slave life was insufficiently leisurely to accommodate the sustained, sometimes daily, performance needed for epic re-enactments; at the same time, epics contain culture-specific genealogical, migration and military histories unsuitable for multi-ethnic audience appeal and translinguistic participation (see Okpewho 1979). Insofar as there exist in the West Atlantic germs of epic narrative material, these are to be found in the charter legends of various Maroon or runaway slave communities. These however tend to be short accounts, but do recall community founders, migration treks, and mythically stated rationalizations regarding their relationships with other groups (see Price 1983: 8). As in Africa, these myths of association are couched in kinship metaphors (see Bilby 1984; Vansina 1990). On the religious plane, sacred narratives about Yoruba divinities have been retained in the lore of African-derived religions such as Cuba's santería or *regal de oct* (rules/order of the *orisha* or deities), and *candomble* of Bahia, Brazil (see Cabrera 1961; Verger 1980; Martínez Furé 1986; de Carvalho 1993). These are accounts of creation, and the attributes, adventures and interrelationships of the divinities.

While originary African epics have not survived the disintegration of earlier regional and national aggregations, the epic as an inclusive genre embraces self-contained narratives, paeans, philosophic commentary, proverbs, and songs. There is thus some evidence that narratives that may have formed part of epics have survived the Middle Passage, but this may result from the fact that similar tale motifs occur within oral genres other than the epic. However, Raymond Relouzat postulates the likely origin of several Caribbean tales about the Seven-headed Beast as the Segu epic of the Bambara hero, Bakary Dian. Bakary destroys the monster Bilissi (Arabic "the Devil"), but before he can claim his reward, an impersonator claims it (see Relouzat 1988: 81–83; Parsons 1933: 268–71, 1936: 95–97; Tanna 1984: 113–15). Again, the Mandinka epic of Sunjata contains the story of a hunter rescued by his three dogs from the machinations of an attractive witch who attempts to discover the secret location of the hero's protective talisman. Similar tales are the Dahomean "Flight Up the Tree: Why the Abiku Are Worshipped in the Bush" (Herskovits and Herskovits 1958: 275–84) and Jamaica's "Old Witch Woman an Hunta" and "Blam Blam Sinday, Dido" (Tanna 1984: 125–28). As such, these tales and motifs are less likely derived from particular epics than from the commonly shared sources on which both epics and segmentary tales drew.

Other widespread tales in Africa and the Americas concern amphibious animals like tortoise or frog who borrow bird feathers but, after offending the

birds, fall from heaven when vengefully deprived of the borrowed trappings; tortoise or rabbit/hare deceptively winning a race by placing his children in relays along the race route; and the Tar Baby debacle (see Harris 1880: 7–11; Weeks 1911:3 67, 388–90; Barker and Sinclair 1917: 69–72; Bascom 1992). Another group recalls the "Complete Gentleman" (see Tutuola 1952: 17–25). A girl attracted by the physical appeal of a dashing male and entering precipitately into marriage with the cannibal/devil is taken to his deathly domain. Her rescue is sometimes effected by a magic formula in song. The role of songs in plot progression and action segmentation is common in African folktales (see Scheub 1975: 50–54). This tradition has been partially retained in the transatlantic diaspora, though it is likely that many tales have lost their earlier song component. Another narrative inheritance is the use of ideophones, words which by their sound symbolism and iteration convey not only onomatopoeia, but also size, gait, speech, or affect (see Noss 1970: 45–46).

Either the same characters people the tales on both sides of the Atlantic, or diasporan substitutes are either translation contingencies or reflect different ecological environments. Among the constants are the tricksters: spider – commonly known in the Caribbean by the Akan name Anansi – tortoise, and a creature variously referred to in the Americas as "cunny [coney] rabbit," or "hare."[7] Their dupes are Tiger/Leopard, Elephant, Monkey, and Hyena, who becomes Dog or Bouki.[8] Intellectual acuity and agility are the assets that enable tricksters to overcome difficulties and compete with others. But in some tales the trickster is condemned to defeat because his conduct leads to social disintegration by fracturing relationships of trust.

In both African and diasporan tales, animals carry the titular address of *tío/cha,* or "uncle," *compère,* or "god-father," "brer/bra/brother." Another structural analogue lies in tale formulaic preludes and epilogues. Folktale sessions may be preceded by riddle contests. The Jamaican storyteller then cries, "Story time!" the Bahamian shouts, "Bunday," the audience echoing these words or responding, "Yeah," "Alright" (Crowley 1954: 219). In the francophone Caribbean, the *conteur* rallies his listeners with "People, crick!" to which the audience replies "Crack!" This formulation intimates the Yoruba concretization of artistic inspiration as a load falling *gbalagada* from the sky, breaking a tree bough. Or the narrator cries, "Tim, Tim!" to which listeners shout, "Bwa shess! [Dry wood]." The narrator may then add, "Everything God put on earth! / What God put on earth?" with the predictable reply, "Everything" (see Shillingford 1970; Charlemagne 1997). The "Crick" / "Crack" device is interspersed throughout the narration as a means of ensuring audience

alertness and to heighten suspense by slightly delaying the recount of events. The tale itself may commence with the European fairytale formula "Once upon a time," or "There was once . . ." But it may parallel the Igbo "When lizards were in ones and twos" (Achebe 1975: 14, 70), with the Jamaican nonspecific time reference "When Wapi kill Fillup," or "When mih eye de a me knee (When my eyes were at my knees, i.e. when I was very small)," which translates Yoruba *nigba ti oju si wa lorunkun* (see Olayemi 1971: 33), and "When saltfish was a shingle house-top (When salted fish was used as roof shingles)," like the Bahamian "In old people time when they used to take fish scale to make shingle, and fish bone to make needle" (see Crowley 1954: 220). Closing formulae in the Eastern Caribbean include "You lie well!," a compliment from the audience to the narrator, or the storyteller's own rhyming couplets, "Crick Crack, / Monkey break he [his] back," or "The wire ben', / The story en'." Lying as a synonym for "fiction" replicates the Eastern Caribbean extension of the term "nansi 'tori" to mean "lie," but in the storytelling context reference to lying recalls the Akan narrator's closing "I have not said," signifying disengagement from the awful powers of the Word (see Izutsu 1956; Tambiah 1968; Peek 1981). His Jamaican counterpart asserts, "Jack Mandora,[9] me no choose none (I have no opinion)," thereby dissociating him/herself from the imaginary characters and situations conjured up through word and gesture.

Conclusion

Despite the "pressures of the text"[10] in literate and complex chirographic societies, the oral traditions have largely survived, even transforming themselves into new genres and usages as evident in the magic, quest, and conflict motifs of print and video cartoons, electronic games, product promotions, films, and *Harry Potter*-type novels. Furthermore, scribal artists and musical composers have resorted to oral traditions, whether out of cultural nationalism – the need to ground their conceptions and representations in the "thought, word, and deed" of a particular people – or to project and mine the resources of inherited poetics. The intention, techniques, and cultural matrices of aspects of the writings of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Derek and Roderick Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Toni Morrison, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Erna Brodber, Olive Senior, Merle Hodge, Merle Collins, Earl Lovelace, Edwidge Danticat, and Nalo Hopkinson, to name a miserly few, are but partially understood and appreciated without reference to traditional verbal esthetic strategies.

Notes

1. See Lewin 1974: 127; evidenced also in Yoruba songs by Margaret Buckley in Hill 1998.
2. Ong (1982: 11) uses this term to refer to nonliterate societies. By "orally oriented societies" I mean the cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, which preserve much of the mindset of primary orality and also cultures with "restricted literacy" as elaborated in Goody and Watt 1968: 11–20.
3. "Perlocution" defines the speech act, either its conscious or unwitting "consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons" (Austin 1962: 10).
4. At the People's National Party's Founder's Day commemoration, Assembly Hall, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, September 1985.
5. At the Graduation Ceremony, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, 20 June 1965.
6. The last two occur in Marley 1976. Another variant, "If the shoe fits, wear it," concludes the verbal exchange in Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 318.
7. Among the Mende of the Senegambia region, Hagbe is a rabbit-sized antelope. See Kilson 1976: 42, fn2. The Mende trickster is Spider, and proverbs aver that both Spider and the folktale represent human behavior (Kilson 1976: 32).
8. Wolof for "hyena." See Crowley 1954; Gaudet 1992.
9. As cryptic as "Wapi and Fillup."
10. Phrase borrowed from the title to Brown 1995.

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8

Carnival and the folk origins of West Indian drama

KEITH Q. WARNER

In the amalgam of languages and cultures that is the Caribbean, it is almost impossible to reach complete agreement on the origin of any of the art forms that have emerged as distinctly Caribbean. In colonial times, the European masters naturally replicated their cultures in this new-found milieu, although they did make a few concessions to the presence and input of other communities – the indigenous ones they found on arrival, and those from Africa and from India in particular. In the postcolonial societies of the Caribbean, the newly independent states have found themselves faced with an intriguing cultural choice. On one hand, they can discard what was brought by the Europeans and stick to what they have produced themselves – often labeled "folk" or "local" to set it apart from the more established extra-Caribbean equivalents. On the other, they can retain Eurocentric values, traditions, and art forms, and in so doing risk giving the impression that they are renouncing their cultural independence. Naturally, it would be highly impractical for societies in the West Indies – still the familiar name for the anglophone territories referred to in our title – to attempt to choose one of the foregoing over the other. In reality, several values and traditions have come together to produce authentic, unique art forms that are both similar to those of Europe, and sufficiently dissimilar from them to be distinctly Caribbean or West Indian. Carnival fits this pattern, as does drama.

West Indians have been stereotypically portrayed as carefree and fun-loving, and as not taking seriously matters of the gravest import. At one end of the chain of island territories, Jamaicans have been seen as reacting to any difficult situation with the popular response: "No problem." At the other end, Trinidadians have been known to take a characteristically light-hearted view of any crisis. This was evident in 1990 when the country, under curfew following an attempted coup, saw many of its citizens having curfew parties wherever they ended up, as restrictions went into effect. Throughout the West Indies, success in cricket at the international level is almost always followed by a carnival-type

celebration, and lack of success is attributed to the cavalier attitude of the players: their carnival or calypso style of play. This propensity has led observers outside the region to conclude that West Indians, and Trinidadians in particular, have a carnival mentality. It is a description that causes those so branded to bristle at its negative connotation, but it is also one that, upon further reflection, is not without its positive attributes. Carnival, as it has evolved in Trinidad, and as it has expanded to the other English-speaking territories of the Caribbean, pervades the popular culture of the islands. It is only natural that it would be a key contributor to the folk origins of the drama produced by the people of the region.

Early researchers maintained that carnival in Trinidad evolved from celebrations by French settlers. This claim is bolstered by the fact that in the anglophone territories, it is only in Trinidad that this spectacle took on the grandeur that we now see, and this from approximately the time slavery was abolished. Carnival as eventually celebrated by the masses was seen as originating from the minority French settlers who had flocked to the island with the promise of land holdings and inexpensive labor to work them. This French influence may in part explain why this festival did not develop in the same manner in the other anglophone territories that were without a similar influx. The fact remains that the Trinidad carnival prospered where the other territories had none, or at least no exact equivalent. This situation is not unlike that which obtained with the development of the calypso, with Trinidad being given credit for its origin despite the existence of similar-type songs throughout the Caribbean. There is little dispute that carnival and calypso are Trinidad's contribution to West Indian popular culture.

With the added importance finally given to the African presence in the islands, there have been those who claim that carnival came to the West Indies from Africa. To support such a claim, they cite similarities in some of the carnival characters – the stilt walker or moko jumbie, and the overall style of masking, for example – as proof of this origin. There is also the view that the French, like other Europeans, merely copied what originated in Africa, since the African continent had been seen as a vast no man's land where all who so desired could go plundering.

Both camps may be correct, in that elements from both Europe and Africa are certainly in the carnival, but so are elements found in neither of these cultures. Indeed, until other West-Indian territories belatedly began to promote a recognizably Trinidad-style carnival, Trinidad's version was hailed as "the" carnival of the region, and has even chauvinistically been billed as "the greatest show on earth." Worldwide acclaim and replication further justify looking

principally at Trinidad's carnival when examining the relationship between this spectacle and the origins of what one could arguably call West-Indian drama.

In this regard, and with respect to the staging of plays in some internationally recognized format, there is a great deal of similarity between the islands. In other words, theater per se can be found all the way from Jamaica, where its presence is quite strong, to Trinidad, where it is less so. Still, differences are significant enough to raise questions about the emergence of a national drama in the West Indies. The islands each have peculiar, distinguishing events that are the popular artistic expressions of the national psyche, the folklore, so to speak. In the Bahamas, it may be the John Canoe; in Jamaica, it may be the annual pantomime. In Trinidad, it is the carnival.

The theater created by West Indians does not always satisfy the definition of "theater" as determined by those who purportedly brought this art form to the region. But if the theater developed in the West Indies is valid, though often encumbered with the ever-present "folk" epithet, and given that a truly West Indian drama might be more mirage than reality, then carnival and its folk aspects are not merely influences on the conventional theater. It is not enough simply to insert a carnival character, a costume, or a song into the conventional theater. The entire carnival is, in fact, the national theater of Trinidad, it being understood that the concept of theater would have evolved significantly along with everything else in the society. Carnival is obviously not the only theater, but it is sufficiently developed to warrant examination as a truly West Indian creation.

Of the carnivals celebrated in the West Indies today, Trinidad's is the most engaging, infectious, and widely experienced by both artist and audience. Apart from those characteristics it is the one carnival that encompasses to a significant degree all the aspects that comprise theater. That it may not, to the purists, satisfy all the attributes of the conventional theater cannot serve to disqualify it as theater or classify it solely as another form of presentation. For in reality what carnival and the people of Trinidad and Tobago – the official name of the twin-island republic, though there is the tendency to speak more so of Trinidad carnival – have done is to redefine the notion of theater. Combined with the purists' studious avoidance of seeing carnival as theater is the fact that fine art has mainly been associated with the elite, while folk art is associated with the masses. Connoisseurs have therefore tended to see the two as opposites. The notion that carnival is theater has been opposed precisely among those – the middle and upper classes, who had almost succeeded in having carnival banned – whose pro-active support for it

would be of invaluable help in the advancement of the art form. This support would be more substantial if carnival were seen to be closer to the fine art end of the spectrum than to the folklore and popular culture end. It is an irony born of the colonial situation that the very ones who withheld their support for this aspect of the island's culture were among those who derived the most financial benefit when they belatedly cashed in on the commercialization of the annual festival. They had seen the lower classes, in particular the segment of the population largely comprised of former slaves, gradually snatch carnival from their grasp, and the ensuing popular nature of this celebration had made them uneasy. Calypsos were vilified. Steelband music was deemed mere noise. And carnival was called an excuse for licentious behavior. The people persevered in their observations of the annual ritual, to the extent that it became part and parcel of their culture. All things considered, the attitude of the masses has prevailed, and the middle and upper class have been swayed, almost to the point of retaking control at times. In the end, however, Trinidad carnival as a significant element of West Indian popular culture is now well established, with different sections of the population enjoying all or some of its varied elements.

Carnival as practiced in Trinidad is multifaceted. It is the season that usually begins immediately after Christmas and extends until the Monday and Tuesday immediately preceding Ash Wednesday. It is the Dimanche Gras show that starts the carnival, which then carries on until the final two-day revelry. It is *jouvay* (the creole version of the French words *jour ouvert*), the pre-dawn start to Carnival Monday, a time of visual satire, puns, and inversion, a symbolic triumph of the masses over the establishment and the "respectable." It is Carnival Tuesday, the climactic day of street parading and costumes, the final opportunity to participate in the masquerade, to "play mas'." It is increasingly a blend of traditional characters – clown, jab jab or devil, pierrot, bat, dragon, midnight robber, moko jumbie, Dame Lorraine, fancy sailor – with the newer portrayals and disguises that comprise the popular bands. There are those who are committed to certain characters, and return to them year after year, usually portrayed as individuals; there are those who base their decision to be part of a particular band on the popularity of the band leader, or on the fact that they simply want to be part of a group of friends seeking to have fun together. But in addition to all those who don disguises, there are those who are dedicated spectators, who prefer to admire costumes and characters from a distance, but who nonetheless see themselves as participating fully in carnival. In other words, it is not farfetched to see both spectators and revelers as playing well-defined roles.

Carnival is, all told, a massive presentation comprising several major productions typical of those associated with the theater anywhere else. It is calypso tents, where the new calypsos are sung, and where eager audiences gather to hear not only the latest dance songs, but also the latest update on political and other intrigue in the society. It is the community yards where steelbands rehearse in preparation for their shot at the Panorama championship, symbol of their superiority in pan, as this music is known. It is mas' camps where revelers, tourists, students, and designers view costume designs and production. It is the attendant competitions that reward all aspects of this national festival, the spirit of rivalry ensuring that almost every sector of the population has its interest piqued. It is the seemingly ceaseless rounds of parties – called fetes – that, incredibly, keep some carnival lovers sleepless for nights on end. It is the flourishing of many forms of art and craft: music (arrangement, playing, and composition), design, costuming, drama, and fine art. It is widespread audience participation and subscription. It is increasing commercial sponsorship, underwriting, financial management, profiteering, and spin-off industries. It is production and human resource management. Finally, it is mass appeal and support.

The climax of the massive presentation is the parade of the bands on Carnival Monday and Tuesday, the single largest event of the entire season, and often compared to one long theatrical performance in several acts. The success of this show depends heavily on design, performance, and music, and these elements are also interdependent on each other. The design of a band and its costumes influences the performance, which in turn is propelled, or even dictated, by the music, another integral part of the entire presentation.

The theme and design of the band, and preparation of the profusion of costumes of varying styles, textures, sizes, colors, and prices, for tens of thousands of participants, or mas' players as they are commonly called, are extremely important, and demand nothing less than consummate professionalism from beginning to end. The delivery of the costumes to the mas' player often involves an intricate, factory-like organization in which many professionals are engaged, although many of these workers would modestly see themselves as working simply for the sheer love of carnival. It is in their blood, many claim when asked why they spend so much time and energy preparing for the two days of revelry, only to start all over again as early as the Ash Wednesday following each carnival season.

While in years gone by bandleaders would be responsible for designing the costumes, in recent times they often use dedicated designers under contract. In some instances, designers may also be bandleaders, as is the case with

Peter Minshall and Wayne Berkeley. Of the designers who work on carnival costumes, a significant number have been educated formally, or by apprenticeship in mas' camps. Some of the designers spend approximately six months in Trinidad, and the rest of the time designing for Trinidad-style carnivals abroad. Outside of carnival many of these designers are engaged in other aspects of theater, entertainment, and fashion, with the result that there is some blurring of the lines separating their carnival work from their work in other areas.

Bands are usually under the direction of a single leader, a committee, or a combination of the two. The design and production of costumes begin with the selection of the theme of the band followed by a mandate to the designer to submit sketches for approval. Once the imprimatur has been issued, the bandleader and the designer arrange for the selecting of materials. The acquisition, normally wholesale, of materials may include trips abroad, or the employment of buyers already living outside of Trinidad; it may also involve private arrangements with wholesalers in Trinidad, ensuring an ample supply of fabric and other materials needed to make costumes. Designers are fiercely competitive, and seek to be innovative in the selection of these materials, which can be as varied as dried leaves, clay, glass, scrap iron, wax, aluminum, sacking, or burlap.

The production of costumes engages the talents of numerous artists and artisans: seamstresses, tailors, shoemakers, painters, wire benders, welders, screen printers, sculptors, and even engineers. These talents ordinarily work in the mas' camp where the band is produced and where there is a centralized system of production, though in other cases they work out of their own homes, enabling them to hire themselves out to more than one band. In the mas' camp there are cells of activity supervised by one or more persons. In each cell something different but pertinent is done, and incrementally, costumes are embellished as they move from one place to another along the quasi-assembly line. There are some workers who are contracted months in advance and who suspend their alternative, personal, bread-earning activities to honor these contracts. Of the persons working on costumes some may be highly skilled, and some semiskilled; some are apprentices and others just helping a friend. The same range can be found in the method of remuneration for the tasks. Some are highly paid on contract, and some are paid according to the piece or task; some are given a costume in exchange for their time, and some work for food and drink; some work for the feeling of community that exists in the camp, while others work for love and excitement.

The delivery of the costumes is another aspect of the production and which has now become an orchestrated event. In the majority of cases the costumes

are delivered according to a plan. Some bands publish in the print media the dates and times that costumes are to be collected. The delivery is staggered, and the costumes distributed to the players in some sort of container: a bag or a box, or both, depending on the costume. The player is also instructed on how the costume is to be worn, since ultimately the optimal effect in the presentation of the band is being sought. There are also instances where the player is told when to wear the costume – Tuesday and not Monday, for example – to maximize the effect on the audience and judges in the annual competition.

The design aspect, though, is not confined to the sketches, but extends to the preparation and building of the costumes to get the desired replication of the drawing. The more elaborate ones require a high degree of engineering and other technical skill in order that the costume blend smoothly in with its wearer, for an ungainly outfit detracts not only from the enjoyment of the masquerader, but also is not viewed too kindly by the judges. Consequently, It is from this *mise-en-scène* that the drama will emanate.

Band and costume design have now become a source of instruction for students and professionals. For instance, American students of art from the University of Madison, Wisconsin, spent two weeks in Trinidad in 1997 studying art and craft, costume making, and production; and in 1993, Irish puppeteers visited Trinidad during carnival to study costume making. But, the costume in isolation, on a stationary form is still a work in progress. It is in the performance of the mas' that the design becomes complete.

Carnival is theater in the street, with characters, individually or in groups, performing on this vast stage. Performance at carnival dates back to the 1800s with the introduction of the now traditional characters, and the first of the military and naval masquerades. These bands originally imitated the military exercises carried out by the militia of Queen Victoria's government that had come to the West Indies to flex their muscles in the face of threatened slave rebellions. During the ensuing years, these bands appeared with improved drills and mock engagements, and evolved into the popular military bands, mainly played by members of the steelbands. They have continued to perfect their performances to include the state-of-the-art military maneuvers and simulated hardware found in the military of their choice (usually that of the United States).

Performances were not confined to bands. Individual traditional masquerades were characterized by costume and performance. The pierrot, for example, was a character whose costume came to be associated with a certain type of performance. This character usually wore a resplendent costume, and had two assistants carrying his train and his weapon. According to Errol Hill, this

character "recited grandiose speeches dwelling on his own prowess, invincibility and impressive lineal descent, and the dire things in store for all his enemies" (1972: 29). Of course, wherever two pierrots met, bystanders would gather to view and judge, as was the case with another stock character, the midnight robber, who also exploited the grandiose, the frightening, the quasi-horrific to coax a few pennies from his listeners into his miniature coffin-cum-piggy bank. His was a performance of dance and mesmerizing oratory, and his influence permeates even everyday life in the language of the people, who deem any overly boastful, and thus empty, stance as "robber talk." This is a most striking example of how carnival and popular culture are intertwined, for no further explanation is necessary whenever the robber talk accusation is made. The entire society is aware that the allusion stems from the familiarity of the people with this character and with what he stands for in the context of carnival.

The long line of characters now recognized as part of traditional carnival comes with specific rituals and performances, so that one does not don the costume simply to dance in the streets to the music. One plays the part of the character. It is an opportunity for even the lowliest of individuals to fantasize, to equalize, in short to be dramatic and theatrical. From the Dame Lorraine with its mockery of the French creole upper class to imps and devils with names of evil-doers inscribed on their oversized books of reckoning; from dragons and scaled beasts breathing fire and venom to Wild Indians, red, blue, or black, and their elaborate headpieces; from Yankee minstrels, a case of blacks imitating whites imitating blacks, to Tennessee cowboys; from bats and clowns to fancy sailors with their dance steps simulating drunkenness or the rocking of a boat, all go beyond the outer disguise to play for an ever-appreciative mass audience that is in tune with the requirements of the various roles or costumes. Increasingly, the contemporary carnival is evolving away from some of the stock characters in favor of presentations that are the visual embodiment of the fantasy of the designer, though there is still the tendency to have a king and queen in many of the larger bands, on whose extravagant costumes a significant amount of time would have been spent. These kings and queens participate in a separate competition prior to the two days of street parading, and usually have the enthusiastic support of the rest of the players in their bands. However, in times of economic stringency, simpler costumes are becoming the norm for the various sections comprising a band. These are worn mainly for the sheer joy of "playing mas'" and their wearers normally have little to do that is considered "in character."

There are many competitions associated with carnival, and their influence can be seen in the concerted attempts made by bandleaders to outdo each other

to gain the nod of the various judges, and the attendant prestige that goes with winning particular prizes or titles. With the growing popularity of the spectacle and its attraction for tourists, the Trinidad and Tobago government has sought, through its National Carnival Commission, to formalize the structure of the presentations by fixing the principal competition venues. The most prestigious is at the Queen's Park Savannah, and the sprawling stage erected every year provides an ideal locale to blend theaters – street and conventional – as the costumed masquerader of the street becomes the costumed character on the stage. It is here that the main judging takes place for the Band of the Year, and that innovation and originality are rewarded. It is, according to Peter Minshall, one of the main proponents of carnival as theater, the only place available for the proper presentation of just not his, but all mas'.

Now, while it is Minshall who is mostly associated with the concept of carnival as theater, at least in the 1980s and 1990s, his bands were by no means the first to dramatize portrayals on stage in the Savannah. Harold Saldenah's *Imperial Rome*, and *Glory that was Greece*, George Bailey's *Ye Saga of Merrie England*, and *Byzantine Glory*, dating back to the 1950s, all had players knowingly choreograph their movements to enhance the authenticity of their portrayals. This development is not without its share of controversy. First, from the point of view of the revelers in the band, there is the complaint that many of the spectators who follow popular bands, but are not in costume, do not vacate the stage so the masqueraders can put on the best possible performance for the judges. Second, from the point of view of the rival bands, there is the complaint that some bandleaders are given more than their fair share of time on stage, to the dismay of those who are left waiting, sometimes almost at standstill, for their turn to show their array of costumes and characters.

Peter Minshall, with performances different from what the public had seen prior to his entrance into the world of carnival-as-theater, took center stage in the 1980s and 1990s. His performances were abstract and symbolic, but no less intriguing. Minshall has produced bands in trilogies, with presentations and performances spanning three years. He has also presented bands in what he has termed two acts, striving for theatrical effect, and thereby emphasizing that mas' is theater. In the 1983 presentation of *The River*, for example, on Carnival Monday, act one, the Washerwoman, his queen of the band, wore an all-white costume. She symbolically washed the clothes of her folk, and their clean clothes hung on a line – erected over her head as part of her headpiece – to blow innocently in the breeze. Each section of the band symbolized a tributary of the main stream, represented by a twenty-five foot wide, half-mile

long, stretched nylon canopy held over the entire band on poles by selected revelers. The pure waters represented by each section, converged in the river above the heads of the participants. Act two on Tuesday began with Mancrab and his bloodstained shroud, and the dead queen with her clothes soaked in red. The half-mile river canopy had become a polychrome river indicating pollution. It was not until 5:30 p.m. that the band, numbering well over 2,000 – thus large by current standards – reached the Savannah stage, and proceeded to complete the symbolic struggle of good versus evil, a favorite Minshall theme that his masqueraders were being called upon to stage (see Nunley and Bettelheim 1988: 108). The timing of the band's arrival coincided with the start of the evening sunset, with its special rays reflected on the costumes of the revelers.

Minshall had stage-managed his presentation for maximum visual impact. He has been persistent in emphasizing that carnival is theater, and has incurred the wrath of his bandleader colleagues for spending too much time acting for the judges, a reasonable complaint when one considers the logistics of moving large numbers of masqueraders on and off the vast open stage erected for the occasion. His answer to his critics is that the logistics problem is not of his making, and that he should not be stymied in his attempt to present carnival's surviving traditions in a particular way. "I do absolutely believe in the power of the mas'," he has said, "so I will play it in the fashion that best allows for that power to be appreciated by all who look upon it" (quoted in Joseph 1997).

Carnival is inconceivable without music. The hypnotic state to which many masqueraders are driven is the result not only of their total involvement with the new self beneath the disguise, but also from the infectious music that accompanies all carnival activity. In this regard, therefore, one must pay attention to another aspect of the drama that is carnival, namely that of the voice of the people, for it is the so-called people's performer, the calypsonian, who provides the music, even the societal context for the mas'.

Throughout the carnival and calypso season that starts immediately after Christmas, as the various preparations are being made for the street parade that is the climax of the carnival, the society partakes of a massive serving of oral literature and popular culture, the new calypsos. These eagerly awaited songs are presented, sometimes in dramatized fashion, at various venues – calypso tents – by calypsonians, the contemporary version of the lead singers, the chantwells, that were part of early carnival bands. The calypsonians have evolved away from direct association with masked bands as such. But it is their music that bandleaders use to accompany their presentations, though calypso is often much more than the music it supplies.

If carnival is the national theater, then calypso is the national literature. In a society that prides itself on its literacy, on its love of book learning, the oral tradition is still vibrant, and very much alive in the calypso. Calypsos constantly interpret events in Trinidad and Tobago society, and monitor activities within and without it. They are the mirror of the national ethos, moving far beyond mere information as supplied by the media (see Warner 1982). Their earlier role of people's newspaper has nowadays more correctly evolved into that of people's magazine. Even in the remotest of country villages, people no longer depend on the itinerant calypsonian to bring them news of what is taking place in the society. Since improved technology provides instant worldwide coverage of any newsworthy occurrence, new calypsos appear with some distance in time from events they depict. Nevertheless, while the "news" factor is no longer uppermost in the minds of the calypsonians, calypsos do analyze social and political events, and do reflect prevailing moods and attitudes. They are an integral part of the popular culture, and come closest to explaining what makes this society distinctly Trinidadian, even distinctly West Indian or Caribbean. Such calypsos hold the interest of the public mainly through their lyrics, thus through what they "say."

Many of the new calypsos are presented at venues – any such place being dubbed tents – in the six- to eight-week period between the start of the new calendar year and the two days of street parading. Aware of the appeal of dramatic presentations, calypsonians have often resorted to staging the story line of many of their calypsos. These presentations are characteristically done in slapstick fashion, with little or no attempt to disguise the calypsonians playing the various characters. This is not usually a problem, and is even expected of the presentation, since the audience is more interested in the slant the performance gives to whatever is the latest imbroglio being dramatized. For instance, calypsonians are seen by the people as being constantly in touch with the shenanigans of those in power, or the covert activities of all politicians in general. This is so much so that in one of his early renditions, popular calypsonian The Mighty Sparrow, boasted that "if Sparrow say so, is so," thus granting unto himself moral and poetic license not easily claimed by others in the society. Yet this is not seen as extraordinary, for it is what the public has come to expect over the years, and those who step over the line of decency are immediately greeted with sharp disapproval.

All in the calypso is not protest and social commentary, however, and the public has come to expect other things from its bards, most of whom have traditionally sung under an interesting array of sobriquets, from the early fear-inspiring Roaring Lion, Growling Tiger, or Attila, to the newer, less awesome

Mighty Sparrow, Cro Cro, or Sugar Aloes. Calypsonians provide a healthy portion of literary fulfillment for a society more attuned to its oral tradition than it would like to admit. As such, they sing of love, of life, of episodes, humorous or otherwise, that illustrate the human condition, and the public listens and appreciates. Indeed, it gets involved with these singers, as happens whenever a controversial topic is raised, and a national debate ensues.

Throughout the carnival/calypso season, then, calypsos provide the background to the preparation for the festivities. But while one type of calypso sets the mood for reflection, or pricks the conscience of the people, leading a bandleader like Peter Minshall to use a specific calypso to present an overall theme for his band, it is another type that sets the masqueraders dancing. Even when it narrates a story, what this other type of calypso "says" matters relatively little. It exists as a vehicle for the music, tune and melody being more important than lyric. It is this type of calypso, like Arrow's "Hot, hot, hot," that easily captures international audiences, and accounts for the impression that the calypso is mainly a danceable folksong from "the islands." With the rapid ascendancy of reggae from Jamaica, due in large part to the worldwide popularity of the late Bob Marley, calypso has found itself competing, even in Trinidad and Tobago, with this Jamaican import at the level of popular appeal. Calypso's response in terms of access to world audiences is soca – coined from soul of calypso – but its marketing has not been as aggressive as that of reggae. Nevertheless, there is great interpenetration of one territory's music into another, with reggae influencing calypso in Trinidad, and calypso influencing reggae in Jamaica. The resulting mixture is appreciated by the public as a whole, for it is aware that this blend is something authentically Caribbean, and something born of the masses and their culture. Jamaica has now begun to host an annual carnival, as do most of the other Caribbean territories, but Trinidad's carnival remains undoubtedly the premier celebration of the region.

As the climax of carnival approaches, it becomes clear which of the dance type of calypso will dominate the street parades – the most popular being designated the Road March. In recent times, a new sort of call and response has developed, as the calypsonians have urged their listeners to participate by doing certain dance steps or movements. "Get something and wave" and "Put your hands in the air" were two of the more popular exhortations made in the 1990s. The result is a communal dance – a new one every year – a communal participation in an experience that is renowned for its ability to coax the inhibited, the reserved, or the conservative out of their noninvolvement. It is noticeable, for instance, that carnival bands are increasingly dominated by women, and that many appear on the streets in scanty costumes that lead some

spectators to complain annually that there is too much lewdness in carnival. In their defense, such revelers maintain that carnival is a time for total freedom, and that the suggestive dancing in public is nothing more than an open and harmless celebration of the vibrancy that lies at the depth of the society's soul. They see the complaints as yet another attempt by the establishment to stifle any show of enjoyment and creativity by the masses. This inability to deal with what has evolved in the popular culture is seen as another of the legacies of colonialism.

It is the same situation that existed with regard to the acceptance of the music produced by the novel instrument called the steelpan, fashioned, almost incredibly, from discarded oil drums. The social stigma that was attached to association with the steelbands and their members was similar to that attached to association with calypsonians. Popular culture in both these instances was not given any credibility by the establishment, which grudgingly paid occasional lip service when it was convenient for its own self-interest. Fortunately, both calypsonian and steelband player stuck together in the face of social pressure to abandon their art form and their music, and in the lead-up to carnival, they work harmoniously together. Almost all the music played by steelbands for the carnival season is calypso.

Carnival and calypso are thus intimately interwoven. Both have redefined the concept of audience participation, and both have evolved into barometers of the mood of the society. Community involvement is key to them both, for in the oral arena in which calypso is performed, there is constant interchange between performer and listener, just as the carnival spectator is invariably swept into the action, onto the stage, so to speak (the symbolic sprinkling of baby powder on spectators by one carnival character, the fancy sailor, being evidence of this interaction).

It would seem perfectly natural for the blend of carnival and calypso to end up on the conventional stage, there to be an example of what postcolonial societies can produce when they marry the inherited with the newly minted, when popular culture is allowed to be fully expressed. Indeed, there have been many attempts to develop a specifically carnival theater by taking carnival characters and rituals and integrating them into proscenium-style plays. These efforts have produced plays such as Errol Hill's *Man Better Man* (1957), Derek Walcott's *The Charlatan* (1954), Godfrey Sealy's *To Hell Wid Dat* (1990), and Felix Edinborough's *Mas in Yus Mas* (1980) and *J'Ouvert* (1982). These productions were first and foremost examples of conventional theater with carnival characters, carnival songs, and carnival dances incorporated, as opposed to the open, and admittedly difficult to define and delimit, street theater. The

short-lived experiment of the Trinidad Tent Theatre of the early 1980s, which also showcased the incorporation of carnival characters into a conventional type of drama, showed that it was not sufficient merely to write plays that incorporated traditional characters and scenes, however noble such a venture might seem. This type of carnival theater still had as its premise the idea that something "local" – an unfortunate term even in this postcolonial phase – was being made to fit a pre-conceived model, one that was accommodating a bit of local color and folk input, and one that was reserved, all things being equal, for "real" theater. There was once more the misguided notion that popular culture was only a complement to true culture.

One noteworthy development in the continuing marriage of carnival and folk theater is the Jouvay Process as conceived by Tony Hall's Lordstreet Theatre, which turns the microscope on carnival and extracts traditional characters. The process involves familiarizing members of the theater group with the history of carnival, with the early calypso/carnival music of kalinda, and with the movements of stick fighters, all of which centers on an appreciation for the use of the street. Members eventually blend a traditional carnival character with a contemporary one, and portray it, going to various outdoor or community locales, where they draw in bystanders, and so try to discover how animators prod others to respond, such as at carnival time in the street.

It must be emphasized that the folk origin under discussion is not a mere stepping stone to the more conventional theater, which has existed, and no doubt will continue to exist, in the West Indies. Carnival as theater stands on its own; in fact, it cannot work totally on the proscenium, where it seems somewhat out of place and out of character, despite the theatricality inherent in the various portrayals. It needs the street, or a street-like atmosphere, which it is not likely to find with an audience seated quietly indoors. Carnival has its own life, and has even given birth to other similar attempts, as Trinidad and Tobago nationals and other aficionados have taken this phenomenon to the rest of the Caribbean nations, and to the metropolitan areas of Europe and North America where there are large concentrations of Caribbean immigrants.

There is heavy emphasis on participation by the people, even when, to all appearances, spectators are mere bystanders. The passive observation of floats passing by is not what the Trinidad carnival is about, and it is for that reason that there are problems when a band presents itself before the judges at the designated venues. Revelers, whether or not in costume, deem it their right to enjoy the music, to "jump up" as they say, for, to use another popular expression of Trinidad revelers: "Carnival is we t'ing." In other words, it belongs

exclusively to them and they are going to enjoy it come what may. The matter of interfering with the competitive chances of the very band in which they are "jumping" seems to be of minimal importance. Such participants would no doubt be quite surprised to hear they were part of a theatrical performance as such, and in fact they do not use the term "theater" to describe the event of which they are a vital part. However, they would be acutely aware of being an integral part of the popular culture of a nation that now proudly advertises this event as one of the cultural wonders of the world.

From the beginning, carnival has been about drama: the Dame Lorraine, the pierrot, the midnight robber, wild Indians, all costumed characters with set roles on the street stage. The drama has been about the formerly illicit calypso tents, the police raids they suffered, and the clever use of the *double entendre* to prevent detection by colonial authorities. The drama has also been about the outlawed *cannes brûlées* processions ("canboulay" of popular parlance) that evolved out of the burning of the sugar cane, and ended in riots with the police. It has been about the seasonal kalinda dance, and about the stickfights, where Trinidad males externalized and ritualized their quest for dominance. The drama has been about jouvay with the revelers emerging in the pre-dawn daubing themselves with mud and presenting the grotesque and the obscene. It has, finally, been in the struggle of the urban blacks to have upper-class society accept their steelbands as making music, thus as contributing to the corpus of fine arts that the establishment thought its preserve.

It is clear then that, as of old, the drama in carnival is not in the single story being told, and hence confounds all who look for a single plot. The drama is in the performance of the costume and band, the delivery and topic of calypsos, the arrangement and playing of the accompanying music. The drama is in the fierce competitions of steelband and masked band, the feverish preparation for these contests, even in the stage-management of the grand theatrical event.

Further, there is little doubt that carnival, born of the folk and intrinsically tied to the folk, is the national theater of Trinidad. Whereas in former times dancing in the street, masked characters, and music created by the lower classes or folk were frowned upon by the colonial upper class, the mulatto and black middle classes, today people of all social and financial levels participate in and support this annual presentation. Hence from the lowly beginnings, from the bowels of the folk, there is now a flourishing, widely appreciated national theater in Trinidad, and it is carnival. It is a significant contribution to drama in the West Indies, for it shows that postcolonial societies can indeed develop their own art forms with an original blend of the imposed culture and the indigenous.

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9
Africa and writing

ALAIN RICARD

Africa is everywhere inscribed. From rocks to masks, sculptures, pyramids, and manuscripts one needs but a stubborn and narrow-minded commitment to alphabetic writing to deny that the continent has left graphic marks of its history everywhere. Graphic representation is indeed present, but is it writing? One of the best books on the topic, written from an Asian angle, *Visible Speech*, subtitled "The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems," by John De Francis, will be my guide on what can be called the "African chapter in the history of writing" (see Figure 9.1). Speech communities always generate material means to keep and retrieve information – this is not always writing. I will then reflect on graphic representation of sounds and the competition generated between several systems of graphic representation, before considering the contribution of a new kind of artist, the alphabet inventor, who belongs to the history of art, and not to the history of literature.

De Francis makes two useful distinctions that have a practical bearing on the analysis of writing in Africa. He divides students of graphic systems into two camps, the inclusivists and exclusivists, using as a discriminating criterion their definition of writing:

> Partial writing is a system of graphic symbols that can be used to convey only some thought.
>
> Full writing is a system of graphic symbols that can be used to convey any and all thought.
>
> Inclusivists believe that both partial and full writing should be called writing; exclusivists believe that only full writing deserve this label. (De Francis 1989: 5)

Africa is the continent with the largest number of recorded rock art paintings: from the Drakensberg and the Matopos in Southern Africa to the Air in the Sahara, the continent seems to have been populated by crowds of painters eager to record, to pray, or to celebrate. A recent book, *L'art rupestre dans le monde*, by Emmanuel Anati, director of Unesco World Archive of Rock Art

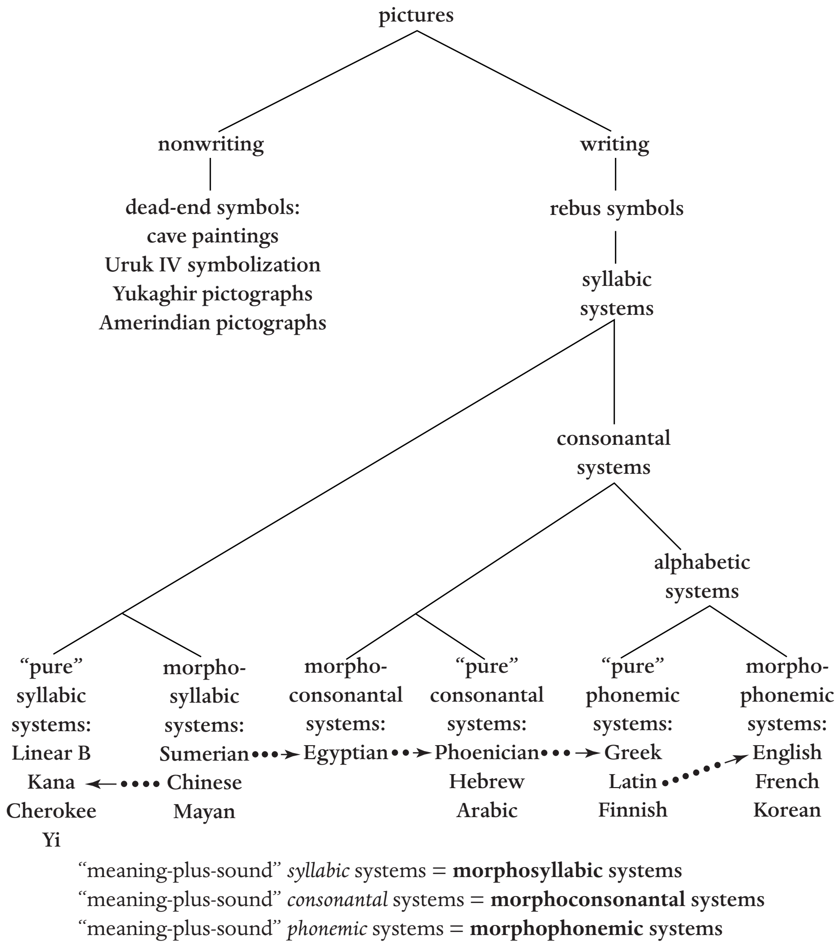

Figure 9.1 De Francis's Writing Classification Scheme. (From De Francis 1989.)

(WARA), based on an extensive survey of several millions of pictures and engravings, attempts to demonstrate that cave paintings are indeed a kind of writing, and that we have here a universal code. Studies by Henri Lhote on the Sahara and by Henri Breuil and Victor Ellenberger in southern Africa are of course part of this model that organizes graphic production according to two axes: a diachronic series taking into account the mode of subsistence of the artists and a synchronic dealing with the syntax of the pictograms. For Anati, some pictograms are ideograms and point to a universal code of graphic expression. In his view, Central Tanzania offers what is probably the longest

sequence in the world of such images and is probably the "cradle" of this art (Anati 1997: 191–92). They are an exceptional testimony of the development process of thinking, of intellectual achievement, and of the cultural changes that have marked East Africa within the last 40,000 years. Especially impressive are the pictures of the Kundusi gatherers, with their heads masked, arranged in a triad, as if captivated by a special myth:

> Painted walls stand for a cathedral. In it are kept myths and legends, i.e., the capacity to keep a living relationship with the past or the future, which is usually done in palaces or sanctuaries.
>
> What is called the White Bantu style offers us a true historical archive, full of pictograms and ideograms, which remains to be interpreted. It provides extraordinary information on the concepts and beliefs of Bantu people.
> (Anati 1997: 221; 223)

Anati's attempts to relate recent findings to Nyau ritual and dance are especially interesting: they allow us to read the paintings as pictograms of masks and dance and provide a bridge to present-day Chewa society (Anati 1997: 235; Probst 1997).

Africa is full of inscriptions of what the Angolan writer Luandino Vieira calls "illiterate writing." Paintings and engravings that encode stories and rituals belong to writing, if we adopt an inclusivist position. So does graphic symbolism in a different way. In her book, *Symboles graphiques en Afrique noire* (1992), C. Faik Nzuji undertakes a semiological analysis of the code of representation in different groups. This is an avenue that was explored long ago by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen (1951). Dogon graphic symbolism has been the topic of several studies. It is indeed of the utmost importance because these symbols are in close relation to speech: they are produced within speech communities and demand interpretation by these communities. They fulfill one of the essential functions of writing: recording information and enabling its retrieval. They do this in a specialized way not available for any kind of messages. But many writing systems suffer from the same constraints. The "African Chapter in the History of Writing" (Raum 1943) is the study of ways to keep and retrieve information by graphic means:

> When Livingstone entered the country of the Lunda he observed that all trees along his route bore incisions, which are said to have resembled faces reminiscent of Egyptian pictures. (Raum 1943: 181)

These signs – incisions etched on trees and marked by colored dots on sticks – even if they are not pictographs (why not?) – fulfill some functions of writing,

by reminding us of the words, spells, and prayers of those who inscribed them:

> Symbols are cultural creations that derive their meaning from rituals and cults, intense moments that punctuate the life of their users. In most cases, the body is marked, objects are carved, modeled to this end. Scarifications are thus messages sent to the ages. (Faik-Nzuji 1992: 122)

Marking of property, what Raum calls "crystallizing and registering thought processes" (1943: 9), as well as graphic and colored symbols are used by African peoples; they serve

> three main purposes: the perpetuation of expressions of emotional states and volitional tendencies in inscriptions which bear a magical, and sometimes religious, significance; the regulations of social relations by supplying distinguishing marks for private and clan property and by affording a medium of communication between individuals; finally graphic symbols serve to record the shape, name and number of objects as well as subjects of conversations and negotiations and thus act as instruments of intellectual processes. (1943: 187)

As is well known, graphic symbolism fulfills different functions: magical and numerical. Certain systems have been particularly well perfected, such as the Nsibidi script (Dalby 1986). Some objects elicit a verbal response and thus encapsulate a text. The systematic use of such objects can function like writing. It is especially important to recall these propositions to prevent a confusion of perspectives. These pictograms have been used for centuries. As David Dalby explains, the graphic symbolism of the Egyptian ideograms probably belongs to symbolic repertories long used in Africa, whether on rock, on wood, or on skin. The Egyptian system of writing is of course full writing, capable of recording any thought: it recorded a literature used in an actual society. These pictographs have been enriched by what De Francis calls the rebus principle:

> Pictographs used as pictographs lead nowhere. Pictographs used as phonetic symbols lead to full writing . . . The rebus principle formed the basis of three systems of writing, generally thought to have been independently developed, which were created at intervals of about fifteen hundred years: first by the Sumerians about 3000 BC, then by the Chinese about 1500 BC, and last by the Mayas about the beginning of our era. (1989: 50)

As De Francis demonstrates convincingly – and paradoxically for those with a superficial and often ideological knowledge of Chinese writing – Chinese ideograms note essentially the sounds of syllables, while Egyptian hieroglyphs note the sounds of consonants. Of course not all the system is phonetically

based but it has a central phonetic component, and it is precisely this that makes it capable of recording any kind of thought, of being full writing. The operation of the "rebus principle," substituting images of things to represent the sounds of their names, is the key to the development of a writing system. Pictograms serve to complete the picture, to enrich, to make the texts precise. The oldest written African language is thus Egyptian, to which we can add Nubian. The Meroe pyramids and the Sudan desert have yielded stones with inscriptions, allowing us to decipher Meroitic script but not to understand the language:

> In addition to its use in religious contexts, Meroitic was without doubt also the written language of both the administration and of daily life.
>
> The variety of preserved inscribed monuments is so great that we can assume both knowledge and use of writing for a significant portion of the population . . . a comprehensive body of source material is now at hand for the Meroitic Period of the kingdom. Its value, however, is certainly weakened by the fact that the texts can be read, but not translated. A few basic rules of the linguistic structure are recognizable, showing that Meroitic might belong to a group of northern Sudanese languages to which Nubian is also ascribed. But the chronological and genetic distance from these languages is so great that not much help can be expected by making comparisons. The meaning of divine and personal names, place-names, and individual titles can be grasped, especially in those cases that stem from Egyptian. Among these are words like . . . *ato* ("water"), *at* ("bread"). (Priese 1996: 253)

The Kingdom of Kush and its capital Kerma were in dynastic times (25–15 centuries BCE) at the center of an ancient Nubian empire and of the relations between Egypt and Black Africa. The inscriptions found are written in Egyptian, but Meroe, the successor kingdom, had its own written language. Written with a selection of Egyptian demotic hieroglyphs, it is indeed an African language, related to languages still spoken in the area. But it is also fascinating by reason of the mystery it presents: we know the consonants and the vowels but we cannot organize the discourse, as if the written image of the language were too far removed from an actual language. Many African languages have been written with rather inadequate systems: perhaps Meroe was the first one of the series and this is the cause of its present opacity.

The highly tonal, largely monosyllabic West African coastal languages would probably need something like the Chinese system to be efficiently written, whereas the class and tone languages of the Bantu would certainly be reduced to bare consonantal skeletons in the Egyptian writing system. In other words, these languages need another approach of representation where

phonemic analysis would go along with symbolic representation. It is already difficult to write vowels, with aperture and length: how can we represent pitch as well in a phonemic (or alphabetic) system? The Vietnamese have succeeded in a context of an exceptionally strong feeling of national consciousness, ready to bear many sacrifices. The balance between phonemic and other kinds of representation (symbolic, pictographic) in a system is achieved over centuries: a writing system does not live divorced from a society. It is very important to realize, for instance, that a system which looks cumbersome and inefficient, like the hieroglyphs, had special advantages for the world within which it was required to function:

> The central complaint is that the Egyptians evidently lacking in imagination, failed to take what is deemed to be the obvious step: simply to use their uniconsonantal signs in the manner of an alphabet, abandoning the other types of signs. Such criticism, which is based essentially on the assumed superiority of alphabetic script over all others, is quite misplaced. It not only overrates the efficiency of alphabetic systems, it also undervalues the merits of others. The Egyptian system has the disadvantage of containing a relatively large number of signs. In compensation however, its mixed orthography creates visually distinctive word patterns that actually enhance legibility. (Davies 1987: 35)

In Africa only Egyptian, Nubian, Ge'ez, and Tamazight have, over the centuries, developed their own systems of full writing. A literature, a community of writers and readers were thus created. The Ethiopian syllabary (whether in Ge'ez or in Amharic) is the only syllabary still in practical use in Africa today. Other African languages have borrowed scripts, whether Arabic or Roman. In the last two centuries, inventions of specific syllabaries, in the Mande area for instance (Vai syllabary), have occurred in a context of intensive culture contact with Islam, but remained local and did not produce a literature (Dalby 1970). All these inventors should be remembered as graphic artists more than as writers or inventors. Only the Bamun sultan Njoya, at the beginning of the twentieth century, devised a syllabary in which original works of history were written; unfortunately the development of this original creation was stopped by the destruction of his printing shop at the time of French colonization. Arabic itself was probably the most commonly used written language in Africa up to the nineteenth century. It was written in Timbuktu in the fifteenth century and there still exists an Arabic literature in West Africa.

To borrow a script is not to borrow a language, and some adaptations are necessary. Arabic, for instance, has only three vowels, while many African languages have more (for instance, Kiswahili has five vowels) and some even have

tones. Fula and Hausa were written in the Arabic script, using the *ajami* script created in the eighteenth century; as was Kiswahili on the Indian Ocean. But of course these adaptations are not without problems. As Amadou Hampaté Bâ, a well-known Islamic scholar as well as francophone writer put it:

> We do not even know for how long Fula was written in Arabic script . . . No linguistic study of the western system had been made to fix for each phoneme a specific sign . . . So writing varied with each different area. The result was that a writer who did not know his text by heart had difficulties rereading his text six months later . . . The only known exception is the Futa Jallon where, thanks to a long practice of writing, people could reread themselves, not without difficulties. (Bâ 1972: 28–29, my translation)

Arabic does not have certain phonemes, for instance *-ng,* so often present in Bantu languages. Tippu Tip, the famous slave dealer from Zanzibar wrote his autobiography in Kiswahili in 1899 using the Arabic script and the text was transliterated by the German Consul and published in romanized Kiswahili (Whiteley 1958) as well as in European languages; it is probably one of the first Swahili narratives in which Islam is not the dominant theme. Many Swahili Arabic-script manuscripts have been transliterated to become romanized books – *Al Inkishafi*, for instance, which is probably the greatest Swahili poem, written at the beginning of the nineteenth century – and spread in book form in 1939 thanks to W. Hitchens's work.

There has been a large movement towards romanization, along with the spread of colonial education and missionary Christian activity, not so much to convert Muslims to Christianity as to prevent the conversion of non-Muslim Africans to Islam by providing alternative ways of writing their languages, detached from any association with Arabic. This was the rationale for writing down in Roman script many African languages, in Nigeria especially. At the same time a romanized version of the Hausa script – *boko* – was printed and widely disseminated. It may have been a colonial plot in the 1930s, but its continuing success is due to other factors, especially its standardization. Let us also remember that the Turkish language was romanized at the same time. The same is true for Kiswahili, which was used as a medium by Catholic missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, while Protestants were more reluctant to engage in the theological dialogue with Islam that this kind of linguistic appropriation required, since a large part of Swahili conceptual vocabulary came from Arabic. Finally, Somali was romanized in the 1970s and became the official language of the defunct Socialist Republic of Somalia.

The switch from Arabic to Roman script inspired a massive effort to write down previously unwritten languages. Some posed rather complex problems, as can be seen from the chart showing the different ways of writing down Khoi sounds such as clicks (see Figure 9.2). The creation of an International Phonetic Alphabet, in 1854, provided a useful comparative tool to compare different languages, previously recorded in rather haphazard ways, according to the different linguistic backgrounds of their students. French missionaries would write *-ch* while English would write *-sh*: Thomas Mofolo behaved as a proper student of the Paris Mission when he wrote the name of the Zulu hero *Chaka* (*ch-* French spelling of the Zulu fricative) and not *Shaka*.

The spread of writing and especially of printing has been the task of missions in Africa (see Coldham 1966) but without some measure of agreement on transcription, the dissemination of the written version of each African language is heavily handicapped. The Yoruba reached an agreement between themselves in 1875 (see Ade Ajayi 1960), thanks to the pioneering work of Bishop Samuel Ajaiyi Crowther, linguist, explorer, translator, and a Yoruba by birth: a fact that helped considerably the development of their written literature. Religious differences made for different writing systems, based on conventions of the European tongues. Sometimes nationalistic concerns were in force, and lasted long, as demonstrated by the differences between South African and Lesotho spellings (*Shaka* or *Chaka*) of the same language, Sesotho. Today the size of the South African Sotho market is a powerful magnet that has helped to convert the orthography of Lesotho publishers, without any linguistic conference.

The issues in graphization leave us with a legacy of competition between churches and between states. The Gu people of Porto Novo (Benin Republic) never wrote their language like their Yoruba neighbors (Nigeria): to divide was a prerequisite of imperial rule and the invention of different graphic forms of mutually understandable languages was a great tool of division between competing powers (see Ricard 1995: 145–49).

In a typically romantic worldview, writing the language of an African group – of any group – meant, in the nineteenth century, bringing this group to light, making it emerge from the Dark Ages. The world was classified according to the "Great Divide": with Gutenberg the "Night has passed away and the Day has come," sings the choir in Mendelssohn's Second Symphony performed in 1840 to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the invention of the movable type (Vail and White 1991: 1). A general theory of graphic expression cannot consider alphabetic writing to be the apex of human culture. It should reject well-known theories that have a rather ethnocentric bias: other paths have been followed by other cultures, in Asia or in Africa, for instance, but

Hottentot Language.

PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS.				CLICKS.			
Nos.	TITLES.	Date.	Catal.	Dent.	Lat.	Gutt.	Pal.
1	Sir Thomas Herbert, Bart.,...	1638	28.	i s t			
2	G. Fr. Wrede, Compendium....	1664	*30.				
3	God. Guil. Leibnitii, Collect...	1717	35.	t?		k?	
4	M. P. Kolbe's Travels	1719	33.	∩ (or) ~			
5	Andrew Sparrmann, M.D.,......	1782	23.	t'			
6	C. P. Thunberg, M.D.,...........	1789	24.	a	A	á	
7	F. Le Vaillant, Travels.........	1790	25.	Λ	V		Δ
8	John Barrow, F.R.S.,............	1801	26.	—		ᴗ	
9	Dr. van der Kemp, Catech.....	1805	*21.	By 6 differ. Numer.			
10	H. Lichtenstein, M.D.,..........	1808	18. 19.	t'¹	t'²		t'³
11	Kafir and Zulu Books, since...	1824	43.216.	c	x	q	(qc)
12	Will. J. Burchell, Travels......	1824	20.	ɔ	c	cc	
13	Joh. Leon. Ebner, Travels	1829	*	——			
14	J. H. Schmelen, Manu., before	1830	10.	—	ɔ	ǀ	∩
15	H. C. Knudsen, Spell.-book.....	1842	5. 6.	·	ɔ	ɔɔ	:
16	H. C. Knudsen, Luke's Gospel	1846	15.7.4.	·	ɔ	c	:
17	C. F. Wuras, Catech., before...	1848	21.	·	ɔ	c	
18	C. F. Wuras, Grammar.........	1850	16.	f	y	q	v
19	H. P. S. Schreuder, Zulu Gr...	1850	178.	ϟ	≷	·≷·	
20	R. Lepsius, Manuscript.........	1853		1c	1x	(ɋ	ɩo
21	Rich. Lepsius, Stand. Alphab...	1854		/	//	!	ǃǃ
22	F. H. Vollmer, Spelling-book..	1854	8. 12.	v	q	f	x
23	Rhenish Mission Conference...	1856		/	//	ǂ	≠
24	Henry Tindall, Grammar, &c.	1856	2. 3.	c	x	q	v
25	Wm. H. I. Bleek, Rese., &c....	1857	215.36.	c	x	q	o
26	C. F. Wuras, Manuscript.......	1857	16.21.d	Λ	π	∩	
27	Manuscript Notes.................		6.	ts	kl	gkt	kt
28	J. W. Gibbs, Remarks, &c......	1852	174.	□	[]	⊂⊃	

Figure 9.2 Different ways of writing sounds. (From Bleek 1958.)

this is often forgotten. Misconceptions regarding non-alphabetic systems have long been the rule, such as believing in the totally non-phonetic nature of Chinese writing (Goody and Watt 1972: 349–52) and assigning, by contrast, to the alphabet the property of developing logical methods. As De Francis rightly comments: "There is in this approach [Goody and Watt's] no concrete analysis of why . . . the consonant-plus-vowel system should be singled out as the primary factor in the intellectual ascendancy of Greece over its Near Eastern neighbors, who had achieved their inferior literacy half a millennium earlier" (De Francis 1989: 245). These Manichean oppositions marked by remnants of an Orientalist posture have been even stronger in the African case and have prevented research from looking at the Egyptian data in an African context.

Going back to our inclusivist position we can safely say that the African chapter in the history of writing is probably one of the longest in human history and that the obsession with orality – what Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1991) call "the invention of oral man" – is more an ideological and political posture than a well-informed theoretical stand.

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10

Ethiopian literature

TEODROS KIROS

Ethiopian literature falls into three broad categories: classical literature, including historical narratives, heroic poetry, and works of philosophical reflection cast in an imaginative mode; romantic and political literature in Amharic, and, since the Second World War, the new literature in English. The classical literature is expressed in Ge'ez, a Semitic language that is also the oldest written language in Africa, with its unique orthography going back nearly two thousand years. The Holy Bible and all other Christian texts have been translated into Ge'ez, which survives today as the language of the Ethiopian clergy; in this respect, it has a status similar to Latin in the western world. Ordinary Ethiopians neither spoke nor wrote in Ge'ez. Therefore, the texts written in that language did not seep into the soul of the people, and did not produce a national literary culture. The classical literary texts, hymns, and songs circulate today only among the priestly class and highly specialized students and teachers of Ge'ez. This is part of the reason that the modern Ethiopian state which emerged in the late nineteenth century had to forge a new language aimed at producing a popular national culture through the medium of Amharic.

Classical literature

This category comprises a substantial number of devotional books, many of them works translated from foreign sources. They include biblical scriptures, exegesis, service books of the Coptic church, texts detailing the lives of saints of the Universal Church who flourished before the schism at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE and of saints of the Coptic church, especially the Desert Fathers,[1] and homilies by the early Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom, Athanasius of Alexandria, Severus of Antioch, and Cyril of Alexandria (Haile 1995: 40). It is widely believed that the translation of the Bible into Ge'ez began in the fifth century, one hundred years after the conversion of the Aksumite

kingdom to Christianity, and that it was completed by the seventh century (Knibb 1999: 2). This translation, based on a Greek text, was revised in light of Arabic and Hebrew texts during the literary revival that marked the reign of Amda Tseyon (1314–44) in the fourteenth century. Literary activity, which had stopped with the decline of the Aksumite kingdom in the seventh century, was revived with the establishment of the Solomonic dynasty (1268–1975). Ge'ez versions of many sacred books have disappeared (Haile 1995: 43), but some have survived. The main religious books of this period are the *Book of Enoch*; the *Book of Jubilee* (on the Sabbath), and the *Book of Joseph and Asenath*. These books were unknown to the authors of the Old Testament but were apparently well known by the authors of the New Testament. They have now become fully incorporated into the body of Ethiopian sacred books; thus, they form the Bible, which for Ethiopians consists not of sixty-six but of eighty-one books. In the Ethiopian Christian community, all the texts grapple with distinctly Ethiopian problems, out of which develops a distinct Christian literature by Ethiopians and for Ethiopians. This was the first exercise in the indigenization and localization of Christianity in the African experience. A broader view of this interpretive literature must include these texts as contributions to global Christian literature.

Classical Ethiopian literature also includes a large body of philosophical writings in literary language, in genres such as fables and poetry, deriving from different external and internal sources. Classical Ethiopian philosophy itself results from a confluence of Greek, Egyptian, Aramaic, and Arab sources. The *Fisalgos* (second century CE) is a transcription from the Greek *Physiologos*. It is primarily symbolic of moral values. In these texts, various animals, plants, and natural objects function as symbols of moral instructions, and thus compose a distinctly Ethiopian interpretation of the Bible. They revolve around a discourse that emphasizes the duties of children toward their parents, as in this passage from the *Fisalgos*:

> The young one of the hipwopas,[2] when their father grows old, pluck off his molting feathers, peck his eyes, keep him in a hot place, welcome him under their wings, feed him, and guard him, as if they were saying to their father: "As a reward for having kept us, we shall do likewise to you." And they do so until (these aged birds) are imparted with renewed vitality; they are rejuvenated and are young once more. (Sumner 1994: 25–26)

The Book of the Philosophers also uses images in the same way as the *Fisalgos*. In contrast to the *Fisalgos*, *The Book of the Philosophers* is a collection of sayings that illuminate tradition as a source of philosophy, in other words,

that consecrate philosophy as a product of orality. Most of the sayings are Ethiopianized interpretations of classical Greek philosophers – Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle – but the texts retain their Ethiopian roots and cadence. They are not merely appropriations, but rather transformed interpretations. As Claude Sumner has argued, Ethiopians never translate literally: they adapt and modify, add and subtract; thus, a translation always bears a typical Ethiopian stamp. The results are always texts that distinguish themselves from the original sources.

One of the outstanding texts of the fourteenth century concerns the story of Skendes (Greek, Sekondos), a story that has fired the imaginations of Greek, Syrian, Arabic, and Ethiopian scholars over the centuries. The Ethiopian text is based on the Arabic, although some scholars contend that its style is modeled on the Greek. The Ethiopian version recalls the story of Skendes, the son of sagacious parents, who decided to send him to Berytus (modern Beirut) and Athens for a classical education. Skendes was thirteen years old at the time of his departure to the foreign lands. While he was abroad, he encountered a statement of the wise philosophers that declared, "All women are prostitutes." He was greatly perturbed by the statement and determined to verify it. After staying abroad for twenty-four years he returned to his homeland. He recalled that disturbing statement about the nature of women, and decided to test his own mother. Through the services of a maidservant whom he met at a public well, he managed to trick the maid into letting him into his mother's house, to spend the night with her mistress in exchange for one hundred dinars. So he spent the night with his own mother. In the morning he revealed himself to his mother as her very own son. Shocked by the discovery, she hanged herself.[3]

Skendes regretted his words that had caused the death of his mother, and vowed never to speak again; from that moment on, he became permanently silent. The emperor at the time was Andryanos, and when he heard the extraordinary and tragic story of Skendes, he invited him to his court. When Skendes was ordered to speak, he refused; instead he wrote down his thoughts, and the king also communicated with him through writing. His responses were organized into two books, with fifty-five questions in the first and 108 questions in the second. After the emperor had carefully read his responses, he was deeply impressed, and did not order the philosopher to speak. Instead, it was officially decided that the work of Skendes be treated as a national treasure and be preserved in the priests' archives.

The philosopher developed in his discourses systematic theories about the essence of God, the angels, the universe, and the elements, and about the soul,

human nature, and the spirit. Many of his other discourses speculate about the emotions and states of being. According to Sumner, the obstinate silence of Skendes produced an implacable dialectic of speech and silence in classical Ethiopian philosophy. The importance of silence and wisdom, the need to control the tongue, became powerful ethical and sapiential themes in classical Ethiopian philosophy.

The *Book of the Philosophers*, *Fisalgos*, and *Skendes*'s sayings are both literary and philosophical. At issue is not the status of the texts. They are broadly speaking philosophical in their own right. It is the case, however, that they are derivative transformations of non-Ethiopian texts to which Skendes and many others contributed. Some of the sayings are natively Ethiopian, based on observation, reports, readings of the Bible, and other sources. Given Ethiopia's location and history, it is not an accident that the sapiential themes are at once Arabic, Syrian, biblical, and Greek. Ethiopia is clearly at the confluence of world cultures, and its philosophical tradition precisely reflects that confluence.

These philosophical reflections are interesting in several senses. To begin with, the ethical counsels become transformed by Ethiopian thinkers into much more than their original form. The various traditions, customs, and belief systems impose themselves on the original forms and radically alter them. Furthermore, they provide us with a novel opportunity to inspect closely the meaning of tradition in the Ethiopian context. The inner architectonics of the Ethiopian texts can be understood and appreciated only if we take account of the multicultural tapestry out of which they are woven and which they radically transform into their very own African literary forms. Sumner offers a striking example of this process of integration:

> One example taken from *The Book of the Philosophers* will suffice to drive this point home. The well-known conversation between Diogenes and Alexander of Corinth, which is recorded by Diogenes Laertius, is found in our Ethiopian work. But it is transformed beyond recognition. "Move away from my shadow" of Diogenes is ascribed to Socrates in Ethiopic, as it already was in the Arabic. The whole passage has been given such a specifically Christian form and development that one seems to be listening to an Oriental monk speaking through the mouth of Socrates. Alexander the Great is simply called "The King" – and the Arabic does as well. As in most other passages in our manuscript, he is placed in an inferior position in relation to the wise man. The whole dialogue hinges around one point: life. For Socrates the real life is the spiritual one. But the king misses the point, and thinks that Socrates is speaking of the temporal life. (Sumner 1994: 51–52)

Royal chronicles

The *Kebra Nagast* (Glory of the Kings), dating to the early fourteenth century, is a characteristically original text that traces the origin of the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia as part of the elaboration of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The text can be read as a legitimation of the dynasty, a justification of its right to rule based on the divine rights of kings. In marvelous poetic-analytic language, it describes the amorous relationship between Sheba, the beautiful and shrewd Ethiopian queen, and the wise Solomon (Bezold 1909). Another section of the work describes the military genius of Alexander the Great. *Kebra Nagast* is simultaneously mythical, allegorical, and more fundamentally apocalyptic. This story gives Ethiopia the first legendary king, Menelik, who became the first self-conscious founder of the Ethiopian dynasty. He is purportedly the son of Solomon and Sheba. A long line of kings traces their genealogy to this legendary story. Different books of this period also describe the deeds of heroes, such as during the wars of the Ethiopian emperor Amda Tseyon (1314–44), celebrated in *The Glorious Victories of 'Amda Tseyon, king of Ethiopia* (Huntingford 1965).

These texts are one source from which Ethiopian historians chronicle Ethiopian history; they represent one of the two fountains from which Ethiopian history flows. The other source is *Gedlat* (Acts of Saints). Getatchew Haile finds the *Gedlat* exceptionally useful, the simplicity of the Ge'ez in which they are written being one its attractions; while the rich tapestry of the Ethiopian setting that grounds the texts is another (Haile 1995: 50). This period also gave Ethiopia one of its finest emperors, Zara Yacob, who was also an accomplished literary figure.

Hymns and poetry

The emperor Zara Yacob (1434–68) is remembered for his vivid hymns and his devotion to the cult of Mary. He pleaded that the "goddess" should be revered by the faithful; painters heeded to his demands and personified her in breathtaking paintings. According to Haile, "The king ordered thirty-three feasts to be observed in Mary's honor, some monthly and some annually" (1995: 50). Zara Yacob's literary texts are filled with hymns to Mary. A foundational hymnody called *Igziabher Negse*, is considered his main literary output. The following passage from Zara Yacob's *Book of Hours* is representative of its style and atmosphere of devotional piety:

> What should we call you, O full of grace;
> You are the gate of Salvation;

> You are the portal of light;
> You are the daughter of the palace
> Should we call you a golden basket?
> Your son is the bread of life;
> His apostles are your stewards,
> The sacrifices of the body of your First-born.
> (Haile 1995: 52)

One of the genres of Ge'ez poetry is that associated with *Qine*. These poems are employed as panegyrics and eulogies of political and religious personalities, to honor the saints and as hymns to celebrate particular religious ceremonies. The poems are rhymed and rhythmical, and are performed by trained singers. The composers must follow strict rules of composition as regards the length of the lines, rhythm, and grammatical structure. The singers are expected to display exceptional powers of expression. Students are carefully instructed in the mastery of the genre, before they can aspire to compose these intricately woven *Qine* poems. One such book of rhymes is *Diggua*, a book of hymns attributed to a sixth-century Aksumite priest (Haile 1995: 51). *Aksum Tsion*, a famous church, uses *Qine* to celebrate "the conception of Mary" as a special religious event; this church prohibits the use of *Qine* for any other purpose. The most famous poem in this genre is *Mezmure Dawit*, which closely follows *"Psalms of Dawit,"* written by an anonymous poet who lived probably in the sixteenth century.

The fifteenth century witnessed ferocious conflicts between Orthodox Christians and other denominations. Islam was also seeking to penetrate Ethiopia by force, and Ethiopian Christianity was asserting its autonomy and repelling foreign intrusion. The great religious books of the century are literary documentations of these conflicts. Among them can be mentioned *Egiazhar Ngse* (The God King); *Kisaitan Herdet* (Satan's Dance); and finally the *Gedlat,* a book that narrates the "deeds and miracles" of the saints. The fifteenth century was also a century of king worship. Divinized Ethiopian kings are praised in literary homilies. The most powerful literary figure of the time was Enbakom, a Muslim merchant who converted to Christianity and became prior of the monastery of Debre Libanos. He is the author of *Anqas'a amin* (Gate of Faith); *Fetha Nagast* (Justice of the Kings); and *Hawi Mesthafe*, a theological encyclopedia translated by Salik of Debre Libanos.

Unfortunately, the fifteenth century also witnessed the destruction of books consequent upon the Muslim incursion (1527–43). As Islamization spread, the destruction of Christian books increased, crippling Ethiopian literary life. All this resulted in mitigating the verve and imagination of

those who wrote in Ge'ez, which lost its expressive vigor and presence. It became reduced to a "liturgical" language of the Church. Except among Ethiopian Falashas, Ethiopian Jews who continued to use Ge'ez, the language has been replaced in all the secular sectors of Ethiopian national life by Amharic.

Romantic and political literature in Amharic

It took several centuries before Amharic replaced Ge'ez as the language of writing. Amharic had emerged by the fourteenth century as an independent language, replacing classical Ge'ez as the spoken language of the royal court under the Solomonic dynasty (Molvaer 1997: xiii). The oldest writings in Amharic are poems and songs in praise of Emperors Amda Tseyon and Emperor Ghelawdewos; these writings appeared in the fourteenth century. Amharic achieved official status as the literary language of Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Menilik (1881–1913); Menilik's own extensive chronicle was written in Amharic (Demoz 1995: 17). Emperor Tewodros (1855–68) introduced the idea that the unification of Ethiopia required the use of a national language. Amharic thus gained prominence in the late nineteenth century, opening the way to the flowering of a new national literary culture. Amharic became the official language of Ethiopia in 1955, as promulgated in the country's revised constitution.

The establishment of the first government press in 1906, and the setting up of more presses later on, facilitated the publication of the books that were beginning to be written (Molvaer 1997: xiv). Scholars have described the years between 1900 and 1935 as "the renaissance of Ethiopian writing." A new crop of Ethiopian writers emerged during this period, writers who were experimenting with new forms of fiction. Afework Gebra Yesus published his first novella in 1908. Hiruy, "the father of Amharic literature," is reputed to have written about twenty-eight books. Among these books, *Wedaje Libbe* (I Am My Own Best Friend, 1925) is the most popular. Tekle Hawariyat produced the first Ethiopian play in 1930 (Molvaer 1997: 48). After the restoration of Ethiopian independence, following the Italian invasion (1936–41), and spurred by the support of Emperor Haile Selassie, Ethiopian writers began to produce poetry and novels of considerable literary merit. Reidulf Molvaer has featured some of these Ethiopian writers in his collection of interviews (Molvaer 1997).

T'obbiya Lebb Wallad Tarik (literally, "history born of the heart"), by Afework Gebre (1868–1947), is perhaps the most famous work of this period. It

announces the arrival of the novel written in Amharic. Gebre recalls in this novel the perennial conflict between Christianity and Islam. As Yonas Admassu has observed,

> this foundational novel confronts us, at first sight, with the simplicity of a tale. Yet, it would be difficult, even erroneous, to classify it as a simple tale. If anything, the work defies classification. It reads at once as myth, legend, adventure, romance, fantasy, all put together rather hastily, but with a clearly defined moral and political intent that only invites (indeed, demands at every turn it negotiates), the reader's serious interpretive participation. (Admassu 1995: 95)

Afework is followed by a string of great novelists such as Haddis Alemayehu (b. 1902), the author of the modern classic, *Fikir Eske Mekabir* (Love until Death), first published in 1958. This powerful novel contains a scathing criticism of the static institutions of feudal Ethiopia. The story of a forbidden love between the peasant Bezzabeh and the aristocrat Seble, the novel is at once romantic and realistic. The tension between the demands of love and the dead weight of backward institutions is resolved in favor of the rights of the peasant to love, and Seble, the slave of honor, sings the language of freedom.

Other novelists have taken the path opened up by Afework. Mangestu Lemma's *Yegitim gubae* (Synod of Poetry) was published in 1955. Kebede Mikael, also known as "the grand old man of Amharic" reportedly wrote more than a hundred books, but only twenty-two have been published. He adapted and translated *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as *Faust* (Molvaer 1997: 74). Belau Girma's first novel, *Ke Admas Bashager* (Beyond the Horizon) is another novel of disillusionment, widely admired for its narrative of the misery and deprivation of the Ethiopian poor. Germachew Tekle Hawariyat's *Araya* is an educational novel that recounts in a captivating style the adventure of a gifted boy, Araya, who is presented to a French visitor, Mme. Dubonne Foi. He is taken to France by her, is educated there, and returns home as a young man. Araya has developed a profound respect for western technology and efficiency, but he prefers and admires the values of discipline and self-control, which are heralded as Ethiopia's own cardinal virtues.

The novels cited above are now classics of modern Ethiopian literature in Amharic. The succeeding generation of writers was to focus on Ethiopian life under Emperor Haile Selassie. Abe Gubenya (1933/34–1980) is the author of the longest novel (602 pages) in Amharic, *And lennatu* (His Mother's Only Son), about the famous Ethiopian Emperor Tewodros. Another novel, *Alwelledim*

(I Refuse / Do Not Want to Be Born), is a social novel that confronts the feudal regime of Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, by exposing the vacuity of religion insofar as religion is used to mystify and justify the oppression of the peasants by absentee landlords. The novel is notable for its prophetic anticipation of the socialist autocracy of the Ethiopian Derg (or "Committee"), the repressive regime that ruled the country from 1974 to 1991 under Colonel Mengistu. In its depiction of a repressive state, the novel can be considered an Ethiopian equivalent to Orwell's acclaimed *1984*. The Israelis in *Alwelledim* are represented as a people living under a garrison state, as this was to be perfected later by the Derg. The novel was banned during Haile Selassie's reign, and the Derg briefly embraced it, during its short-lived democratic phase. But once the Derg consecrated repression as a way of life, its leaders quickly realized that the novel was after all a perfect representation of the State they had created. So the novel was banned again. Abe Gubenya's death coincided with the rise of State terrorism under the Derg.

The implicit indictment of the Derg in Abe Gubenya's work is extended by the direct attack of the regime in Belau Girma's novel *Derasiw* (1980, The Writer), which examines the life of a writer who confronts oppressive regimes and cannot speak truth to power. Following the footsteps of Gubenya, Girma examines the inner workings of repression by focusing on the vulnerability of the writer who dares to speak the truth. His characters are modeled after the inept and incompetent officials he knew, and his novel documents their lust for power, their unscrupulous methods, and indeed some of their crimes. The failed campaigns in Eritrea and the derogation of the idea of state socialism itself form part of his indictment. Girma's second novel, *Oromai* (Enough), even goes further. *Oromai* is the work of a witness who has seen all and decided he had had enough of the perversities of political life in contemporary Africa, in which the writer speaks truth to power at the risk of his life. Indeed, *Oromai* is said to have sealed Girma's fate. The writer, who was director-general of the Ministry of Information after having been an editor of the government's newspaper, *Addis Zemen*, was summarily dismissed by the Mengistu regime and barred from holding any further employment. Predicting his own death in *Derasiw*, Grima wrote,

> I do not have any plans on how to live life except simply existing. The purpose of life is merely living. I live this precious piece of life, like Abraham without dwelling in a house, and like Moses, nobody knowing the site of my grave. I survive and write with the hope of living in the future and looking back at the past. (Girma 1980: 209)

Ethiopian writing in English

There is a dearth of fiction writing in English across the Horn of Africa. In light of this well-known fact, the emergence of writing in English in Ethiopia is an impressive new development. Although French was for a long time the lingua franca of the Ethiopian intelligentsia, it was superseded by English after 1941 (Zewde 1991: 108–09), a position that was consolidated after the return of the emperor, Haile Selassie, who had taken refuge from the Italian invasion, during the war, in England. After the war, English was introduced to the court and became the language of instruction in the schools and at the University of Addis Ababa.

Some limited writing in English began in the early 1960s, inspired by a new sense of curiosity about other cultures and ways of being that the postwar period initiated. Some Ethiopian writers who have lived abroad and become diasporic writers have adopted English as a second language. Others have managed to write both in English and their native tongues. These writers have internalized the contours of European literature, and can only write in its conventional forms. The reasons for the choice of English by Ethiopian writers are as varied as the writers themselves. For some, it is simply a matter of taste, a preferred medium of esthetic form; for others, it is a matter of convenience, of gaining access to a wider public through a language of wide international diffusion. However, all these authors write about aspects of Ethiopian life, thereby staying true to their Ethiopian / African origins even though they write in English.

B. M. Sahle-Sellassie has dominated Ethiopian writing in English. His fourth novel in English, *Firebrands*, is considered his best work; because of its uncompromising stand against politicians, Tadesse Adera has compared the work to Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Adera and Ahmed 1995b: 164). Other lesser known but very able writers have written novels and plays in English. Abe Gubenya wrote two books in English, in addition to twenty books in Amharic (Molvaer 1997: 183); Mengistu Lemma translated two of his pre-revolutionary plays into English, *Telfo bekise* (Marriage by Abduction) and *Yalaccha gabiccha* (The Marriage of Unequals) (Molvaer 1997: 278); Daniachew Worku, who studied creative writing at Iowa University in the US, wrote a novel, *The Thirteenth Sun*, published in 1973; Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin wrote plays and poems in English and Amharic (Molvaer 1997: 272). The contribution of this major poet and dramatist have been been well summed up by Biodun Jefiyo in these terms: "All told within the social context of pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia of the Emperor, his ecclesiastical potentates, and their aristocratic,

anti-people pretensions, Gebre-Medhin's plays constitute an intense, passionate ideological contestation of the religion which underpins and sustains the misrule of the oligarchy and the denigration of the governed" (Jefiyo 1995: 186).

In *Collision of Altars*, the poet sings:

> I am a Kush, and of this land of Ra
> On whose roots the first sun rose,
> My body living
> As my head is true.
> Mine is unlike your hybrid
> Devious, little Sabean mind
> Where the quibbles of your Ge'ez tongue
> Outlive the living body by far.
> With us, the body has language
> The mind cannot speak.
> Both live. Without the one
> The other is dead: and
> The one cannot live
> The other's complete life.

His other work, *Oda Oak Oracle*, calls for a new humanism built on the foundations of compassion and reciprocity (Jefiyo 1995: 187). The principal character Shanka represents this new consciousness, as indicated by this passage from the play:

> We cry
> Only to join your hands
> Come
> Abortive cry against darkness
> Come
> The truer the love
> The thornier the fate
> And the more reason to die
> Come darkness, come.

The development of Ethiopian literature in English has been brought to a new and exciting high point with the publication of Nega Mezlekia's novel, *Notes From the Hyena's Belly* (2000). In a powerful blend of autobiography and social history, the novelist explodes the contemporary stereotypes of Ethiopia and incites our imagination to revisit the grandeur and stubborn sovereignty of this ancient empire. In intricately woven stories told with verve and imagination, Mezlekia treats Ethiopia as the site of a classic conflict between modernity

and tradition. Along with a gripping story of his childhood, he introduces us to a living Ethiopian culture: its customs, religious traditions, and the nuanced ways of seeing and knowing. The book's beginning with his birth "in the year of the paradox," in the labyrinthine city of Jijiga, displays the author's textual mastery, in a narrative texture that frames local myths, beliefs, and practices in powerful evocative language. As the young Mezlekia navigates the complexity of family and culture, he leads us through the local scene – its ethnic tensions and its religious universe – all the while focused on a vision that incorporates the classical Ethiopian metaphors of the human world as an animal world, with its central characters: the vicious hyena, the brave lion, the shrewd fox, and hardworking donkey. This work is without question a monumental contribution to the modern Ethiopian literary culture.

Ethiopian literature in English is a recent development, but it already includes some of the most significant works in African literature today, most notably the plays of Tsegaye Gebre-Mehdin. Moreover, as Mezlekia's remarkable work demonstrates, it is a literature that remains in close touch with its roots in the literary and poetic tradition of the national community, as this community has evolved over millennia of a dramatic history.

Notes

1. This is a collection of sayings known in the Coptic Church as "bustan al-rohban" "the monk's garden," also known in English as "the paradise of the Desert Fathers." It consists of accounts of the lives of Desert Fathers of Egypt.
2. A species of bird.
3. The parallel with the Greek tragedy of Oedipus is of course obvious.

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11

African literature in Arabic

FARIDA ABU-HAIDAR

The Arabic language is a rich and flexible tool that, over the centuries, has been shaped and molded by the many different peoples that came to express themselves in it. In Africa, Arabic spread with the advent of Islam. It became the official language throughout northern Africa, from the Sudan to the western Sahara, and as far south as Mauritania. The first Arabic works in Africa date from about the tenth century and are mostly religious treatises written by Muslim jurists. Creative writing in Arabic initially consisted of poetry, a genre much esteemed and perfected by Arabs since pre-Islamic times. Prose works continued to be scholarly and religious, right up to the end of the nineteenth century when genres new to Arabic literature, like the novel, the short story, and drama emerged.

The region now has a thriving national literature in Arabic. Egypt, in particular, has a rich tradition of Arabic creative writing, predating the emergence of modern Arabic literature elsewhere in Africa. The Maghreb countries, once under French rule, have a globally renowned francophone literature. It was only after independence that the Arabic creative writing of the Maghreb began to reach a wide readership in other parts of the Arabic-speaking world. In sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in West Africa, where Islam is the main religion, Arabic is a religious language, introduced by Muslim scholars. It spread with the establishment of centers of Arabic learning in several African cities. Some parts of sub-Saharan Africa have been prolific in the production of Arabic works. In Nigeria, Muslim scholars were producing works in Arabic as early as the thirteenth century. But throughout the sub-Saharan region, any literary production in Arabic, whether in prose or verse, has been concerned primarily with religious themes. It is generally folk poetry and legends, orally transmitted from one generation to the next, that focus on secular topics, notably the history of famous tribes and the heroic deeds of warriors.

Oral poetry and storytelling have always been part of the African cultural heritage. It is not surprising, therefore, that some Arabian romances and epic

poems, introduced into Africa through various channels, but largely via Egypt, became part of African folklore. Foremost among these is the romance of the Banu Hilal, an Arabian tribe who, in the tenth century, moved first to Egypt and later to Tunisia. Their exploits in battle, particularly those of their heroes, among them Abu Zayd al-Hilali, fired the imagination of later generations of folk-poets and storytellers. The wanderings of the Banu Hilal in the Arabian Desert, their seeking new territory, and their settlement in northern Africa constitute the main themes of a voluminous epic known in Arabic as *Sirat Bani Hilal*. Stories interspersed with poems from this romance are to this day related in coffee houses and other public places throughout northern Africa and in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, by storytellers often referred to as poets, who, in a way, performed and continue in many places to perform the roles of medieval *jongleurs*.

Another well-known popular epic, *Sirat 'Antar* (The Adventures of 'Antar), whose hero is 'Antara ibn Shaddad, the sixth-century Arabian warrior-poet, was just as popular in Egypt, the Sudan, and the northern African countries as it was in the rest of the Arab world. Its central character 'Antara is, after all, half-African. 'Antara, the poet, is moreover the author of one of the seven *Mu'allaqat*, the well-known select *qasidas* (odes) of pre-Islamic Arabia. A *qasida* is a long poem – often of more than sixty or seventy verses, all having the same meter and rhyme scheme – that became formalized in the eighth century.

As pre-Islamic Arabic poetry held the fascination of the numinous for Arabs everywhere, Arabic poetry, imitative of the style of the classical Arabian *qasida*, became popular in territories conquered by the Arabs, like northern Africa and Spain. From about the tenth century, cities in the region now known as the Maghreb, among them Fez, Tlemcen, and Tunis, became important centers of Arabic learning, and produced a number of scholars and poets who looked to the Arab east for guidance and inspiration. The eleventh-century poet and scholar Ibn Rashiq (1000 – *c.*1070), who was born not far from the present city of Constantine in Algeria, urged fellow poets to give up imitating the classical *qasida* with its descriptions of imaginary desert journeys, and to concentrate on depicting the environment they lived in and knew best. Ibn Rashiq's major contribution to Arabic literature is his encyclopedia of poetry, *Al-'Umda fi Sighat al-Shi'r* (The Sourcebook on the Art of Poetry), describing the function, structure and forms of Arabic poetry. It is a work that has been praised by a number of later scholars, among them Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), one of the best-known medieval historians and thinkers, who described Ibn Rashiq's *Al-'Umda* "as an epoch-making work" (Nicholson 1956: 288).

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis to a family of Arabian descent who had lived in Islamic Spain. He is considered to be "the greatest historical thinker of Islam" (Nicholson 1956: 417). His renown rests on his *Muqaddimah* (*Prolegomena*), the introduction to his monumental work, *Kitab al-'Ibar* (The Book of Examples), on the history of Arabs, Berbers, and neighboring races, as well as all the Muslim dynasties of northern Africa. In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun presents his readers with a philosophical theory of history, tracing the religious, economic, scientific, and artistic developments of the civilizations he knew. He states at the outset that the true purpose of history is to make people aware of different societies and civilizations. He firmly believes that history is subject to universal laws. And it is in these laws that truth can be found. He divides the human race into nomads and citizens, claiming that all races are originally nomadic before they inevitably become settled. Once they are fully urbanized, they form states and conquer new territory. When they have achieved all that they set out to do they become effete and corrupt and begin to lose the very qualities that had helped them to develop and prosper. It is then that they turn weak and defenseless and become a prey to other less developed civilizations who in time conquer them. R. A. Nicholson states that no one before Ibn Khaldun took such a comprehensive and analytical view of history or "attempted to trace the deeply hidden causes of events, to expose the moral and spiritual forces at work beneath the surface, or to divine the immutable laws of national progress and decay." Nicholson goes on to say that Ibn Khaldun's "intellectual descendants are the great mediaeval and modern historians of Europe – Machiavelli and Vico and Gibbon" (1956: 438–39).

Pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, being one of the five pillars of Islam,[1] most Muslim scholars attempted to make the journey to the holy city of Islam at least once in their lifetime. For those in the western extremities of Muslim lands, the journey entailed traveling through unfamiliar landscapes and terrains, often fraught with danger. Some scholars chose to describe their journeys and adventures in writing. This trend during the Middle Ages gave rise to a wealth of geographical and travel literature in Arabic. Among the best-known geographical works that display a good deal of originality are those by al-Bakri (d. 1094) of Cordova, al-Idrisi (1100 – *c.*1162) who was born in Ceuta and studied in Cordova, and Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217) who was born in Valencia and died in Alexandria. Al-Bakri was a prolific writer whose works, many of which have not survived, cover different subjects, among them theology, botany, and philology. He is said to have written also a number of wine poems. Among al-Bakri's surviving works are a dictionary of the place names that occur in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and extracts of a work titled *Al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik* (The Book

of Roads and Dominions), which contains valuable descriptions of West Africa. It is because of these two works that al-Bakri has gained a prominent place among medieval Arab geographers. Al-Bakri influenced younger geographers, among them al-Idrisi who settled in Palermo where he worked under the patronage of Roger II, King of Sicily. In compiling his geographical works, al-Idrisi used European maps and relied on the verbal reports of European travelers. He was also influenced by the works of Ptolemy. Al-Idrisi's younger contemporary, Ibn Jubayr, was a prolific traveler who wrote at length of his journeys (*The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*), leaving for posterity valuable documents of medieval life in Spain and North Africa. Like many another geographer and travel writer, Ibn Jubayr's first venture eastwards occurred during a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The works of geographers who came after al-Idrisi and Ibn Jubayr showed little originality. From about the thirteenth century, travel literature became a popular genre. Perhaps the best-known medieval Arab traveler is Ibn Battuta (d. 1368–69 or 1377) who was born in Tangier. In 1325 Ibn Battuta traveled across North Africa to Egypt and Syria. His journeys east took him to Iran and the heartlands of Asia, as far as China. Arriving in the Indus Valley in 1333, Ibn Battuta spent some time in the Indian subcontinent. He visited Constantinople and southeastern Europe. He first made the pilgrimage in 1326, and was to return to Mecca several times after that. He traveled into the interior of Africa, reaching East Africa. The account of his numerous journeys was dictated by him to Ibn Juzayy, a secretary of the sultan of Fez. Much of what he related to Ibn Juzayy was reconstructed from memory. Ibn Battuta also drew on the works of earlier geographers and travel writers. In spite of the fact that he may have been given to exaggeration, his descriptions of the people and places he came across constitute a highly important landmark in Arabic travel writing and provide valuable information on the social geography of Muslim territories in the fourteenth century (*Ibn Battuta: Travels in Africa and Asia 1325–1354*). Another writer who left important records of his time and milieu is al-Maqqari (*c.* 1577–1632). Born in Tlemcen, he spent most of his life in Morocco. Al-Maqqari wrote a number of works, some of which are considered to be valuable documents, describing the people and places he knew. His *Rawdat al-As* (Meadows of Myrtle) consists of biographies of Moroccan scholars and also describes his own life and education. Al-Maqqari's masterpiece, *Nafh al-Tib* (The Rich Fragrance), provides a wealth of information on the political and literary history of Muslim Spain.

In sub-Saharan Africa where there is a long-standing tradition of Arabic religious and didactic writing, Sufism (Islamic mysticism) played a significant

role in the development of Arabic scholarship and literature. The majority of scholars who wrote in Arabic were followers of Sufi orders known as *tariqa*s (paths, ways). Their works cover a wide range of Islamic disciplines, comprising *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), *hadith* (Prophetic traditions), and *'ilm al-tawhid* (theology). Their poetry, also with a religious bias and moralistic overtones, is of several types, including *madih* (eulogy), often in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, *ritha'* (elegy), and *hija'* (satire). Among the Sufi orders that flourished in West Africa and had many followers are the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. In Senegal, Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba (1853–1927), originally a member of the Qadiriyya brotherhood, established the Muridiyya order. The Muridis distinguished themselves in Islamic scholarship. In 1866, under the leadership of Shaykh Bamba, they founded the city of Touba, which became a center of Islamic pilgrimage and Arabic scholarship. A good number of Shaykh Bamba's writings were motivated by his nationalist feelings against the French colonial powers. One of his best-known works, *Masalik al-Jinan* (The Roads to Paradise), explains the various Sufi stages. Shaykh Bamba chose to write in Arabic because he felt that the Arabic language "reflected a spiritual obligation due to his own initiation into Sufism, and to an ardent desire to commune with God and with the prophet Muhammad" (Camara 1997: 170). A prolific writer and educationalist, Shaykh Bamba's works, and especially his religious poems, written in classical Arabic, have inspired younger generations of Senegalese Wolof-language poets, while he himself is mentioned in some Wolof poems.[2] The Tijaniyya *tariqa*, founded by Ahmad al-Tijani (d. 1815), also played an important role in the development of Arabic literature in Senegal. One of the leading followers of this *tariqa* was the twentieth-century scholar Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1975) who published several books and also wrote poetry. Niasse had followers in other parts of West Africa, and especially in northern Nigeria, where in Kano a local literature emerged, inspired primarily by his teachings.

Arabic scholarship in what is now Nigeria dates from the thirteenth century. One of the first known writers is thought to have been Abu Ishaq Ibrahim of Kanem (d. *c.*1212) who was a grammarian and poet. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Nigerian Arabic writing consisted only of religious works. It was shortly before the beginning of the nineteenth century that Arabic writing received a new impetus following an Islamic revivalist movement, led by Fulani scholars. Shaykh 'Uthman ibn Muhammad Fudi (d. 1817), his brother 'Abdullah (d. 1829), and his son Muhammad Bello (d. 1837) together produced a large number of prose works and poems. 'Abdullah ibn Fudi wrote a commentary on the Qur'an under the title, *Diya' al-Ta'wil* (Lucid Interpretation). Muhammad

Bello wrote several biographies of Sufi saints. These three scholars tried to free Islam of the non-Islamic elements that they felt had crept into it over the years. 'Uthman ibn Fudi fought neighboring rulers who did not prohibit pagan practices infiltrating Islam. Other notable Nigerian scholars include al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (d. 1811) and his son Muhammad (d. 1826), followers of the Qadiriyya order, who wrote extensive prose works. Their teachings helped to spread Arabic learning in the region. In Yorubaland, in southwestern Nigeria, Ilorin became a prosperous center of Islamic learning, attracting scholars from other parts of Africa, including Arab settlers. The prose works they produced deal with all the disciplines of Islamic scholarship. A number of scholars wrote religious poetry also. Secular oral poetry, particularly praise poetry, has always been popular in Yoruba culture. In the nineteenth century, written praise poems in Yoruba, modeled on classical Arabic poetry, were introduced by Muslim scholars. These, together with animal fables and other texts in Yoruba, were translated into Arabic, introducing a new trend in Nigerian Arabic scholarship.

In Mauritania, which became a French protectorate in 1903 and a French colony in 1920, gaining independence in 1960, Arabic scholarship has always been highly esteemed. Sufism in Mauritania also played a significant role in the development of Arabic writing, just as it did in Senegal and Nigeria. As far as creative writing is concerned, poetry, both written and oral, has always been a highly popular art form in Mauritania, as it has been in most of the western Sahara. Mauritanian written poetry in classical Arabic follows the meters and rhyme schemes of the Arabic *qasida*. Poetry is also composed in Hassaniya, a colloquial variety of Arabic whose use is widespread in Mauritania. Hassaniya verse is syllabic and draws on local folksong rhythms. It is either recited or sung, and is known in its latter form as *leghna* (from Arabic *al-ghina'*, or "song"). Although poetry in the region was composed as far back as the fifteenth century, some of the best-known poets lived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, foremost among them being the Sufi poet and scholar Shaykh Muhammad al-Mami (d. 1865). A comprehensive account of Mauritanian poetry can be found in *Al-Wasit* by al-Shinqiti (d. 1913). Apart from being a compendium of poems in classical Arabic and Hassaniya, the work consists also of important data on the history, geography, and folklore of the region.

A younger contemporary of Shaykh Bamba, who was also a Sufi and a committed nationalist, was the Algerian Emir Abdelkader (1808–83), who led an unsuccessful rebellion against the French. Abdelkader was a notable scholar and poet. The author of a number of prose works on military and religious

issues, his writings paved the way for the next generation of Algerian scholars and reformists. The Arabic works that were published in Algeria during the first decades of the twentieth century are nearly all didactic. Apart from his prose works, Abdelkader left a number of patriotic poems, most of which were collected and published posthumously. His nationalist sentiments, expressed in the poems, inspired Arabic-language poets throughout the Maghreb in the early decades of the twentieth century when feelings of national awakening began to be openly expressed in writing.

It was in Arabic newspapers and periodicals that the beginnings of modern Arabic literature in Egypt and the Maghreb emerged. A number of Arabic newspapers appeared in Egypt at the start of the nineteenth century. One of the best-known Arabic newspapers, which is still printed today, is the Egyptian *Al-Ahram*, founded in 1876 as a weekly. It became a daily in 1881. *Al-Ahram*'s service to modern Arabic literature has been immeasurable and unprecedented. The newspaper has always carried articles dealing with literary topics, as well as book reviews, poems, and short stories. It was in its pages that a number of outstanding literary works were first serialized, including some of Naguib Mahfouz's award-winning novels. The earliest newspaper in the Maghreb is thought to have been the Tunisian *al-Ra'id al-Tunisi* (1860, The Tunisian Pioneer), which was an official publication. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, that independent newspapers in Arabic began to appear in the Maghreb. In Algeria, which was a French colony (1830–1962), and not a protectorate like Morocco (1912–56) and Tunisia (1881–1956), the first decades of the twentieth century are marked by the publication of three Arabic periodicals, *Al-Muntaqid* (1925) (The Critic), *Al-Shihab* (1925) (The Meteor), and *Al-Basa'ir* (1936) (Insights), founded by the Association of Ulema ("learned men"). The Ulema were a reformist group who, under their leader Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1889–1940), adopted the slogan "Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language and Algeria is my homeland." The articles they published in their newspapers were mostly religious or didactic, calling for social and political reforms. The Ulema advocated spreading the true message of Islam, freeing it of any superstitious beliefs, and encouraging Arabic scholarship throughout French-occupied territories. Among Ben Badis's many works was a commentary on the Qur'an that appeared in *Al-Shihab*. The Ulema included two poets among their founding members, Tayyib al-'Uqbi (1888–1960) and Muhammad al-'Id Khalifa (1904–79). They frequently published selections of classical poetry in their newspapers and also welcomed original new verse. Much of the poetry written during the first decades of the twentieth century, however, is imitative of the style of classical poetry and hence lacking in originality.

Twentieth-century Arabic poetry is usually divided into three main stages: neoclassical, which began in the nineteenth century and continued until the early years of the twentieth; romantic, which was fashionable during the first half of the twentieth century; and modernist, which became widespread from about the 1950s. In Egypt neoclassical poetry enjoyed considerable popularity. The leading exponent of the neoclassical movement was Ahmad Shawqi (1868–1932), whose poems include eulogies and panegyrics, imitative of the style of Arab poets of the classical era. Known in the Arab world as the "Prince of Poets," Shawqi also wrote a number of plays in verse, mainly with classical themes, including *Masra'Kilyobatra* (1929) (The Death of Cleopatra) and *'Antar* (1931) based on the hero of the *Adventures of 'Antar*. Neoclassical poetry was also popular in the Maghreb countries. In Algeria al-'Uqbi and Khalifa wrote in the neoclassical style. As the new trends that were being introduced into Arabic poetry were of western provenance, Algerian poets were reluctant to allow what they considered to be non-Arab influences into their compositions. In Morocco also, the *salafiyya* ("return to the past") movement, which had a number of followers from among scholars and poets, was opposed to any literary innovation. Some distinguished Moroccans, among them 'Allal al-Fasi (1910–74), a highly respected Moroccan academic and writer who was also a poet, encouraged the development of patriotic poetry known as *al-Shi'r al-Nidhali* ("protest poetry"). Written in the classical mode, patriotic poetry became widespread in other African countries. In Algeria the best-known patriotic poems are by the nationalist poet Mufdi Zakaria (1913–77), who wrote the famous exhortative song *Min Jibalina* (1932, From Our Mountains). Apprehended by the colonial authorities for his anti-French writings, he was imprisoned. It was from his prison cell, in 1955, that he composed the poem *Qasaman* (An Oath), which has become the Algerian national anthem. *Qasaman* has been published in a collection entitled *Al-Lahab al-Muqaddas* (The Holy Spark) that comprises Zakaria's best-known poems. Tunisians also wrote protest poetry in the first decades of the last century, when poets joined forces with essayists and religious leaders to protest against the French occupation of their country.

The "first major literary figure from the Maghreb to make an impact on Arabic literature is undoubtedly the Tunisian poet Abu'l-Qasim al-Shabbi (1909–34)" (Martínez Montávez 1974: 99), who was hailed as a nationalist. The poems he wrote during his short life have been published in a collection, *Aghani al-Hayat* (1955) (Songs of Life). Written in a spontaneously simple, yet lyrical style, they convey the poet's feelings of love, his veneration of nature, and his longing for freedom. Al-Shabbi was influenced by western literature, which he read in Arabic translation. His poetry, in which mystical elements can be

detected, is representative of the romantic movement in Arabic poetry that was then emerging. The initiators of the romantic movement in Egypt founded a monthly periodical in 1932 that they called *Apollo*. They also established the Apollo Society, whose first president was Shawqi. The society welcomed members from all over the Arabic-speaking world whose contributions they published in their periodical. Although *Apollo* was founded just two years before al-Shabbi died, some of his later poems were published in it. Another important poet who emerged during this period is the Sudanese Yusuf Bashir al-Tijani (1912–37). Like al-Shabbi, he too venerated nature and "enriched Arabic romantic poetry by his moving accounts of his mystical experiences" (Badawi 1993: 50). Al-Tijani's poems reflect influences of an Arabic literary tradition, western romantic poetry, and Sudanese sung poetry with its African rhythms. Although not as dominant a figure in Arabic literature as al-Shabbi, al-Tijani made a worthy contribution to Sudanese literature, which, three decades later, gained international acclaim with the fictional works of Tayeb Salih.

Al-Shabbi paved the way for future generations of poets from the Maghreb who gradually turned away from the traditional meters and rhyme schemes of classical Arabic poetry. His successors began to introduce new forms and meters, drawing inspiration from western models, as well as from the free verse movement which gained momentum in the Middle East in the early years of the 1940s, and which was highly influenced by western norms. From about the 1950s a number of outstanding Moroccan poets emerged. They include Muhammad al-Habib al-Furqani (b. 1922), Muhammad al-Sabbagh (b. 1930), ʼAbd al-Karim Tabbal (b. 1931), and Muhammad Bannis (b. 1950), who all write innovative verse that is free of the rigid rules of classical Arabic poetry. Tunisia also boasts a number of outstanding contemporary poets, among them Salah Garmadi (1933–82), Abdelaziz Kacem (b. 1933), and Tahar Bekri (b. 1951), who have all written poetry in both Arabic and French. In Algeria, apart from Zakaria, a number of poets emerged during the war of independence and in the first years of independence, although none among them has to date made much of an impact on modern Arabic poetry. Much of contemporary Algerian poetry is imitative of Middle Eastern poetry, dwelling on patriotic themes and particularly the Algerian war of independence.

Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia have a wealth of oral poetry in both Arabic and Berber. Many of these poems are now in print. Arabic oral poetry, composed spontaneously and transmitted orally, is usually in the vernacular, although some oral verse is composed in literary Arabic. The themes of oral poetry are varied. Apart from relating legends and histories of local populations, and celebrating the lives of local heroes, there are also exhortative war

poems and amatory verse, the latter describing the poet's yearning for the beloved. Some poems, particularly those in a more literary language, are in praise of the prophet. In the twentieth century, oral poetry came to contain political and nationalist themes, evoking each country's history and the way of life of its people. A type of traditional oral verse in colloquial Arabic that has always been popular with audiences, and is sometimes set to music, is the *malhun* ("vernacular"), an important aspect of the cultural heritage of the Maghreb.

Twentieth-century Egyptian literature is one of the earliest, and to date the most prolific, in the Arabic-speaking world. Most studies of Arabic literature tend to focus on Egyptian writers, to the exclusion of authors from some other Arab countries. In the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (Meisami and Starkey 1988), for example, there is no mention of Libyan or Mauritanian writers. In this chapter, however, I propose to include very few Egyptian writers and to concentrate on a more general survey of Arabic writing in Africa, focusing on literatures that are often overlooked. Before the twentieth century, Egypt, which was occupied by the British (1822–1914) and subsequently made a British Protectorate (1914–22), led the way in modern Arabic literature and thought. Napoleon's invasion in 1798 and the British occupation of the country turned the Egyptian outlook towards Europe. Literary works in English and French were translated into Arabic, giving Egyptian intellectuals an insight into western letters and culture. Western influence on Arabic literature was further enhanced by the arrival of Syrian Christian intellectuals who, fleeing religious persecution in their country, settled in Egypt, which they found to be a safe haven. They established publishing houses and founded newspapers and magazines. They were also instrumental in introducing genres hitherto unknown to Arabic literature, like the short story and drama.

Among the earliest writers to make an impact on modern Arabic literature are the Egyptian writers Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888–1956), Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898–1987), and Taha Husayn (1889–1973), whose literary careers span the beginnings and development of twentieth-century Arabic literature. All three, who were sent to France to complete their studies, succeeded in introducing western ideas into Arabic literature. Haykal was a novelist, critic, and politician. Early in his career he wrote what could be described as a pastoral novel, *Zaynab* (1913), credited with being the first truly Egyptian novel, and an important landmark in the development of Arabic fictional writing. Haykal was a strong believer in an Egyptian national literature. Both *Zaynab* and his second novel, *Hakadha Khuliqat* (1955) (She Was Born Thus), are set in rural Egypt and give a romantically nostalgic depiction of the Egyptian countryside

and the way of life of the people. Al-Hakim, who was a playwright, a novelist, and short-story writer, also believed in the importance of national literature. He composed patriotic songs during the nationalist revolt of 1919. Al-Hakim, however, is best remembered for being one of the most prolific playwrights in the Arab world. Having begun by publishing novels and collections of short stories, he took up drama, with which his name has become synonymous in the Arab world. Taha Husayn was one of the advocates of the purity of the Arabic literary language. He was totally opposed to any colloquialism in creative writing and shunned folk literature. Husayn's works of literary criticism are highly influenced by western norms. Husayn, who had a long and distinguished literary career, wrote several novels in which he introduced characters drawn on people from the poorer walks of life, a theme that characterizes the prolific output of Naguib Mahfouz.

Naguib Mahfouz (b. 1911), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988, is considered to be the writer who almost single-handedly made modern Arabic literature globally known. Mahfouz far outstrips most Arab writers in the quality and quantity of his output, produced over a period of fifty years. In spite of the fact that he wrote short stories and plays, his name is associated with the development of the Arabic novel. Mahfouz began by writing historical novels set in the Pharaonic era, before turning to sociorealistic themes. He wrote a number of works that portray the Cairo lower middle classes among which he was born and raised. His highly acclaimed family-saga trilogy – *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (1990) (*Palace Walk*), *Qasr al-Shawq* (1991) (*Palace of Desire*), and *al-Sukkariyya* (1992) (*Sugar Street*), whose titles are Cairo street names – concentrates on three generations of a traditional Egyptian family between the years 1917 and 1944. Published between 1956 and 1957, all three volumes were written before the 1952 revolution that overthrew the Egyptian monarchy. In all his works Mahfouz excels in depicting convincing scenes and dialogue. In his inimitable way he succeeds in turning literary Arabic into a language that approximates spoken Arabic, making his works easily accessible to a wide readership. Mahfouz has not been without his critics. His allegorical novel *Awlad Haratina* (1959) (Children of Our Quarter, trans. *Children of Gebelawi*, 1981) was the subject of a great deal of controversy when it was initially serialized in the Egyptian press. Set in an imaginary quarter of old Cairo, inhabited by characters whose names evoke Adam, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, among others, the novel was condemned by religious authorities and Mahfouz accused of blasphemy. The work was later published in book form in Lebanon in 1967, and has since been reprinted and translated into other languages, including English.

Another Egyptian writer who has become internationally known is Nawal El Saadawi (b. 1931). Born in a small village north of Cairo, El Saadawi trained as a doctor. She was subsequently posted to a village in a rural area in 1955. It was there that she began her literary career, publishing her first collection of short stories in 1957. A year later her first novel, *Mudhakkirat Tabiba* (1958) (The Memoirs of a Woman Doctor, 1988), appeared. The novel is an autobiographical work, based on her life and experiences as a doctor in rural Egypt. It is also a controversial work that criticizes, in uncompromising language, the malaise affecting Egyptian society, particularly in the countryside. This theme was to recur in her other works, most of which have been translated into the major world languages. Her nonfictional work *Al-Mar'a wa al-Jins* (1972) (Woman and Sex) appeared while she was working as Director of Health Education in the Egyptian Ministry of Health. Soon after its publication, the book was censored and El Saadawi dismissed from her post at the ministry. She continued to write controversial novels, among them *Imra'a 'inda Nuqtat al-Sifr* (1975) (*Woman at Point Zero*, 1983) and *Mawt al-Rajul al-Wahid 'ala 'l-'Ard* (1976) (The Death of the Only Man on Earth, trans. *God Dies by the Nile*, 1985a). In all her works, whether fictional or factual, El Saadawi speaks openly of the plight of women in patriarchal societies. What emerges in nearly all her writings is her "authorial domination" that "encloses her protagonists within a monologous discourse in which there is little sign of interior development" (Manisty 1993: 268).

El Saadawi's may be the only Egyptian woman's voice to date that has made an impact globally on feminist literature and women's studies. Yet in Egypt she is not the only woman writer expressing utter dissatisfaction with the status of women. Several other Egyptian women writers have challenged gender roles and patriarchal values within their society, among them Sakina Fu'ad (b. 1942), Radwa 'Ashur (b. 1946), and Salwa Bakr (b. 1949). Bakr, some of whose works have already been translated into other languages, including English, is set on challenging the power of patriarchy and presenting female characters in a new light. In her novel *Al-'Araba al-Dhahabiyya la Tas'ad ila al-Sama'* (1991) (The Golden Chariot Does Not Go Up to Heaven, trans. *The Golden Chariot*, 1995), she depicts several women from different walks of life, presenting her readers with the many faces and viewpoints of Egyptian women.

Despite the fact that Sudan has a fairly rich literary tradition, it was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that the country gained a place on the literary map of the Arab world, thanks to the efforts of one writer: Tayeb Salih (b. 1929). Salih became one of the best-known writers from Africa, following the publication in English of his award-winning novel, *Mawsim al-Hijra ila*

al-Shimal (1966) (*Season of Migration to the North*) in 1969. The setting of Salih's novels and short stories is Wad Hamid, an imaginary Sudanese village by the Nile. The Nile is depicted as both generous and cruel. As a navigable river, it provides a link with the outside world, and waters the doum-palms that are an essential part of the landscape. Yet it also claims lives. In *Mawsim*, Mustafa Sa'eed, the stranger who settles in Wad Hamid, drowns in the Nile, and his body is never recovered. In *Daw al-Bayt* (1971), the eponymous character, a white stranger, washed up on the riverbank in Wad Hamid, disappears in the Nile when he is engulfed by its waters. Salih's storytelling, in all his works, is reminiscent of the oral narratives of African *griots*. When he first began writing in the 1950s he developed the technique of the oral storyteller, talking directly to his readers and relating the events in a tone of intimacy and confidentiality. In this way the reader becomes not only an observer, but is directly involved in the narrative and the events described. The journey or migration motif in Salih's works is another aspect that is evocative of African folklore. In spite of the fact that Salih presents other settings, as in *Mawsim*, when the plot moves to England in flashbacks, Wad Hamid and the Nile remain the pivots around which the characters and the events revolve. For Salih, as for the majority of African writers, "life begins in the village" and wherever the characters go, "they carry the village with them" (Obiechina 1972: 201).

In the Maghreb, the short story was the first Arabic fictional genre to emerge during the early decades of the twentieth century. Short stories developed from the didactic prose pieces that appeared in newspapers during the first half of the twentieth century. The novel, a much later genre than the short story, developed in Tunisia and Morocco in the 1940s, while in Algeria it did not make its appearance until the 1970s. The person who is considered to be instrumental in preparing the ground for the Algerian Arabic novel is Réda Houhou (1911–56), a member of the Association of Ulema who was educated in Saudi Arabia. On his return to Algeria, Houhou joined the association and began to publish in their periodicals. The earliest pieces he wrote were essays, similar in vein to those written by Ben Badis and other Ulema, urging Algerians to rid Islam of the superstitions that had crept into it. Houhou also called for the emancipation of women and for secular education in Arabic for all Algerians. He gradually turned his essays into short narrative pieces to make them more appealing to readers. It was not until the war of independence (1954–62), that the Arabic short story became a full-fledged genre in Algeria when some Algerians, moved by events in their country, felt the need to express themselves in writing. Several writers who emerged during the war of independence abandoned writing after independence. The few who continued

to produce short stories were instrumental in the emergence of the Algerian Arabic novel.

The two best-known authors who have had a lasting influence on the development of Arabic fictional literature in Algeria are Abdelhamid Benhedouga (1925–96) and Tahar Ouettar (b. 1936). *Rih al-Janub* (1971) (South Wind) by Benhedouga is considered to be the first important example of Arabic novel writing in Algeria. Set in the countryside in the first years of independence, it introduces a variety of characters, including a young educated woman who is torn between the traditional world of her environment and the more liberated one that she discovers as a student. Benhedouga in this and later novels succeeds in tackling the question of women's rights and other important social issues. His novels are nearly all written in a linear style with the events set out in chronological order. Tahar Ouettar, on the other hand, adopted at the outset an experimental technique that has continued to characterize his fictional production. The war of independence, social malaise, and injustice are the themes that recur in his works. A committed Socialist, he documents important developments in post-independence Algeria, notably the Agrarian Revolution of the 1970s. Benhedouga and Ouettar dominated Arabic fictional writing in Algeria before they were joined by Rachid Boudjedra (b. 1941), a well-known francophone author who began to write in Arabic from 1981. Boudjedra's Arabic novels echo the iconoclastic, anti-patriarchal diatribes voiced in his francophone works. Boudjedra tends to experiment with the Arabic language, often coining his own expressions. For both Ouettar and Boudjedra, introducing innovation into language symbolizes a complete break from the established norms of classical Arabic. It is their way of forging a new Algerian identity in literature paralleling the country's emergence as an independent nation after years of colonial rule.

Arabic fictional writing in Algeria flourished during the 1980s when there was a certain freedom of expression in the country. A number of bilingual Algerians chose to write in Arabic, thus giving Algerian writing of Arabic expression a new verve. Nearly all these writers are men, the only two women to date being Zhor Ounissi (b. 1936) whose writings have been greatly influenced by Houhou's works, and Ahlem Mostaghanmi (b. 1952). Both Ounissi and Mostaghanmi are concerned mainly with political issues. They devote little space in their novels and short stories to feminist themes. With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the country many Algerian writers were threatened with death for daring to broach the taboo subject of sex and to question religious beliefs and practices. Several of those threatened fled the country. Some, like Waciny Larej (b. 1954) and Amin Zaoui (b. 1956), both

well-established writers of Arabic fiction, now live in France where they have begun to write in French.

In Morocco, where Arabic continued to be written while the country was a French Protectorate, novels began to appear from about the 1940s. Abdelmajid Benjelloun's (1915–81) two-part autobiographical work, *Fi al-Tufula* (1957, 1968) (On Childhood), is considered to be one of the earliest examples of the Arabic novel in Morocco. There are a number of outstanding Moroccan novelists, foremost among them being 'Abd al-Karim Ghallab (b. 1919), whose works portray Moroccan social reality. In one of his best-known novels, *Dafanna al-Madi* (1966) (We Have Buried the Past), he describes how Moroccans became politically conscious in the twentieth century. In an earlier novel, *Sab'at Abwab* (1965) (Seven Doors), Ghallab depicts the world of political prisoners, imprisoned merely for daring to criticize the status quo. Ghallab tackles a number of important topics, like the exploitation of poor rural workers who flock to the city in search of their livelihood. He stresses the importance of secular education on the eve of the twenty-first century. Issues of paramount importance in the Arab world, like the Palestinian question, are also themes that occupy Moroccan writers. Mubarak Rabi' (b. 1935), in his novel *Rifqat al-Silah wa al-Qamar* (1976) (The Companions of Arms and the Moon), focuses on the 1973 Arab–Israeli war. The novel won the prize of the Arab League Academy in 1975.

Both Ghallab and Rabi' have distinguished themselves as short-story writers, a genre that continues to flourish in the hands of able writers, among them Mohamed Berrada (b. 1938). Berrada began to write novels in the 1980s. His first novel, *Lu'bat al-Nisyan* (1987, reprinted 1992) (*The Game of Forgetting*, 1996) has been translated into English, French, and Spanish. Set during the last years of the protectorate, the work explores the ways in which childhood memories affect adult life. Narrated by several voices, it vividly depicts Morocco's modern history. Berrada is one of the co-founders of the Union of Moroccan Writers, some of whose members have gained international recognition.

A writer who distinguished himself both in the field of the short story and the novel was Mohamed Zafzaf (1944–2001). One of the most prolific of present-day Moroccan authors, Zafzaf began writing in the 1970s and published more than twenty volumes of fiction. His work portrays both positive and negative aspects of Moroccan society. Early in his career Zafzaf came in for a lot of criticism because he dared to speak openly about sexual matters, especially in his novel *Al-Mar'a wa al-Warda* (1972) (The Woman and the Rose) where he presents a central character who is obsessed with sex, drink, and drugs. In most of his works Zafzaf succeeded in presenting his readers with

tormented individuals desperate to express themselves freely in a taboo-laden society.

As in Algeria, Moroccan women authors of Arabic expression are still too few and relatively unknown. The two women who are known outside Morocco are Khannata Bannuna (b. 1940) and Leila Abouzeid (b. 1950). Bannuna's works are concerned mostly with political issues. She too has dealt with injustices committed against Palestinians. Abouzeid often introduces assertive women characters who are determined to establish themselves as individuals in a society that still sees women as dependent on men.

Tunisia is, without doubt, the largest producer of Arabic works in the Maghreb, despite its having been a French protectorate for three-quarters of a century. Perhaps the first Tunisian to become well known as a short-story writer is 'Ali al-Du'aji (1909–49) who also wrote radio plays and song lyrics. One of the most important novelists is al-Bashir Khurayyif (1917–83), who also wrote short stories. His highly acclaimed novel *Al-Digla fi 'Arajiniha* (1969) (Dates in Their Clusters) is set in the oasis of Nefta where the author himself was born. The novel describes the harshness of life in rural areas in southern Tunisia, and the animosity that develops between people because of deprivation and poverty. Khurayyif takes up a number of social issues. He is particularly concerned with the way women are treated, and this is vividly brought out in his works. A great believer in racial equality, he condemns racism in his novel, *Barq al-Layl* (1961), which tells the story of the eponymous character, a sixteenth-century black slave. Khurayyif was the first Tunisian novelist to introduce extracts of Tunisian colloquial Arabic into his narratives, a technique adopted by younger writers, among them Alia Tabaï (b. 1961) in her first novel, *Zahrat al-Subbar* (1991) (Cactus Flower). Tabaï is one of a number of Tunisian women writers, which includes Arusiyya al-Naluti (b. 1950), who explore contemporary issues affecting Tunisian society in their novels, collections of short stories, poems, and plays.

In Libya, scholarly prose and poetry in Arabic continued to be written during the Italian colonial period (1912–47). Fictional writing began in the mid-1930s. It did not become fully established, however, until well after Libya was declared independent in 1951. Yet Libyan literature remains purely for the home market. Libyan authors are rarely known beyond the country's borders, with the exception of Ibrahim al-Kawni (b. 1948) and Ibrahim al-Faqih (b. 1942). Al-Kawni, who began writing in the 1970s, has established himself as the best representative of contemporary Libyan literature. His many novels and collections of short stories have been translated into several languages. Al-Faqih

also began writing in the seventies. He published fictional and nonfictional pieces in various Arabic periodicals. It was not until the 1990s when his trilogy, *Hada'iq al-Layl* (1990) (*Gardens of the Night*, 1991), was published that he became well known in the Arab world.

Al-Kawni's works are steeped in African mythology and history. The majority are set in the vast desert that stretches westwards to the Fezzan, eastwards to the Hoggar Mountains, and southwards to Lake Chad, Kano, and Timbuktu. Al-Kawni, who is a Tuareg, was born in the desert but moved to Tripoli where he received Arabic formal education. His novels and short stories are written in Arabic, yet they resonate with the rhythm of Tamasheq speech, his Berber mother tongue. He often introduces Tamasheq words and expressions, which add color and authenticity to his works. Just as the Nile in Tayeb Salih's works is both bounteous and treacherous, the desert in al-Kawni's fiction can be welcoming and at the same time menacing. Travelers find refuge in it. Yet it is also the place where many of them die of thirst or are buried in the sand when the ferocious East Wind blows without mercy. The desert in al-Kawni's short stories and novels, notably his two-volume novel *Al-Majus* (1991) (The Pagans), is inhabited by both humans and *jinn*. Mixing reality with mythology is characteristic of al-Kawni's works. The humans are either white, nomadic, and Muslim, or black, sedentary, and animist. There is a lot of violence in most of his stories, and he dwells on descriptions of violent death. Living with nature, sometimes awake, and at other times hallucinating or having nightmares, al-Kawni's characters seem to be in search of an ephemeral paradise, the illusory oasis of Waw, which they yearn to reach.

The desert also plays a significant role in Ibrahim al-Faqih's trilogy. The first volume is set in Scotland, where the central character, Khalil, a Libyan, is studying at Edinburgh University. The six main characters include an Indian as well as a Frenchwoman, and two Arab men, one of them the central character. There are constant references to the desert where Khalil was born. The desert predominates as a setting in the second and third volumes in which the characters are all Libyan, with the main difference being that some of them are real, while others appear only in Khalil's dreams and hallucinations. Khalil is presented as a tormented, restless man, constantly in need of love, which he is denied. In his search for happiness and peace of mind, he goes to the desert to visit the tombs of his ancestors and to seek the advice of Sufis. By describing Khalil's dreams, the author is able to mix the real with the imaginary, and by choosing the desert as a setting, he is able to delve into the mythical past of Libya with its world of magic and holy men.

The Arabic novel in Mauritania dates from the early 1980s. Ahmad Wuld 'Abd al-Qadir, in his two novels, *Al-Asma' al-Mutaghayyira* (1981) (Changing Names), and *Al-Qabr al-Majhul* (1984) (The Unknown Grave), evokes rural Mauritania in the nineteenth century, before the onset of modernity transformed the country and changed the way of life of its people. The first novel tackles the theme of identity. It describes how the central character, a young boy sold into slavery, changes his name several times during his life, in order to be accepted by the various people among whom he has to live. The second novel is a nostalgic evocation of pre-twentieth-century life in the Mauritanian countryside. *Ahmad al-Wadi* (1987) by Shaykh Ma' al-'Aynayn, set in the present, depicts the struggle between urban and rural values. The central character, who is seduced by a western way of life, is gradually convinced by Ahmad al-Wadi, a recluse, to settle in the country and to lead a life totally removed from western influence.

Twentieth-century Arabic drama, drawing on both the western and African oral genres, is a flourishing art form throughout most of Africa. In Egypt there is a long tradition of modern drama in both classical and colloquial Egyptian Arabic that is known and liked throughout the Arabic-speaking world. In the Maghreb, theater has been an important medium, thanks to the efforts of people of the caliber of Abdelkader Alloula (1939–94) in Algeria, Tayeb Saddiki (b. 1938) in Morocco, and 'Izz al-Din al-Madani (b. 1938) in Tunisia, among others. Alloula built a varied repertoire of plays in his native city of Oran. He translated masterpieces of western theater and wrote his own plays, all in colloquial Arabic. His theater and the ensemble he formed became well known throughout the Maghreb. Tayeb Saddiki's repertoire is as prolific as Alloula's. His plays are greatly influenced by the oral folk literature of Morocco. He frequently introduces into his plays the character of the storyteller, a popular sight in market places throughout Morocco. Saddiki writes and produces plays in French, classical and colloquial Arabic. Al-Madani, who is known for his avant-garde writings, is a leading playwright in Tunisia. He cleverly camouflages contemporary social issues in his plays by setting them in an historic era. In Nigeria the increase in Arabic-educated intellectuals and the spread of institutes for the teaching of Arabic have given rise to the translation of modern English plays into Arabic, notably Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The year 1994 saw the publication of the first original Arabic language play, *Al-'Amid al-Mubajjal* (The Honorable Dean). Written by an academic, Zakariyau I. Oseni (b. 1950), it describes corruption in Nigerian universities.

At the close of the twentieth century Egypt still dominates as the most prolific producer of Arabic literature, whereas Arabic creative writing is still in its infancy in Mauritania. In Libya, only al-Kawni and al-Faqih have to date

made their mark internationally. In Sudan, Tayeb Salih is still the predominant voice, despite the emergence of several other Sudanese writers. In the Maghreb, Arabic writing is on the increase, and published material is becoming widely available, with the exception of Algeria where works are rarely distributed outside the country. In Nigeria, Arabic writing "seems to be well on its way to broader forms of expression" (Abubakre and Reichmuth 1997: 205). Despite the many stages of development Arabic creative writing in Africa has gone through in the course of the twentieth century, it is difficult to predict at the present time how it will develop and what the future holds for it in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. The other four pillars are: *salat* (prayer), *sawn* (fasting), *shahada* (the [Muslim] creed), and *zakat* (almsgiving).
2. See for example Camara 1997, where he quotes and translates verses from Seri ñ Musa Ka's poetry in Wolof in which Shaykh Bamba's name occurs.

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12

The Swahili literary tradition: an intercultural heritage

ALAMIN M. MAZRUI

Swahili literature, broadly defined as that body of verbal art originally composed in the Swahili language, is a product of what Ali Mazrui (1986) has termed Africa's triple heritage. It emerged out of a confluence of three forces: the indigenous tradition, the Islamic legacy, and the western impact. The indigenous contribution has, of course, featured primarily in the realm of orature; but, over the years, it has continued to affect the destiny of Swahili *written* literature that is the focus of this chapter. One must also bear in mind that the boundary between what is written and what is oral in the various genres of Swahili literature is not always easy to determine.

With regard to the interaction between the Arab-Islamic and indigenous factors, in particular, the general tendency, until relatively recently, was to privilege the former (usually seen as the "donor") over the latter (regarded as the "recipient") to a point where it has supposedly lost its local identity. But as Rajmund Ohly observes, "The overlapping of these two cultures – the local, Bantu and the Oriental – took place on the basis of mutual adjustment and not, as has been thought until now, on the basis of assimilation, so that a two tiered development of literature can be observed which embraces both the pure elements of Bantu folk culture and the inflowing Muslim-Oriental elements" (1985: 461). In fact, the so-called layers became integrated into a new organic synthesis and, in time, fused with other influences reflecting, among others things, the tensions between town and country, and between "gentry" and "commoner."

Particularly indicative of this cultural bias in the interpretation of Swahili literature is the controversy surrounding the earliest Swahili poet on record, the poet-king Fumo Liyongo wa Bauri. To the Swahili people, Fumo Liyongo has become almost an iconic representation of the depth, the achievement, and the ambience of their culture as a whole: "That Fumo Liyongo was at once a major poet and a 'hero' in the social world makes him, for the collective imagination, the embodiment of that combination of the poetic utterance and social practice

which epitomizes the Swahili ideal of a fully developed human potential" (Shariff 1991b: 154). Placed between the tenth and thirteenth centuries by oral sources, Fumo Liyongo has often raised questions about his religious affiliation on the evidence of his own poetry: Was he a "pagan" as suggested by Ohly (1985: 462), a Muslim (Shariff 1991b: 162), or a Christian (Knappert 1979: 68)? The record of Swahili literature over the centuries is replete with such examples of cultural intermarriages that continue to confound literary critics in search of easy answers.

The rise to prominence of a Muslim clergy, however, led to a systematic bias in the preservation of the Swahili literary heritage. Poems that were more "purely" Islamic now stood a much greater chance of preservation for posterity than those that were deemed to be less so in orientation. In the words of Assibi A. Amidu, "while the poems of Liyongo are much older than the Swahili version of the Hamziya [the thirteenth-century praise-poem on the prophet of Islam originally composed in Arabic] and were probably written down long before the 17th century, only the Islamic ones such as the Hamziya were approved of and preserved while the secular poems of Fumo Liyongo and his contemporaries were either suppressed or allowed to perish" (1990: 4).

With their modal partiality towards the written over the oral word, European colonizers later gave further credence and legitimacy to this Oriental-Islamic bias within Swahili literature. What existed in a written form – predominantly religious – was quickly and mistakenly taken to define virtually the entire scope of the Swahili literary experience. The fact that the Swahili themselves accorded greater value to their oral tradition and that at no point in their history did they produce a greater proportion of homiletic than secular literature now became submerged under new layers of Eurocentric prejudices.

The beginnings of writing in Swahili literature can be traced to the Afro-Arab contact in the East African seaboard that goes back to antiquity. According to the accounts of *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (by an unknown Greek author), Arab and Persian traders must have frequented the East African coast as early as the first century CE, if not earlier. There were also recurrent waves of Arabian migrants who were displaced by internecine wars in their own countries and found refuge, and eventually settled, in the East-African city-states. Over time, many of these settlers intermarried with the local population and Islam, once it established itself in the area soon after it was founded in Arabia, became an additional force in the consolidation of this Afro-Arab heritage. It is out of this cultural intercourse that the Swahili written tradition was born.

This first wave of writing used Swahilized versions of the Arabic alphabet akin to what is referred to as *ajami* in West Africa. Exactly when this mode of

writing came into being in the Swahili literary tradition is difficult to determine. The Hamziya poem celebrating the life of Prophet Muhammad, for example, is said to have been composed no later than 1652 CE (Knappert 1979: 103). The earliest surviving manuscript, however, dated about 1728 CE, is Mwengo wa Athumani's *Utenzi wa Herekali* (The Epic of Herakleios) – also known as *Chuo cha Tambuka* (The Book of Tabuk) – on the seventh-century military encounter between the troops of the Byzantine Emperor, Herakleios, and those of the Prophet Muhammad (Gérard 1981: 96).

This pre-twentieth-century literature was replete with homiletic *tenzi* or *tendi* (singular: *utenzi* and *utendi,* respectively) verses with a didactic or hagiographic thrust. The term *utenzi* generally refers to an extended narrative poem of defined meter and rhyme even though it often assumes an epic form and function. Structurally, the *utenzi* verse is made up of four lines – or, in the opinion of some, two with a caesura – with eight syllables to a line and an *aaab* rhyming pattern. Its language is often simple, making little use of such features as extended metaphors, allegories, and symbolism. And because of its structural and stylistic simplicity it has lent itself well to lengthy versification of historical events and fictional narratives. There are *tenzi* on legendary characters like Fumo Liyongo, on the lives of various prophets of Islam, on wars and battles within Swahililand and elsewhere, and on many other subjects requiring extensive articulation. In length, the *utenzi* can run into thousands of verses. Shaaban Robert's *Utenzi wa Vita vya Uhuru* (1967a), an account of the Second World War from a Tanzanian perspective, for example, is comprised of some three thousand verses.

Prosodic developments in the Swahili verse tradition, however, were by no means limited to the *utenzi*. Indeed, by the turn of the nineteenth century, again under the impetus of the Afro-Arab contact, the entire Swahili poetic tradition had come under an elaborate prosodic system governing the use of meter and rhyme. The golden period of Swahili literature, with poetry as its pivotal force, had now been properly ushered in.

Much of the earliest written Swahili literature was predominantly Islamic both because of the subject it treated and because of the influence of the wider Muslim culture on canons of composition in East Africa. What Thomas Hodgkin said of Ghana's Islamic literary tradition, then, was also true of the earlier stages of much of written classical Swahili literature: "It is a literature which can be properly called 'Islamic' in the sense that its authors were Muslims, trained in the Islamic sciences, conscious of their relationship with the Islamic past, and regarding literature as a vehicle for the expression of Islamic values" (1966: 442).

Some of the verse forms that emerged during this period have, in fact, continued to be used for themes that are almost entirely religious. These have included: the *wajiwaji* and the *ukawafi* – compositions of five-line and four-line verses, respectively, with fifteen syllables to a line and caesuras between the sixth and seventh and, again, between the tenth and eleventh syllables; and the *inkishafi* (with four lines to a verse, ten syllables to a line, with a caesura between the sixth and seventh syllables). These types continue to defy any separation between form and substance.

Significant also is the fact that much of the poetry was composed by the *ulamaa,* scholars versed in Islamic theology and jurisprudence, all with a high sensitivity to the metaphysical relationship. These early poets "lived and worked on the northern coast of Kenya . . . writing religious and didactic verse in the Arabic script and using one of the northern dialects of Swahili" (Whiteley 1969: 18). It is reasonable to assume, then, that the *ajami* tradition in Swahili literature may itself have arisen out of a need to reach the common Mswahili (Swahili person) spiritually through the effective medium of poetry. In the course of Qur'anic instruction many Swahili acquired the capacity to read in the Arabic alphabet without the capacity to understand the Arabic language. *Ajami* became the bridge between the legacy of a foreign medium and literacy in an indigenous language.

One of the most renowned of these *ulamaa*-poets was Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali bin Nasir (1720–1820 CE), a descendant of a long line of Swahili scholars. His best-known composition is the *Al-Inkishafi* (Self-Examination). In the poem, Nasir draws inspiration from the historical ruins of Pate and draws the analogy of death from them. By reflecting on the once accomplished and splendid achievements of the Swahili people of Pate, the poet castigates his own heart and urges it to take its cue from the fallen ruins and ephemeral nature of life. Describing the depths beneath and beyond the grave with terrifying clarity reminiscent of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, he urges his heart not to take this world seriously:

Ewe moyo wangu nini huitabiri!
  Twambe u mwelevu wa kukhitari
Huyui dunia ina ghururi
  Ndia za tatasi huzandamaye?

Suu ulimwengu uutakao
  Emale ni lipi upendeyao?
Hauna dawamu hudumu nao
  Umilikishwapo wautendaje?

Why, O my soul, heed'st not thy Future Fate!
 Soothly, if thou wert wise, discriminate
Would'st not perceive this world of rain frustrate?
 Why to its turmoiled path dost ever turn? . . .

This mortal life, this vale of thy desire,
 Where doth its virtue lie, that thou admire?
Nor Earth, nor man, for ever shall endure
 E'en had'st thou mortal power, what could'st attain?
(Trans. by Hichens 1969: 58–65)

He then almost begs his heart to repent its past sins and pray for eternal peace and happiness that can only be found in the life after death. Other celebrated *tenzi* of this period include Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali bin Nasir's *Takhmisa ya Liyongo* (on the events surrounding the life and tragic end of the Swahili poet-hero Fumo Liyongo); Abdalla Mas'ud Mazrui's *Utenzi wa Al-Akida* (an historical chronicle in verse of the intrigues in the power struggles between the *akida* [commander], Muhammad bin Mbarak Mazrui, and the Omani governor of Mombasa); and Abubakar Mwengo's *Utenzi wa Katirifu* (on the supposed romance between a wealthy Muslim man and Hasina, the daughter of a slain "pagan" king, that leads to conspiracies and, subsequently, to a series of battles between Muslim forces and those of non-believers in Islam).

It is also from this period that we have records of the celebrated woman poet, Mwana Kupona binti Mshamu (1810–60), and her poem, *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona*. Composed in 1858 shortly before her death, the poem was intended to be an instructional guide for her seventeen-year-old daughter, Mwana Hashima binti Mataka, on the place, roles, duties, and responsibilities of a woman in respect of her husband. Today, the work stands as one of the most famous among the *tenzi*. Its accomplishments can be attributed as much to its tone and humor as to the flow of its language and the style intrinsic to the work: "The poem is a masterpiece of allusions that play up the male ego in a society where men see themselves as masters over their womenfolk, while at the same time instructing the intelligent woman to treat the opposite sex as she would an infant" (Shariff 1991a: 46). More recently, in fact, the poem has begun to generate some controversy as to its ideological orientation. Some argue that it affirms and reinforces the patriarchal order in Swahili society, while others see in it a subversive, if disguised, anti-hegemonic discourse. Amidst this controversy, however, Mwana Kupona continues to enjoy a place of note among Swahili poets: shops, restaurants, sewing businesses, and cultural forums are some of the projects that bear her name.

While Mwana Kupona has rightly attracted the greatest attention among women poets, women have generally had a profound influence on Swahili verse. Even when they do not receive the acclaim that they deserve, some of the best verse in the Swahili literary tradition continues to be the product of female genius. Furthermore, women have been central in the conservation of works of poetry of the classical type, both in their oral and written forms, and it is to them that people usually turn for the most eloquent recitations. Ali A. Jahadhmy has noted, in connection with the Swahili of the island of Lamu, that its women "in the past as well as in the present have been the custodians of Swahili poetry; in fact, some of the best verse literature has come from the pen of women . . . Zena Mahmud has just completed a most authoritative work on Swahili poetry . . . She is, with a few others, carrying on the tradition of the women of Lamu as keepers of the Swahili verse tradition" (1975: 28).

The nineteenth century, however, also saw the rise of a written poetic tradition posturing towards the secular. Everyday issues of social and political importance were captured in verse and preserved for posterity in the Swahili-Arabic alphabet. The leading spirit behind the popularization of this more secular poetic tradition was the inimitable Muyaka wa Mwinyi Haji (1776–1840), who lived and composed in Mombasa on the coast of Kenya. Muyaka marks the beginning of a gradual shift of the Swahili poetic genius from the northern coast of Kenya (Lamu and its archipelago) to Mombasa, a shift precipitated in part by a conjucture of new historical and political circumstances in the region.

In the hands of Muyaka, the quatrain (or *shairi* in the Swahili language) attained its rightful place as an important genre in the Swahili poetic diction. The *shairi*, comprised of four-line verses, a sixteen-syllable meter with a middle caesura and a final rhyming pattern, is often used for the more grave subject matter. Muyaka produced *shairi* poems with an unmatched mastery on the topical issues of his period. He wrote of love and infidelity, prosperity and drought, the sex-exploits of key figures of his time, and the calamities of the Mombasans. Above all, Muyaka became the celebrated poet of the Mazrui reign of Mombasa in the first half of the nineteenth century. And his war poetry, during the rivalry between Mombasa and other city-states, continues to excite the imagination of the Swahili to the present. In one of his war-inspired poems, for example, he boasts:

Ndimi taza nembetele, majini ndimi mbuaji
Nishikapo nishikile, nyama ndimi mshikaji
Ndipo nami wasinile, nimewashinda walaji
Kiwiji samba wa maji, msonijua juani!

> Maji yakijaa tele, huandama maleleji
> Pepo za nyuma na mbele, nawinda wangu windaji
> Huzamia maji male, male yasofika mbiji
> Kiwiji simba wa maji, msonijua juani!
>
> I roam the seas, a hunter bold, in waters deep I slay!
> And in my fearsome grip I hold, relentlessly, my prey.
> My foes would rend my flesh! Behold! Tis them I hold at bay!
> For I am fierce and valiant, aye! The lion of the seas.
>
> When high the surging rollers leap and squall, toss white the spray,
> When back and forth the wild winds sweep, I hunt my hunter's way!
> I sink in the depths of the water's deep, whose surge no ship may stay!
> For I am fierce and valiant, aye! The lion of the seas.
>
> (Trans. by Gérard 1981: 103)

So central was Muyaka's poetry in the power struggles between Swahili city-states during his time, that scholars of his works liken him to the court-poets of Europe.

Muyaka's genius lay partly in his linking the social relationship with the relationship of the ego. The poetry of the private self is more limited in Afro-Islamic literature than in Afro-European literature. But poets like Muyaka helped to build bridges between individual privacy and public concern.

The secularization of Swahili written poetry within the traditional prosodic framework continued into the colonial period. In the words of Albert Gérard, "while Muslim subject-matter remained paramount in Swahili literature, colonial enterprise fostered the growth of a [new] trend . . . the use of the epic forms for handling secular topics and contemporary events" (1981: 119). Of particular significance is poetry seeking to document colonial conditions and anticolonial struggles in what had become German East Africa. Hemed al-Buhry's *Utenzi wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima* (The Epic of German Invasion of Mrima, 1955), and Abdulkarim bin Jamaliddin's "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" (The Epic of the Maji-Maji War, 1957) are some prominent examples of this new poetic development.

The classical Swahili tradition, however, continued to exert an impact on the postcolonial period. The themes, style, and tone of Muyaka's poetry, in particular, have continued to influence modern poets like Abdilatif Abdalla, Kaluta Amri Abedi, Zena Mahmud, Mwalimu Hassan Mbega, Ahmad Sheikh Nabhany, and Ahmad Nassir. Their poetry is replete with archaisms drawn from the work of poets who preceded Muyaka. To fully assimilate, appreciate, and evaluate their work often requires grounding in classical poetry. Swahili culture is so vital a component of their poetry that it is often difficult to

understand the nuances without some familiarity with the various registers of the Swahili language. Furthermore, the very fact that they have continued to compose on a variety of themes that are of direct relevance to the realities of modern Africa has vindicated the assumption that modern themes and issues are capable of being versified within the traditional poetic diction. Their poetry is both classical and inventive without being stilted.

The public concerns of some of these poets are not only secular, they are also sometimes political. Abdilatif Abdalla is particularly renowned for his politically oriented poetry. Radical in his politics, he was imprisoned essentially for supporting an opposition party in Kenya at a time when the political system was becoming increasingly autocratic. After a five-year term in jail on charges of sedition and libel, he compiled an anthology of his prison poems that span his entire experience in Kenyan prisons. His poems are militant and unrepentant in tone. The sense of isolation and the effects of solitary confinement are vividly recaptured in the imagery he uses. The anthology is reminiscent of the poems of Muyaka in which he castigated the treasonable conduct of some of his compatriots. Equally striking is Abdalla's nationalism. In one poem, reflecting on whether to embark on a self-imposed political exile by a finer flight of imagination, he puts himself in a position not unlike that of a crab: "Where else can a crab run to save into its own shell?" (Abdalla 1973: 77).

Unlike many of the African poets writing in European languages, the poets writing in Swahili within the traditional prosodic framework are seldom groping for identity. There is a conspicuous absence of poems obsessed with cultural alienation or with cultural conflict with Europe, or even poetry of the surrealist type. The only genre that comes close to the theme of "alienation" is the so-called poetry of political combat. This includes those poems, which appear regularly in Swahili newspapers, composed to condemn the evils of neocolonialism in its political sense and poems that recount the virtues of *Ujamaa* in Tanzania. The poets themselves were trained in the classical Islamic education system and, in most cases, suffered a minimum of cultural alienation. While the traditional Islamic system of education accommodated aspects of African traditional culture, the western system of education alienated and sometimes suppressed traditional value systems. The recipients of traditional Islamic education came out equipped with both the Arabic alphabet and the Roman alphabet and tended to use the two interchangeably. They became conscious of the existence of the legacy of Swahili literature before being initiated into the heritage of literature in European languages. They accepted the legacy of the *ulamaa*, the priestly poets of old, and at

the same time searched for a new idiom commensurate with their time and place.

In their contributions to poetry columns in Swahili newspapers, these poets also seek to influence standards of language use in the society at large. The poets constitute an *ipso facto* Swahili academy, serving as the custodians of the "very best" of the Swahili linguistic tradition that they seek to conserve and promote. As Ali A. Mazrui once observed, "There is a school of thought in English poetry . . . to the effect that poetry should approximate the ordinary language of conversation. But in Swahili culture there is a school of thought which would argue that ordinary conversation should try to approximate the elegant language of poetry" (1986: 245).

Closely related to the destiny of Swahili literature, however, was the development of the Swahili language itself. Even before the inception of European colonial rule, Swahili had managed to spread well beyond the frontiers of Swahili ethnicity and had acquired an important role as a medium of interethnic communication. But precisely because the language was still primarily circumscribed to trade functions, Swahili literature continued to be the exclusive preserve of people who were themselves ethnically Swahili. This status quo, however, was to be drastically transformed by the German invasion of Tanganyika in 1885, and British colonization of Kenya, Uganda, and Zanzibar around 1895, as a new Swahili literature began to evolve from outside the traditional boundaries.

The earlier phase of this colonial linguistic history was virtually dominated by Christian missionaries who, inspired by their evangelical concerns, struggled to learn Swahili and in time rendered various sections of the Bible into the language using the Latin script. The missionaries were also initially responsible for exposing the west to Swahili literature by making its folktales available both in writing and in translation in European languages, as well as for introducing the west to Swahililand by having some English texts translated into Swahili. The Swahili versions of some of Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Aesop's Fables*, for example, were all produced during this early phase of the colonial dispensation (Rollins 1983: 113–14).

Later, the Germans widened the use of Swahili and raised its status by making it the official language at the lower levels of their colonial administration. The British after them continued with this policy in Tanganyika and extended it, to a lesser extent, to parts of Kenya. But the British also went a step further by introducing the language into schools and by encouraging its teaching as a subject in much of the Swahili-speaking area. They also promoted its use as a medium of instruction in lower elementary education throughout Tanganyika

and Zanzibar – the two constituting what is today called Tanzania – and the native Swahili-speaking area of Kenya.

This new role of Swahili as an academic language naturally placed the question of instructional materials for schools on the colonial educational agenda. An (East African) Inter-Territorial Language Committee was thus set up in 1930, partly to standardize the language and its new Latin-based orthography, and to encourage local Africans to write creative works in the language. What came to be known as "Standard" Swahili was now in the making based, supposedly, on the Zanzibar dialect of the language. Though initially opposed by the Swahili themselves, especially in Kenya, due to its seeming artificiality, the new imposed norm rapidly established roots in East Africa, especially among non-native speakers. The orthographic Latinization of Swahili was now also in full swing and would gradually marginalize Swahili-Arabic writing altogether.

In their continued efforts to address the urgent need for school readers in Swahili, the British translated even more of their own literary classics into the language. Between the late 1920s and early 1940s, therefore, there was a proliferation of translated creative works, which included R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Rudyard Kipling's *Mowgli Stories*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* and *King Solomon's Mines*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and others. By 1940, these British models in Swahili had sufficiently inspired the local population to stimulate new writing by East Africans themselves. These efforts were given further encouragement through the establishment of the East African Literature Bureau in 1948 with its primary focus on publishing Swahili language texts.

European involvement in setting a new written norm for the Swahili language and its literature within the first half-century of colonial rule, therefore, was immense. According to Jack Rollins, "In terms of literary influence, one set of figures alone will explain more than several paragraphs. Between the years 1900 and 1950, there were approximately 359 works of prose published in Swahili; 346 of these were written by Europeans and published mainly in England and Germany. Many of these were translations: Swift, Bunyan, Moliere, Shakespeare, but none more pervasive, in more abundance, and having more effect than the Bible" (1985: 51). These biblical narratives in Swahili included not only the books of the Bible itself, but also hymn books, catechisms, prayer books, and booklets on the lives of individual saints.

There were also Swahili journalistic ventures of one type or another, going back to the time of German rule in Tanganyika and which, sometimes, carried short stories. *Msimulizi* (The Narrator) came into being in 1888, and

Habari za Mwezi (Monthly News) in 1894. The two were soon followed by *Pwani na Bara* (The Coast and the Inland) and *Rafiki* (Friend) by the competing German Protestant Mission and the German Catholic Mission, respectively. These experiments continued during the period of British colonial rule, initially under the impetus of British colonial administrators like A. B. Hellier.

In his statistics, Rollins is unlikely to have included the works published by Muslim scholars like Sheikh Al-Amin bin Ali Mazrui and Sheikh Abdalla Saleh Farsy. Nonetheless, the overwhelming proportion of the widely circulating Euro-Christian-produced materials, using what was conceived to be Standard Swahili, came to set the linguistic standard to which East Africans, including the Swahili people themselves, were now expected to adhere. The dis-Islamization of Swahili, its ecumenicalization, was now rapidly under way and was to affect the destiny of Swahili literature in some major ways in the decades to come.

But unlike the classical period of Swahili writing which emanated from the Kenya coast, the more modern phase of Swahili literature that was partly set in motion by the African–European encounter, developed its strongest roots in Tanzania, where Standard Swahili was supposedly born. And while colonialism helped in consolidating the secular tradition in Swahili literature, it also impelled the emergence of new genres and subgenres, including prose fiction and written drama.

Prior to the colonial period the only Swahili prose writing of significance was in the form of historical chronicles. Preserved ones among these include court chronicles such as *Tarekhe ya Pate* (The Pate Chronicle) covering the years 1204 to 1885 and the *Khabari za Lamu* (The Lamu Chronicle) covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are also other chronicles dealing with the history of Kilwa, Shungwaya, Mombasa, and other city-states. This genre continued to be encouraged by both the Germans and the British and set the background against which modern prose fiction was to emerge.

Following in the tradition of the chronicles was James Mbotela's *Uhuru wa Watumwa* (The Freeing of the Slaves, 1934) a semi-historical narrative that is widely regarded as the precursor of the Swahili novel. Though composed by an African, *Uhuru wa Watumwa* is essentially colonial in its style, content, and ideology to the extent of exonerating the west in African enslavement. But it is nonetheless important "for the history of Swahili literature because it exemplifies how a new trend was arising in modern-educated circles that were alien and even hostile to the predominantly Muslim and/or Arabic elements in traditional Swahili culture" (Gérard 1981: 136).

The artist who is considered to have been most decisive in the development of modern Swahili writing, however, is Shaaban Robert (1909–62) from Tanga,

Tanzania. Though a poet of note, his most important contribution to Swahili literature was in prose fiction, and his early writings are a clear demonstration of the multicultural heritage at work. His first novellas, *Kufikirika* (The Imaginable, written in 1946 but published posthumously in 1967), *Kusadikika* (1951) (The Believable), and *Adili na Nduguze* (1952) (Adili and His Siblings) are all a fusion of a medium of composition of western influence and a stylistic tendency towards fantasy with a didactic orientation that express the legacies of both the African tradition and the *Alfu-lela-ulela* stories from the *Arabian Nights*. In his later works, *Utubora Mkulima* (1968a) (Utubora the Farmer) and *Siku ya Watenzi Wote* (1968b) (The Day of Reckoning), however, Shaaban Robert moves closer to the novel in the western sense, making little appeal to the fantastic, having a multiplicity of plots and a large number of concrete characters clearly described in some depth and located more precisely in time and place.

Inspired by a strong sense of nationalism with a literary mission to raising the status of the Swahili language, Shaaban Robert is widely acclaimed for the colorful and rich quality of his language. And his renowned poem on Swahili continues to galvanize Tanzanians in their attempts to enrich the language in various ways. Robert urges his compatriots to cherish the language, for Swahili is to the Tanzanian what a mother's breast is to a child:

Titi la mama litamu
  hata likawa la mbwa
Kiswahili naazimu
  sifayo iliyofumbwa
Kwa wasiokufahamu
  niimbe ilivyo kubwa
Toka kama mlizamu
  funika palipozibwa
Titile mama litamu
  jingine halishi hamu

Mother's breast is the sweetest
  Canine it may be
And thou, Swahili, my mother-tongue
  Art still the dearest to me.
My song springs forth from a welling
  heart, I offer this my plea
That those who have not known thee
  may join in homage to thee.
Mother's breast is the sweetest,
  no other satisfies.

(Trans. by Jahadhmy 1975: 3)

A Mswahili of Yao origin (from Malawi), Shaaban Robert served as a symbolic bridge between the Swahili and non-Swahili cultural universes at a time when Swahili literature was rapidly ceasing to be an exclusively Swahili ethnic phenomenon. Its boundaries were expanding beyond the East-African coast, beyond the home of the Swahili where it was born. The trend towards the de-ethnicization of Swahili literature in Tanzania was further consolidated by the country's leftist move to *Ujamaa,* a policy that fostered the rise of Swahili as the national and official language of the new East-African state.

But if the Swahili language and its literature had become de-ethnicized in a demographic sense, Tanzanian society itself was becoming increasingly Swahilized in a cultural sense. The cultural label "Swahili" and the national label "Tanzanian" were gradually becoming synonymous. In the words of Kiango and Sengo, "Here at home [in Tanzania] Swahili is our guardian; it has reared us from the colonial era and united us to the period of our independence. It is the language that expresses our social reality . . . A Swahili means a Tanzanian" (Kiango and Sengo 1972: 10).

With his mastery of the language and his creative genius Shaaban Robert became a pioneer in the Swahilization of Tanzanian culture. His prose contributed to setting in motion a new trend in the Tanzanian imagination towards a trans-ethnic Swahili literature. He clearly anticipated Tanzania's nationalist spirit, if not its revolutionary ideals. His was work that "expressed the views of a generation which saw the necessity for social changes but turned away from the road of violent revolutionary transformation" (Ohly 1985: 474).

But if Shaaban was the greatest inspirational figure in the emergence of Swahili prose fiction, it fell to his national compatriot Euphrase Kezilahabi to raise it to greater heights of artistic achievement. After the publication of his first novel, *Rosa Mistika* (1971), Kezilahabi quickly distinguished himself as a writer of extraordinary talent with the courage to test the boundaries of cultural censorship in addressing topical issues of social and political concern in Tanzania. More significantly it was Kezilahabi who placed the "psychological novel" firmly on the Swahili literary map, addressing, perhaps for the first time in Swahili prose writing, psychological themes like alienation, with vivid imagination. A product of a university education both in Africa and the USA, Kezilahabi is described as "the greatest novelist of the Tanzanian mainland, who more than any other Swahili writer has been influenced by western literary trends" (Bertoncini 1989: 107). His national compatriots have likened him to Thomas Mann and Albert Camus because of the existentialist orientation of some of his writings (Mlacha and Madmulla 1991: 31).

Representing almost the opposite trajectory is another, equally accomplished writer of the modern period, Said Ahmed Mohamed of Zanzibar. With a university education from both Tanzania and Germany, Mohamed is a prose-fiction writer, playwright, and poet, even though he is best known for his novels. Like his celebrated compatriot Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed – the author of *Kiu* (1972) and *Nyota ya Rehema* (1976) (Rehema's Fortune), winner of the 1973 Kenyatta Prize for Literature, and one of the most skilled Swahili novelists of the twentieth century – Said Ahmed Mohamed has demonstrated remarkable dexterity in language use and great ingenuity in crafting the structures and plots of his stories. But perhaps more than any other Swahili novelist, he is the writer most strongly identified with "socialist realism." His works have a persistent focus on class exploitation and the class struggle. As a result, he has sometimes been regarded as the Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Swahili literature.

The works of Shaaban Robert, Kezilahabi, and Mohamed fall under the larger taxonomic scheme discussed by Mlacha and Madmulla who distinguish various types of Swahili prose fiction: the psychological and the social, the historical and the political, the autobiographical and the ethnographic, the utopian as well as the dystopian (Mlacha and Madmulla 1991: 29–43). There is also a rapid mushrooming of popular fiction, encouraged especially by the expansion of individually and locally owned publishing houses. The earliest seminal figure in this new Swahili fiction is the Zanzibar-born Mohamed Said Abdalla, the writer of, among other novels, *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* (1960) (The Ancestors' Graveyard), *Kisima cha Giningi* (1968) (The Well of Giningi), and *Siri ya Sifuri* (1974) (The Secret of Zero). This subgenre was soon to grow in leaps and bounds as Faraji Katalambulla and others began to make their contributions, with detective stories becoming particularly attractive. And underlying all this growth and diversification of Swahili prose fiction was an increasing tendency towards greater realism even as the oral heritage continued to exercise its influence, especially in matters of linguistic style.

A prose genre that has received far less attention than the novel has been the short story. East-African Swahili newspapers like *Mambo Leo*, *Taifa Leo*, *Baraza*, and *Mzalendo* seem to have served as the initial outlets for short-story compositions, going back to the early years of colonial rule. Later, beginning in the 1960s, *Kiswahili*, the official journal of the Institute of Swahili Research in Dar es Salaam, also began publishing Swahili short stories on an irregular basis. Anthologies of short stories, however, do not seem to have appeared until the early 1970s. An important stimulus in this direction was the BBC radio Swahili short-stories competitions that were launched in 1967. Some

of the submissions were later selected for publication under a series entitled *Hekaya za Kuburudisha* (Entertaining Tales), produced by Longman Kenya between 1970 and 1977.

A writer who has come to be recognized as one of the most gifted in this genre is the distinguished novelist from Zanzibar, Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed. His stories invariably won the first prize in every BBC competition. With a general tone that swings between irony and humor, his stories are lyrical, full of suspense and surprise, with characters that are rich and dynamic. Mohamed's creative genius in short-story writing was later capped by his single-authored collection of six stories, *Kicheko cha Ushindi* (1978) (Laughter of Triumph).

Equally accomplished in this genre is another Zanzibar-born writer, Saad A. Yahya, best known for his collection *Pepeta* (1973) (Rice Flakes). Assuming the voice of a detached insider, Yahya explores, with penetrating insight, the various spaces in the complex lives of residents of Zanzibar (his original home) and Nairobi (his adopted home) in the postcolonial period. Weaving tragedy and irony, Yahya proves to be an acute observer of the East-African condition, and his collection is a demonstration not only of his creative genius but also his profound humanity.

At the heels of Mohamed and Yahya has been their compatriot, the internationally acclaimed Said Ahmed Mohamed. Like Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed, Said Ahmed Mohamed also made his initial appearance in the short-story scene through the radio competitions of the BBC. Winning several literary awards, his stories were among those that later appeared in the Longman series *Hekaya za Kuburudisha*. Said Ahmed Mohamed also took part in the short-stories competition organized by the Swahili service of Radio Deutsche Welle, coming at the very top in every instance. A selection of the latter eventually went into making his anthology *Si Shetani si Wazimu* (1985) (It's Neither Spirit nor Insanity).

At this same period, Gabriel Ruhumbika produced his collection of four short stories, *Uwike Usiwike Kutakucha* (1978) (Crow or Not, Dawn Will Break). Varying widely in style, from quasi-realistic to re-crafted fables, Ruhumbika's stories are strongly didactic in their general orientation. But it is his compatriot Alex Banzi who seems to show even greater fidelity to didacticism and to the traditional *ngano* (story) in his choice of form as demonstrated, especially, in his *Nipe Nikupe na Hadithi Nyingine* (1982) (Give Me and I Shall Give You, and Other Stories).

Other distinguished writers of the short story have included the poet Mugyabuso M. Mulokozi (concentrating, in particular, on political satire and

quasi-revolutionary themes) and the outstanding and most influential Swahili novelist, Euphrase Kezilahabi (with his continued emphasis on the existential). Their stories have appeared in several places, including newspapers, magazines, journals, and edited volumes, but neither of them has produced single-authored collections in this genre.

Of all these writers, however, it is Mbunda Msokile who has emerged as the single most important beacon of the Swahili short story. He too began by contributing his short stories to local newspapers. After experimenting with a couple of novelettes, he came to acquire special prominence as a short-story writer with the release of his anthology entitled *Nitakuja Kwa Siri* (1981) (I Will Come Secretly). But it is his pioneering study of the short story, *Misingi ya Hadithi Fupi* (1992) (Foundations of the Short Story) that finally distinguished him as the most dedicated advocate of the genre. The first part of this lengthy text deals with theoretical and historical questions in the development of the Swahili short story. The second part is a vibrant collection of short stories by himself, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Mugyabuso Mulokozi, John Rutayisingwa, and Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed.

In spite of the many attributes that distinguish the stories of these various writers, however, most of them bear the unmistakable imprint of the *ngano* (oral tales), demonstrating the affinity and synthesis between the "old" and the "new." In the majority of cases, it is even impossible to tell where orality ends and the written begins in the continuing evolution of the modern Swahili short story.

The contribution of indigenous verbal arts to the development of Swahili literature is equally noticeable in written drama, even though the latter is more decidedly a product of the western educational system than prose writing. Inspired by English dramatic works studied in schools during the colonial period, Swahili written plays first made their appearance in the late 1950s, beginning with *Mgeni Karibu* (1957) (Welcome Guest) by a British expatriate teacher, Graham Hyslop, and *Nakupenda Lakini . . .* (1957) (I Love You, But), by Henry Kuria. Though this literary experimentation began in Kenya, however, it was in Tanzania that its greatest genius was to emerge, in the person of Ebrahim Hussein.

Hussein's career as a playwright covers virtually the entire spectrum of Swahili dramaturgical experience in the twentieth century. His first two plays, *Alikiona* (1970) (She Learnt Her Lesson) and *Wakati Ukuta* (1970) (Time Is a Wall), produced while he was still a student at the University of Dar es Salaam, were modeled on Aristotelian design. The frame of reference for these plays, as of many Swahili plays by other playwrights, is "a theatre that created and

sustained Aristotelian illusion, that used a curtain or at least blackouts by electric light to mark or, more precisely, to conceal changes of scenes (scenery), and that, first of all, constructed a series of actions all leading to a single climax" (Fiebach 1997: 22).

This early postcolonial period was also one of growing cultural nationalism as African intellectuals sought to affirm an independent African esthetic. In Tanzania this spirit of reculturation was further galvanized by the politics of *Ujamaa*. And it is against the background of this political mood that Hussein produced his best-known drama, *Kinjeketile* (1969). Not only did the play center on a nationalist theme of historical importance, the Maji-Maji war against German colonial rule in Tanganyika, it adopted Brechtian dramaturgy, which was widely regarded as having a closer affinity with African performance arts than Aristotelian dramaturgy.

As an independent playwright, however, Hussein soon moved away from strict adherence to Aristotelian or Brechtian theater. Instead, he tried to synthesize the legacy of the western theater and the tradition of indigenous arts. This is the dramaturgic trend that unfolds in his other plays, *Mashetani* (1971) (Devils), *Arusi* (1980) (Wedding), and *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* (1988) (At the Edge of Thim). In particular, "Hussein discarded the illusionist components of received European artistic models" and in the process created a uniquely African drama out of Aristotelian foundations (Fiebach 1997: 28–29).

In the mid-1970s, Hussein also published two dramatic monologues, *Ngao ya Jadi* (1976, Shield of the Ancestors) and *Jogoo Kijijini* (1976, Rooster in the Village), which draw almost exclusively from the *ngano* (storytelling) and *kitendawili* (riddle) traditions of the Swahili. But it is Hussein's compatriot Penina Mlama (alias Penina Muhando) – the producer of *Hatia* (1972, Guilt), *Pambo* (1975, Decoration), and *Lina Ubani* (1982b, There Is a Remedy), among other plays – who has more consistently been associated with the African performance experience in her dramaturgy. Her plays have often been refreshingly sensitive to the different registers of the Swahili language and have been quite successful in integrating song, dance, and ritual, adding to the Africanness of their theatrical form. Commenting on one of her productions, Micere Mugo has noted that Penina "succeeds in this play, as few artists can, in engaging the emotions of the audience, so that they become completely and involuntarily absorbed in the fate of the characters. *Hatia* has an easy-flowing style, is arresting and commanding in effect, mainly because the playwright has such a tremendous capacity for creating suspense" (Mugo 1976: 139).

In the meantime, the appearance of Said Ahmed Mohamed's *Amezidi* (1996) (Gone Beyond the Limits), with its inclination toward an African theater of

the absurd, demonstrates the continuing potential of a multicultural synthesis in Swahili dramaturgy. Ahmed himself acknowledges the influence of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, *The Chairs*, and *The Lesson* on his composition of *Amezidi* (Njogu 1997: iv). But there is little doubt, in the final analysis, that *Amezidi* is a synthesis of traditions that is peculiarly Swahili in literary experience.

In addition to prose writing and drama, East Africa's contact with the west also stimulated creative experimentation in written poetry, as a new generation of poets sought to break away from the hitherto more strict confines of meter and rhyme. The first collection of Swahili free and blank verse was published by a British settler in Tanzania. The poet, Cory, was convinced that Swahili poetry as hitherto composed by some of its leading poets was inaccessible except to the highly learned scholar of Swahili language, reducing it to a sophisticated dialog between an elitist few. He attributed this problem to the impact of Arabic poetics on Swahili poetry. As a way of "remedying" the situation, therefore, Cory suggested that Swahili poetry seek a break from the Arabo-Islamic legacy, as an aspect of its modernization, and allow itself to come under the European influence (1958: vii). And it is on the inspiration of this mission that he proceeded to produce what is perhaps the first anthology of Swahili free verse. Similar sentiments were later to be expressed by African writers, like Kezilahabi, who contended that "For a long time Swahili poetry had turned into a dialog among a few people who understand it . . . There is need to bring it down to the level of the common person and get it to spread" (1974b: xiv; my translation). Contrary to the classical legacy, therefore, Swahili poets were now being called upon to adopt a poetic idiom that was close to the everyday language of conversation of "common folk."

But it was Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's Swahili translation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* that sparked an entire debate on the boundaries of Swahili poetics. Nyerere followed the English originals by rendering his Swahili translation of the plays in blank verse. Was this artistically admissible in the Swahili poetic universe? This debate was to grow, both in intensity and acrimony, with the appearance of more Swahili poems in blank and/or free verse by such leading writers as Ebrahim Hussein and Euphrase Kezilahabi. Some of its practitioners, like K. K. Kahigi and M. M. Mulokozi in *Malenga wa Bara* (1976, Poets of the Uplands), Alamin Mazrui in *Chembe cha Moyo* (1988) (Arrow in my Heart), and Said Ahmed Mohamed in *'Sikate Tamaa* (1980c) (Do Not Despair), have sought to maintain a delicate balance between received prosody and free versification. The result has been the continued use of meter and rhyme but in a manner that is non-traditional and more flexible.

Though still lacking in popular appeal, this new poetic style now seems to have succeeded in establishing a certain degree of legitimacy within Swahili literature. As a result, "free verse and metrical poetry are currently coexisting in a more tolerant manner than was hitherto the case. What is likely to result eventually is a dynamic coexistence of verse genres, and this will be enriching to both forms of poetic composition" (Njogu 1995: 149).

Whatever the genre or the style, however, much of the modern literature – especially in prose and drama – has tended to revolve around certain common themes of conflict of values. The most prominent of these is the conflict between tradition and modernity, which, in most cases, is intertwined with the conflict between the rural and the urban. While some works idealize the traditional, others are critical of it or aspects of it, the difference sometimes being determined by the class background of the writer. Saad A. Yahya's collection of short stories *Pepeta* (1973), Ebrahim Hussein's play *Wakati Ukuta* (1971b) (Time Is a Wall) and Mbunda Msolike's *Nitakuja Kwa Siri* (1981) (I will Come Secretly) all exemplify this thematic trajectory in Swahili literature. Relations between men and women, especially in matters of love, sex and marriage, have been especially productive as a topic for the exploration of this particular clash of values.

This same conflict, however, is sometimes presented in narrower terms as one between Africa and the west, between the indigenous and the foreign. This was particularly true of earlier writings that pitted Christianity against indigenous African religions, as in Samuel Sehoza's *Mwaka Katika Minyororo* (1921) (A Year in Chains). But other themes of conflict, like the indigenous versus western systems of education – for example, I. C. Mbenna's *Kuchagua* (1972) (A Matter of Choice) – and indigenous versus western traditions of healing have also been explored. In the realm of politics, examples of this thematic clash include Farouk Topan's *Aliyeonja Pepo* (1973) (The Taste of Paradise), J. R. Nguluma's *Chuki ya Kutawaliwa* (1980) (Hatred of the Colonized), O. B. N. Msewa's *Kifo cha Ugenini* (1977) (Death in a Foreign Land), and Mugyabuso Mulokozi's *Mukwawa wa Uhehe* (1979). And in some rare cases, as in William B. Seme's *Njozi za Usiku* (1973) (Night Visions), the indigenous is presented nostalgically as a past that has been obliterated by western and modern encroachments.

The emergence of the educated class, influenced by western liberal ethos and political ideologies, has also made the conflict between the individual and society a theme of growing attention in Swahili literature. Of particular concern has been the location of the individual in modern African nation-states where national unity is often promoted at the expense of sub-national

identities, or in more "traditional" societies that value collective welfare over individual rights and freedoms. The question of individualism features in many of Ebrahim Hussein's works. Euphrase Kezilahabi, on the other hand, has explored not only the problem of individual alienation (in his *Kichwamaji*, 1974a), for example, but also the conflict between private property and the more socialist land tenure system wrought by *Ujamaa*, as captured in his *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* (1975) (The World is a Stage of Confusion).

The clash between individual rights and collective concerns brings us directly to the theme of conflict between socialism and capitalism. Unlike most of the other themes in Swahili literature that have been approached from a more "universalistic" angle, the concern with alternative politico-economic systems betrays greater regional variation. The socialist-oriented Swahili literature from Kenya, for example, is essentially a reaction to the country's more overt neocolonial reality. It tends to locate the possibility of radical change within the context of specific class tensions emanating from center-periphery relations tied to global capitalism. Mass class uprising (of the proletariat, peasantry, petite bourgeoisie or some alliance / s of these classes) is often depicted as the preferred strategy of revolutionary change. Katama Mkangi's satiric novels *Mafuta* (1984) (Grease) and *Walenisi* (1996), Rocha Chimerah's *Nyongo Mkalia Ini* (1995) (Pancreas, the Liver's Oppressor), and Alamin Mazrui's play *Kilio cha Haki* (1981) (Cry of Justice) all fall within this domain of socialist literature to one degree or another. The socialist trajectory in this literature is generally utopian, in the loose sense of the word as an ideal to be aspired to, without the socialist system itself being explicitly articulated.

More experientially rooted is the socialist-oriented literature of Tanzania. But we do need to draw a distinction between the socialist literature of *mainland* Tanzania (or what was known as Tanganyika before its union with Zanzibar in 1964) and *island* Tanzania (encompassing the islands of what was once the independent nation of Zanzibar). The socialist literature of mainland Tanzania is more explicitly inspired by the living experiences of *Ujamaa* villages. Though there are some texts that are critical of the excesses of their leaders or that highlight some practical problems in the process of formation and management of *Ujamaa* villages, much of it seeks to demonstrate the socioeconomic and / or moral superiority of *Ujamaa*.

Within this socialist tradition we have, for example, K. K. Kahigi's and A. A. Ngerema's *Mwanzo wa Tufani* (1976, The Beginning of a Storm), in which the domestic worker, Kazimoto, who is exploited and abused by his employers, gains the sympathy and love of their daughter, Tereza; the two finally run away and find refuge and support in a socialist village. In John Ngomoi's *Ndoto ya*

Ndaria (1976, Ndaria's Dream), the leading character, Ndaria, is a rich farmer who uses every means at his disposal to prevent the introduction of *Ujamaa* to his village of Ranzi. But once he notices how flourishing a neighboring *Ujamaa* village had become in a few years' time, he becomes guilt-ridden, and subsequently does his utmost to turn Ranzi into an *Ujamaa* village.

Along the same lines, in the socialist literature of mainland Tanzania, we find writings that again support the ideals of *Ujamaa,* but are critical of the excesses of some of the leaders involved in the formation and management of the *Ujamaa* villages. These excesses include forced villagization, administrative mismanagement, and corruption. Some of this literature also highlights more practical problems of socialism, and of the socialist construction of *Ujamaa* villages without, however, interrogating the validity of *Ujamaa* ideals and claims. Examples of texts belonging to this category of critical *Ujamaa* literature include *Kijiji Chetu* (1975) (Our Village) by Ngalimecha Nngahyoma, *Nyota ya Huzuni* (1974) (The Star of Grief) by George Liwenga, and *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* (1975) (The World is a Stadium of Confusion) and *Gamba la Nyoka* (1979) (The Snake's Skin) by Euphrase Kezilahabi.

The socialist literature of island Tanzania, on the other hand, derived its inspiration not from the living experiences of *Ujamaa,* but from the bloody agonies of the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. When *Ujamaa* was promulgated as the politico-economic policy of the federated nation of Tanzania, Zanzibar was already on its revolutionary march towards socialism. As Kimani Njogu (1997) demonstrates, it is this revolution, and its class background and precipitating conditions, which have continued to inform the socialist-oriented literature of Zanzibar and Pemba writers like Said Ahmed Mohamed and Shafi Adam Shafi.

The important point to bear in mind here is that the road to *Ujamaa* in mainland Tanzania, though pursued bureaucratically rather than democratically, was ultimately peaceful, enjoying much popular goodwill and meeting no militant opposition from antisocialist interest groups. The road to socialism in island Tanzania, on the other hand, was marked by a tremendous amount of violence. For historical reasons connected with "race" relations on the island, and due to fears of counter-revolutionary attempts, Zanzibar experienced an undue amount of bloodshed in its quest for a socialist order.

Against this backdrop, therefore, the socialist imagination in island Tanzania became virtually entrapped in a discourse of rationalization. Socialist-inspired writers of island Tanzania seemed to be under moral pressure to explain the very basis and justification for the Zanzibar revolution. They have sought to highlight the feudal-cum-capitalist relations of exploitation and the inhuman conditions of the life of the underprivileged classes in pre-revolutionary

Zanzibar. The impression is thus created that the magnitude of exploitation and oppression in pre-revolutionary Zanzibar was bound to trigger a violent revolutionary upsurge with socialist aims. Mohamed S. Mohamed's *Nyota ya Rehema* (1976) (Rehema's Luck), Shafi Adam Shafi's *Kasri ya Mwinyi Fuad* (1978) (Lord Fuad's Palace), and Said Ahmed Mohamed's *Dunia Mti Mkavu* (1980a) (The World Is a Dry Tree), all betray this rationalizing tendency in Zanzibar's socialist-inspired literature.

In spite of its internal differences, however, much of the socialist literature of Tanzania has tended to omit reference to neocolonial capitalism and dependency. This is a trajectory that clearly distinguishes it from the socialist-inspired literature of neighboring Kenya. The focus on the home-grown system of *Ujamaa* in mainland Tanzania, and on the locally induced revolution at the dawn of independence in Zanzibar, have relegated the problem of neocolonialism to the periphery of Tanzania's literary imagination in Swahili. But now that *Ujamaa* has virtually been abandoned and the Zanzibar revolution discredited, we can expect new trends in socialist-oriented writing in Tanzania. This possibility is clearly demonstrated by Said Ahmed Mohamed's play *Amezidi* (1996), which explores, among other issues, the broader theme of Africa's dependence on the west.

The contrast between Kenya and Tanzania brings us to a fundamental anomaly of the East-African esthetic situation. It is Kenya, and not Tanzania, that is the home of Swahili esthetic genius at its richest. Most of the classical masterpieces of Swahili poetry came from the Kenya coast. Tanzania's contribution to Swahili literature has much more recent origins, attaining new heights of achievement only in the second half of the twentieth century. But the home of the older poetic traditions of the Swahili language, and the source of most of the great epics, was the Kenya coast.

Yet, in terms of general dissemination, Swahili culture is more widespread in Tanzania than in the Kenya nation as a whole. Tanzania, among African countries, has the smallest number of creative writers writing in English. The largest output in drama, prose, and poetry is in Swahili. The literature in general is a reflection of the nationalist character of Tanzanian society. Once the most radical nation in East Africa, it managed to decolonize the various aspects of life there, ranging from the emphasis on Kiswahili for legislative deliberations to the politicization of the so-called masses. Finding themselves in a radically tempestuous climate, the poets and novelists also preoccupied themselves with the problem of "development." An entire state-sanctioned movement of dialogic and dramatic *ngonjera* political poetry has evolved to extol the virtues of Tanzanian nationhood and the pitfalls of too excessive

a dependence on external cultural models. Day after day the predominant Swahili newspapers are inundated with poems urging greater reliance on the land as the backbone of the Tanzanian economy and lauding the beauty of the Swahili language, customs, and political and literary culture.

Kenya, on the other hand, continues to have a more limited geographical area of concentrated aesthetic achievement in Swahili. Most of the country's noted writers continue to come from the narrow coastal province. Outside this region, it is the Swahili language as a neutral medium of communication rather than Swahili culture as a rich vessel of heritage that has spread (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995: 119).

This situation may, of course, be only transient. As the language is becoming more consolidated in the country, Kenyans have begun to realize the value of "nationalizing" the cumulative esthetic accomplishments of the Kenya coast. In addition, the whole region continues to be in the throes of a cultural reappraisal that has received added impetus from the end of the Cold War, the entrenchment of global capitalism, the collapse of *Ujamaa,* and the increasing pressure for pluralism. And as these dynamics and counter-dynamics continue to unfold, only the future can confirm their full implications for the destiny of Swahili literature and its multicultural heritage.

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13

Africa and the European Renaissance

SYLVIE KANDÉ

If for the period extending from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, Africa's contribution to art, ideas, and especially world literature has been duly recognized, its contribution has yet to be acknowledged for preceding centuries, and in particular for the period from the decline of the Roman Empire up until the first European explorations along the continent's great river highways.

It has not gone unnoticed that in effect this category of African literature was "invented" in circumstances that make it more accessible to Europe, since its written beginnings are substantially in European languages and it takes over from, and sometimes counterbalances, ethnographic studies. Just as African art was "discovered" at the turn of the twentieth century and studied for the answers it might bring to the questions of form posed by Cubism, so African literature – that which emerged at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries – seems to raise questions that concern Europe itself, which was engaged forcefully and improvisationally in the process of colonization that inevitably radically modified the relationships of colonizers as well as colonized to history, language, and identity.

On the other hand, literary criticism seems to have contented itself with the absence of African (europhonic) letters from the time, roughly speaking, of St. Augustine (354–430) to Olaudah Equiano (1747 – *c.*1801) – an absence supposedly offset through a recourse to orality that is often abusive because exclusive. Thus, the Renaissance and the beginning of modern times, of crucial importance in the transformation of the visions of the world and in the constitution of national literary histories, seem, *a priori*, to owe nothing to Africa, its writers, and its texts.

As a means of periodizing western history, the Renaissance affords a break with the Middle Ages and an acknowledgment of the west's dynamism that opened it up beyond its previous geographic, intellectual, cultural, and

religious boundaries. Placed under the sign of conquest, secularization, and officialization of common languages enriched by a broader knowledge of ancient languages, the Renaissance interlaces tales of triumph, built upon the binary opposition of Us/the Others, "a holy saga of mythic proportions" (Mudimbe 1994: xii), placing under erasure another story of triumph that has heretofore been overshadowed in the west – that of the conquest of Islam over western Europe (seventh to fifteenth centuries), redirected, at the completion of the Reconquista, toward Constantinople, which was taken in 1453. Thereafter seeing themselves as the center of a system that admitted change, westerners ventured to the periphery where they "discovered" and subjugated the Other, sowing children and planting the Christian cross on the lands they had confiscated. At this stage, *métissage* was not envisioned as having a destiny beyond the places of colonial encounter, and especially not in the metropole. According to that logic, it can be understood that the presence in Europe of individuals of African origin was not discussed, except when the fame they had accrued protected them from oblivion, as was the case for Juan Latino and Anton Wilhelm Amo. The very paucity of information on one such as Juan Latino, for example, has led certain critics to consider his existence as purely legendary (Gates and Wolff 1998: 16).

In a useful inversion of perspective, one can nevertheless consider that it was the circumnavigation of Africa, that "third continent," by the Portuguese, who came to Kongo in 1482 and to the Cape of Good Hope in 1487, that gave the Renaissance its first impetus. Their installation in São Tomé and Principe in 1480 inaugurated the cycle of tropical production of sugar destined for Europe, thanks to manual slave labor. Again it is two African reference points that mark geographically the success of the Reconquista: the victory over Ceuta in 1415 by the Portuguese, and over Oran by the Spanish in 1509. All in all, the epoch was favorable to the circulation of people and ideas between America and the "old" continents, and also, despite the tendency to forget it, between Europe and Africa. It has been estimated that two-thirds of the gold that circulated in Europe and North Africa during the fourteenth century, an assurance of economic stimulation, came from commerce with West Africa, the reason for which a famous Spanish map drawn in 1375 shows the King of Mali holding in his hand a gold nugget. The accounts of the Arab travelers of the fifteenth century, such as Al-Bakri, Ibn Battuta, and Ibn Khaldoun, who informed the world of the existence of powerful African kingdoms, come to mind, as well as the undeniable similarity between the European university towns and African towns such as Timbuktu, between Columbus's enterprise and that of Abubakar, the predecessor of Emperor Kankan Moussa of Mali,

who in the fourteenth century launched his flotillas towards America. There is a wealth of syncretisms, of which Leo Africanus is a magnificent incarnation; and there is an abundance of mutual influences, illustrated for example by the introduction of the Sudano-Sahelian style in West Africa by the Grenadine poet-architect El-Saheli whom Kankan Moussa brought back with him at the completion of his pilgrimage to Mecca.

Although sporadic and insufficiently documented, the presence of Africans in Europe from the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment is a reality. We know that beginning in 1444 the first Africans to be deported as slaves were sent to farms in the south of Spain and in Portugal. European literature and painting of the period attest to the social roles that devolved in society to Africans, who were subalterns for the most part – minor pages or musicians – but sometimes endowed with power and dignity: we think of the portrait of Juan de Pareja by the Spanish painter Diego Velásquez (1650).

As a result, most often, of planters' absenteeism, this African presence, numerically important around ports such as Lisbon, Seville, London, Nantes, Bordeaux, and Amsterdam, elicited three kinds of reactions. The first was psychosis and rejection, which were legally translated in decrees of expulsion – from England in 1596 and 1601 (File and Power 1981: 6), and from France in 1777 (Deveau 1994: 242). As shown by the James Somerset case in Great Britain (1772), the reaction consisted in reinforcing the prohibition of slavery in the metropolis, which gradually led to a reconsideration of the legitimacy of the slave trade, then of slavery in the colonies. The third effect was integration, since a large percentage of these Africans mixed through *métissage* into the rest of the European population.

We must be wary of envisioning this presence as a simple reservoir of manual labor or as an exotic "Court of Wonders." We know that numerous Africans transported to the Americas – because they were Muslims – were literate in Arabic: the writings of Job ben Salomon (captured in 1713), Omar Ibn ben Said (1831), and Abu Bakr ad Siddiq (1834), among others, have been catalogued (Diouf 1998: ch. 4). In America or in Europe, those and others wished to maintain and extend their mastery of writing, or to become literate in European languages. From this point of view, Francis Williams (*c*.1700 – *c*.1770) and Phillis Wheatley (1754–84) are not exceptional figures, but alongside Juan Latino, Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein (1718–47), Anton Wilhelm Amo, Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho (1729–80), and others took part in an intense effort to affirm their humanity by claiming their entitlement to writing, which has proved to be one of the most powerful – although least often evoked – manifestations of resistance to slavery.

Let us turn especially to Juan Latino and Anton Wilhelm Amo who, individually renowned in their respective places of exile, chose, however, to engage their identity and their history in their writings.

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Juan Latino (Juan de Sesa) (*c.*1518 – *c.*1597) was in all likelihood born in sub-Saharan Africa, less probably in Spain. This man of letters owes his surname – conferred upon him by one of his co-disciples and adopted by Latino himself, and meaning "Latin teacher" – to the permanence and quality of his intellectual activities. He probably arrived in Seville, Spain, with his mother and was sold in Baen, then worked in the household of the Count of Cabra, Don Luiz Fernandez de Cordoba, as a footslave of the young Don Gonzalo, the third Duke of Sesa. Latino profited from the classes to which he accompanied the young duke to assure his own education at the Cathedral and the University of Granada – a city in full cultural bloom since its reconquest in 1492 at the end of the long crusade against the Muslims. Latino obtained several diplomas in succession: the Bachillerato in 1546; the Licenciado in 1556; and the Master of Arts in the following year. In 1566, after several years of study, he began to teach the humanities, probably at the Cathedral of Granada, with whose history his name remains associated. At that same time, he had developed a private practice, based on his literary and musical talents. Moreover, he married one of his pupils, Ana, the daughter of the Licenciado of Corlobal, which indicates that he gained manumission, either before or simultaneously. They had four children: Juana (1549), Bernardino (1552), Ana (1556), and Juan (1559).

The first African to publish poetry in a European language, Latino was also a teacher, grammarian, and translator. A member of literary circles, according to the critic Menéndez y Pelayo (Gates and Wolff 1998: 21), a companion of Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Hernando de Acuna, and Gregorio Silvestre, he appears as a major figure in the humanist movement in Grenada: a specialist of *studia humanitatis* (rhetoric, grammar, and poetry, especially), he was known for his ability to write elegantly, synthesizing classical culture and Christianity. Juan Latino is known through the numerous references that other intellectuals, critics, and writers, have made to his life and his work, which, for lack of translation, remains relatively unknown outside hispanophone and Latinist circles.

The extant works of Juan Latino are in Latin: in all probability they represent the essential element of his work, since Latino was considered one of the masters of the new Latinity, a literary tendency that developed in reaction to the officialization of Spanish (for which the first grammar book was published

in 1492) and to the preponderance of Arabic (banished in 1556). The *Austriad* (1573) is a famous set of 1,837 hexameters divided into two volumes of 763 and 1,074 verses. The preface contains biographical details and epigrams dedicated to Philip II on the occasion of his son's birth. A celebration of the military victories of Don Juan of Austria, the son of Charles V and the half-brother of Philip II, whom Latino had moreover met, the *Austriad* recounts the events of the Battle of Lepanto in the Gulf of Corinth between Christians and Muslims. In neoclassical style, the *Austriad* presents *exempla,* and is inspired by the metrics and vocabulary of Virgil, Martial, and Horace, yet with numerous Christian references.

A commemoration of the transfer of the royal remains to the monastery of El Escorial has also been preserved, in 600 lines in the same style (1576). There also remains a short, twelve-page pamphlet published in 1585, a tribute of the House of Sesa in which Latino grew up and a homage to his close friend, the third Duke of Sesa. Also attributed to him is an elegy bearing the compliments of Pope Pius V to Philip II for his military victories. His texts in Spanish include, notably, his address at the opening ceremony for the academic year 1565. Sanchez Martin mentions as an example of his translations from Latin into Spanish an epigram dedicated to Seville (Gates and Wolff 1998: 25).

Juan Latino's spectacular social ascent was attributed to the social and cultural climate in Europe which, from the sixteenth century, was more liberal than that in the New World and thus would have allowed certain Africans to be recognized for their talents (Fikes 1980: 212). Nevertheless, one senses that Juan Latino's itinerary was marked by a "sentiment of race" that was relatively active among his entourage and in his own consciousness (Erickson 1993: 503). Sometimes the object of pleasantries of a racial nature, Latino attracted interest in large part because of his marriage with a noble Spanish woman. Furthermore, despite his abilities, Latino only attained the rank of Professor at the Cathedral of Granada, in 1556, after strong polemics. Even then he was threatened with removal from his classrooms. Without minimizing the political nature of the conflicts in a society strongly marked by the Inquisition, which was as hostile to Jews as it was to *Mudejars* and those called Moors, and without minimizing the tension between Latino's humanism and the university's metamorphosis into a conservative center for the transmission of utilitarian knowledge (Martinière and Varela 1992: 288), it is likely that the specificity of his identity worked against him. On the other hand, it would be anachronistic to wish to see Latino as a writer preoccupied with affirming his Negritude. Nevertheless, we should note that Latino did not renounce Africa, and he even on occasion claimed all of it, for example, in the preface of the

Austriad where he writes, "The writer was not engendered in this region, he comes, Latino, from the land of the Ethiopians." We can thus imagine Latino as a man of letters who is at peace with his African origins, but working, in the humanist vein, toward the promotion of the Europe of the future.

The reception of his work attests to his importance in the world of letters in the Renaissance. The oldest sources are Bermudez de Pedraza, *Antiguidad y Excelencias de Granada* (1608, Antiquity and Marvels of Granada) and Ambrosio Salazar, *Espejo de Gramatica* (1615, Example of Grammar). Cervantes alludes to Latino's erudition in the preface of *Don Quijote* (1605). Diego Jimenez de Enciso dedicated a theatrical work to him, *La comedia famosa de Juan Latino* (1620, The Famous Comedy of Juan Latino), often interpreted as his biography (Ivory 1979: 613–17). Poets such as Gabriel Rodriguez de Aridilla have paid him homage. In the twentieth century, the works of the scholars A. Marín Ocete, Calixto C. Maso, and Valurez B. Spratlin should be mentioned, as well as the analytical and synthesizing article by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Maria Wolff (1998).

The Age of Enlightenment has strong ties to the Renaissance. The two periods should be understood as systemic bursts of energy directed at greater clarity in the understanding of the order of things, creative autonomy, and domination of the world of nature. Both are built upon opposition to the order that preceded them, supposedly obscurantist and strictly hierarchized. Between them there is a genealogical link: the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment pursued and perfected the movement of modernization begun in the fifteenth century. Numerous other parallels can be established between the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, notably, for our purposes here, the desire to discover worlds as yet unexplored and human beings uncorrupted by civilization – a desire soon formalized in a new science, anthropology, and in a renewed literary genre, the travelogue. Another similarity: whatever its ties with power, politics, and religion, the university remained the crucible where an emerging European culture was elaborated and cemented by the still preponderant use of Latin.

In the Age of Enlightenment, Europe's relation to Africa enters a period of transition: the question of slave trade, in full force, becomes the touchstone for new debates in all of Europe concerning the freedom and equality of the individual. Sometimes dissertation topics concerning slavery are even proposed for intellectuals in training (Anton Wilhelm Amo, Thomas Clarkson, Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Brissot among others). Nevertheless, the prevailing market relationship excludes the possibility of Europe turning toward Africa with concern for observable truths and tolerance of differences that

are characteristic of the Enlightenment. The slave trade, on the contrary, relaunches the capital of myths and received ideas already enveloping Africa and Africans. The myth of the Noble Savage embraced by a certain elite is no less injurious. The establishment in 1788 of the African Association that sent Mungo Park to Timbuktu, inaugurated the first explorations into the interior of sub-Saharan Africa, which were gradually to ensure the succession of the slave trade by colonialism.

It is therefore remarkable that despite the historical circumstances, marked by slavery and the subsequent invention of racism, two Africans distinguished themselves in the domains that best represent the respective spirits of these epochs: humanism for the Renaissance, and philosophy for the Enlightenment. It should be emphasized that Latino and Amo both took part, within the framework of their academic and literary functions, in two crucial stages in the elaboration of European culture, stages whose effects are still discernible.

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Anton Wilhelm Amo (*c.*1700 – *c.*1754) was born near Axim in the Gold Coast (today's Ghana). He was sent to Europe, in all probability to be educated as a priest of the Reformed Dutch Church. While still a child, he was taken into the household of Duke Anton Wilhelm Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel of Saxony, who gave him to his son after having him baptized according to Lutheran rites. As a young man, he was, moreover, confirmed in the same chapel in 1721 under the name Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Mohre. Amo was educated in that household, either by reason of the promise he represented in a country and age filled with Enlightenment thinkers preoccupied with pedagogy and equality, or by reason of the positive impression produced by Pushkin's ancestor, Ibrahim Hannibal. Hannibal was a lieutenant general of African descent of the artillery in the service of Peter the Great in Russia who, upon returning to France, stopped at the court of the Brunswicks, relatives of the czar (Sephocle 1992: 183; Bess 1989: 390).

Educated in classical languages, French, German, and Dutch, Amo enrolled in 1727 in the college of philosophy at the University of Halle, considered one of the capitals of the new spirit and endowed with a cosmopolitan student population. There he wrote a legal paper (now lost) entitled "De Jure Maurorum in Europa" (1729, The Rights of Blacks in Europe), then left Halle for the University of Wittenberg where his successes earned him the rector's written congratulations in 1733, as well as an active participation in the public life of the institution. Amo taught classes as a lecturer in several universities. He also taught private classes and developed a good reputation. As the first African

to obtain a diploma at the completion of higher studies in Europe, in 1734 he received a doctorate in philosophy, with a thesis entitled "De humanae mentis apatheia" (On the Impassivity of the Human Mind). In the same year, he prepared a study entitled "Disputatio philosophica continens ideam distinctam eorum quae competunt vel menti vel corpori nostro vivo et organico" (A Philosophical Discussion Distinguishing between what Belongs to the Mind and to the Living and Organic Body). Giving courses on systems of classical modern thought, he taught in the universities of Wittenberg, Halle, and Jena. In 1738 he began his major work, "Tractatus de Arte Sobrie et Accurate Philosophandi" (On the Art of Philosophizing with Sobriety and Accuracy), a series of readings clarifying his philosophical positions. According to Blumenbach (who cites "Von den Negern," *Magazin für das Neueste aus der Physik* and *Naturgeschihte*, Gotha, 1787; see Hountondji 1983: 130) and Abbé Grégoire (who cites the *Monthly Magazine* of 1800; see Grégoire 1996: 134, n. 8), Amo is said to have received the title of Chancellor of the State at the court of Berlin.

Living in what was to become Germany, until at least 1747 – the year of the production of a theatrical play satirizing his person, as mentioned in the periodical entitled *Hallische Frage-und-Anzeigen Nachrichten* – Amo, who was approaching fifty years of age, decided to return to Ghana. That departure may be due to the loosening of his ties with his protector; to the increasing hostility in society; and to his relative isolation in a place where, unlike Ibrahim Hannibal and Olaudah Equiano, for example, he had not succeeded in marrying. The last written testimony on Amo comes from David Henry Gallenger, a scientist who traveled to Ghana in 1753. Amo was said to have set up his household not far from his parents and in a section close to the Dutch fort of Saint Sebastien. The date of his death remains uncertain.

Amo enjoyed uncontested recognition as a philosopher and teacher in Germany in the first part of the eighteenth century. His extraordinary itinerary was even further enhanced by the rumored existence of a brother – a slave in Surinam.[1]

A contemporary of Leibnitz, Christian Thomasius, and Christian von Wolff, Amo was strongly influenced by the western intellectual tradition of his time. As a man of the Enlightenment, he was more concerned with classification and verification than with totalization and thus did not produce a specific theoretical system; but he did not hesitate to categorize the philosophical theories of other great thinkers for his students. He often commented on them in critical fashion, in a language appreciated for its clarity. Involved in the philosophical debates of his time, he was engaged in the question of the relationship between the body and the mind, the subject of slavery, among

other debates. Distancing himself from Aristotle, Descartes, and Stahl, Amo strove notably to demonstrate that the human mind is impassive, and is not the seat of sensations, which themselves depend upon the circulation of the blood. But it is this proximity of the body and the mind that allows the latter to understand and act by means of ideas. Some scholars even advance the idea that with his thesis on apathy, he anticipated Kant's question on the conditions of possibility of *a priori* judgments (Bess 1989: 388). Positioning himself in the quarrel between the vitalists and the mechanists, he pronounced himself in favor of Enlightenment thinkers, and on the sidelines with respect to Pietism. In his inaugural thesis, he took a position against the slave trade, contrary to his contemporary, the Ghanaian Capitein, who for his admission to the University of Leiden unwaveringly upheld the thesis of compatibility between Christian principles and the slave commerce.

Abolitionists such as Abbé Grégoire, in his *De la littérature des Nègres,* or Lydia M. Child in her chapter "Intellect of Negroes" from the essay *An Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans* (1836), found in Amo the material to demonstrate the existence of intellectual faculties among those whose servile status had abolished all their rights, including the right to respect. In the twentieth century, Kwame Nkrumah, engaged with his *Consciencism* (1964) in a project of synthesis and evaluation of European philosophy as a preliminary to the development of his own theory, also alluded to his compatriot and predecessor, Amo. More recently, in the framework of the debate on African philosophy/ethnophilosophy, Amo has been a subject of interest for his ambivalence (see Hountondji 1983:128–30 and Nwodo 1985: 36–39).

Is it possible to evaluate the part Africa has played in the life and work of Amo? We observe that Amo kept and even specified his Ghanaian name by signing *Amo-Guinea-Afer* or *Amo-Guinea-Africanus*, "as though he was afraid that his long European adventure might make him or his circle forget his African origins and ties" (Hountondji 1983: 111). Furthermore, as has been seen, Amo's first writings convey the mark of his interest in the African cause. He was determined to demonstrate that slave trading is unjustified: that the past grandeur of Africa, all the skills of Africans are opposed to it, as are Christian principles. His "return" to Ghana – where he had not spent much time – allows us to measure his attachment to the idea of a land of origin, given that the risks he incurred were enormous, since the slave trade was quite active on that section of the coast. Critics nevertheless judged that Africa occupies a minimal place in Amo's research and mode of thought – because of his early acculturation and the absence of intellectual partners of African origin around him. One could nuance this view by indicating that his participation in

activities in the public sphere can be understood as a personal strategy meant to change the representations of Africa and Africans. Moreover, if we admit that there is often a metaphorical relationship between the nature of research and a personal existential problematic, it is important that Amo, who cannot by any means be considered Senghorian, redirected attention to the body as the seat of sensations, at a time when the African body was sold, bought, bartered, tortured, and disdained on a daily basis by virtue of its sudden visibility.

Note

1. For a list of archival material relating to the course of his life, see the article about him written by Hountondji (1983: 113).

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14

The literature of slavery and abolition

MOIRA FERGUSON

One infamous 300-year battle over slavery was waged in Britain and the Americas, a period that is culturally rich with texts written by first-, second-, and sometimes third-generation Africans (in Britain and the Americas), including the United States and the Caribbean. Geography as an organizing principle helps to illuminate the similarities and differences within that literature of slavery and abolition.

African writers in Britain

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, slaves and ex-slaves in the African diaspora, kidnapped in West Africa, shipped across the notorious Middle Passage, and sold into slavery, wrote unflinchingly about their brutal life experiences. In petitions, poems, fictions, and autobiographies, also known as slave narratives, they recreated their environment and their mature selves as human beings enduring grievous lives, in Britain, the Americas and the Caribbean. They wrote in conscious opposition to proslavery stereotypes.

The earliest recorded English slave trader was John Hawkins, who, in 1562, on behalf of the English government, traded Africans to the Portuguese African and Spanish planters. By 1618, the English government held monopolies to slave trading-companies. The Royal African Company was founded in 1672 and was granted exclusive rights of trade between the west coast of Africa and the British colonies in the Americas. In the next five years, the company had shipped 100,000 African slaves to the West Indies and 5,000 to the North American colonies. After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, England assumed imperial dominance in the slave trade by acquiring the right – the *Asiento* – to deliver 144,000 slaves to the Spanish colonies.

Slaves also worked as domestic servants in Britain itself, often for absentee plantation owners, and slave-ship and military personnel (Fryer 1984: 14–19). By the 1660s, the Royal Adventurers had received a charter permitting slaves

to be a supply source (Fryer 1984: 20). It was not uncommon in Britain to see slaves wearing metal collars around their necks, inscribed with the names of their owners. In those early centuries, people turned a blind eye to palpable evidence of slavery in aristocratic and slave-owners' homes.

The strength of the "West India" lobby in parliament made the cause of abolition an uphill battle. With few exceptions before 1750, most of the writing about black communities in Britain appeared in such official documents as ships' records, and often in advertizements for runaway people. That situation, however, dramatically changed after Lord Mansfield's decision in the celebrated James Somerset case in 1772, when James Somerset who had petitioned for freedom in Britain was granted such, provided he did not try to return. The judge, that is, ruled that slaves, even if they were slaves in the country from which they came could not be transported out of Britain involuntarily, and this was widely interpreted to mean that slavery was illegal. This decision indirectly extended a positive effect to the black communities, who numbered about 15,000 people.

By 1772, several African slaves and former slaves were beginning to write about their situation, sometimes with the assistance of amanuenses. White abolitionists encouraged this "literature of repudiation," in O. R. Dathorne's phrase (1981), and public affirmation of African literacy. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (James Albert) was one of the first Africans to have his life story published. He dictated his experiences to a woman who lived in Leominster, entitling the text *A Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, Related by Himself*. Born between 1710 and 1714, he begins by chronicling his life as a child living in Bornu in the northeast of today's Nigeria, and his kidnapping and enslavement as a teenager. He records living in America with a Dutch pastor who freed him after eighteen years when Gronniosaw converted to Christianity. Debt-ridden, he worked as a cook and a privateer to support himself, and having traveled to England, he married. In dire financial straits, he and his family subsequently moved to Kidderminster, where he related his narrative to earn money to support his family. The original publication of his narrative probably appeared around 1774. Nothing is known of the later life of Gronniosaw or his family (Fryer 1984: 90–91).

In contrast to Gronniosaw, who was born in Africa and sold in the American colonies before reaching England, Ignatius Sancho was born aboard a slave ship in 1729 and reached England at the age of two, his parents having died while he was an infant. After the second Duke of Montagu, who had become something of a mentor to Sancho, died in 1749, Sancho assumed a position in the Duchess's

household. Later he married and had six children. Many of his *Letters* (1782) deal with family and business life, and are filled with striking contemporary insights. For example, Sancho speaks vividly about the Gordon Riots and eloquently to Laurence Sterne about the plight of slaves. Nonetheless, he always remembers his African heritage and ethnicity: he uses "Africanus" as his pen name in letters to the press, and consistently acknowledges his "brother Negro" and "my poor black brethren." He referred to himself as "poor blacky grocer." Multitalented, Sancho also composed music, wrote poetry, two stage plays, and a theoretical tract on music (since lost). After a "long illness aggravated by gout and corpulence," he died in 1780.

In 1787, the year that the Anti-Slavery Society was founded, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery* was published in London. Cugoano was born in 1757 on the coast of present-day Ghana and in 1770 was kidnapped, taken to Grenada as a slave, then freed by his owner in England. A community leader, Cugoano worked closely with Granville Sharpe, a white abolitionist involved in the James Somerset case, and Olaudah Equiano, who was one of the most celebrated African writers in eighteenth-century England. A truncated version of Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* was published in 1791, after which scant information about him exists. Purposefully polemical, Cugoano contributed powerfully to the antislavery debate and the pseudoscientific question about the so-called superiority of white people. Such claims were also brought out by the outspoken brilliance of his friend, Olaudah Equiano.

A member of the Ibo nation, Equiano was born in the interior of Nigeria. When he was eleven, he and his sister were captured by slave traders and sold to British slavers bound for North America. A ship's steward, he served under several Mediterranean commanders and Caribbean traders. Having been brought to Virginia where he was sold to Michael Henry Pascal, an officer in the Royal Navy, he was renamed Gustavas Vassa, after a sixteenth-century Swedish monarch.

After many maritime adventures and a harsh human betrayal, the determined, highly literate Equiano purchased his freedom in 1766 and continued traveling throughout the Caribbean and the American colonies. Fearing harassment and recapture, he relocated to England where he worked for Dr. Charles Irving, a scientist experimenting with salt-water purification. Equiano then traveled to Italy, Turkey, Portugal, and the Arctic, and studied opera and architecture. First published in two volumes, his autobiography, entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), is hailed as one of the finest slave

narratives. He begins with his experiences aboard the slave ship, chronicles his mastery of navigation, his naval service in Canada during General Wolfe's campaign, and his labor in the Mediterranean as a gunpowder carrier, then his learning to be a barber while continuing as a sailor to many countries. With his diverse and unsurpassed talents, he emerged as one of the first community leaders and intellectuals of the age. Equiano's two-volume autobiography has remained a classic of the slave narrative genre, as well as in the global genre of autobiography.

African and African diasporic writers in the Americas / United States

Slavery increased in the Americas during the 1600s when thousands of African slaves were forced to that continent and sold. By the 1780s, many northern states had enacted legislation to abolish slavery, and the ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory. Not only did the Declaration of Independence question the validity of slavery, but for many northerners, the practice was unprofitable. Discontent was rife. In 1800, for instance, in the Gabriel Plot, Gabriel Prosser led over a thousand slaves and marched on Richmond, Virginia. Thirty-five people were executed for participating in the plot. In 1822, a free black man named Denmark Vesey organized an insurrection of slave artisans in urban areas, but someone betrayed the plotters: nearly 150 slaves were arrested and forty executed. During the 1830s, northern antislavery societies worked for the emancipation of slaves. Understandably, the antislavery movement included many freed slaves. In the south, by contrast, slavery increased as the population grew from 650,000 in 1790 to 3.2 million in 1850 (Roberts 1993: 184–85). Just as much to the point, slavery increasingly divided the North and South, and by February 1861, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and South Carolina had withdrawn from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America.

Briton Hammon probably wrote the first published work by a black author in North America. Entitled (in its shortened version) *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man – Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England: who Returned to Boston, after having been absent almost Thirteen Years* (1760), it tells of his many unusual adventures. At the end, Hammon expresses his delight in finding his old master and "the Truth was joyfully verify'd by a happy Sight of his Person which so overcome me, that I could not speak to him for some Time" (Starling 1988: 52–53). He preferred a long incarceration in a dungeon in Havana rather than

board a pirate ship. By 1760, in Marion Starling's words, "life had sobered him up a trifle" (1988: 53).

In 1773, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley was published to favorable reviews. Born around 1753 in West Africa, possibly in the country now known as Senegal, the young woman was captured, brought to the Boston market as a slave, and sold in 1761 to John Wheatley. An early poem suggests a shrewd awareness of her situation: "On Being Brought from Africa to America." The 1770s brought significant changes to Wheatley's life: in 1774, she was freed three months before Susanna Wheatley's death on 3 March, and on 1 April 1778, she married a free black man named John Peters. On 5 December 1784, she died in Boston while working as a cleaning maid at a boarding-house, a sure sign, presumably, of contemporary attitudes.

Perhaps the first explicit antislavery poet, George Moses Horton was a slave who exemplified the basic contradictions endured by a black poet in the Americas at that time. Born in North Carolina, he published his first volume of African American poetry, *The Hope of Liberty, Poems: George Moses Horton, Myself* in 1829. Three of the poems addressing slavery included: "On Hearing of the Intentions of a Gentleman to Purchase the Poet's Freedom,"

> Some philanthropic souls from afar,
> With pity strove to break the slavish bar.
> (Gates and McKay 1996: 193)

As more slaves escaped from the South, advertizements and posters calling for their return were common sights. Fugitive slaves, known or unknown, became a regular northern presence. Attempts to rescue fugitive slaves accelerated in the 1840s and 1850s. In this volatile atmosphere, Harriet A. Jacobs, Jarena Lee, Harriet Wilson, Nancy Prince, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary penned their bold, controversial narratives. Most often they used the first person to proclaim their experiences – though sometimes in the third – but they never surrendered their need to mask the distance, rearrange chronologies, and alter characters – all in the service of individual and collective representation and preservation. They apprehended only too well their dangerous political milieu.

Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself* (1861) marks in an unprecedented fashion a departure for slave narratives, frequently told from a female perspective. As never before, her narrative paved the way for gendered reconstructions of a slave's experience. She speaks about the persistence of sexual harassment and the vulnerability of female slaves and white-male manipulation of motherhood in an unprecedentedly open fashion. For many years, Jacobs had concealed herself in her grandmother's attic. Her

owner, Dr. Flint, continued to stalk her for many years, even after she traveled north to join her children (Edwards and Dabydeen 1991: 176). The complex life of Harriet Jacobs – "the black fugitive slave author and creator of Linda Brent," in Jean Fagan Yellin's compact phrase – necessitated a pseudonym, her persona integral to her survival (Yellin 1987: xxxi). Under a *nom de plume*, she could attack with some impunity perpetrators of racist violence and sexual abuse.

No less heroic in a different context was William Wells Brown, born into the household of Dr. John Young, a farmer and physician in 1814 in Lexington, Kentucky, the son of a slave mother and a slaveholder. In 1827, after Young bought a farm in St. Louis and moved there, Brown worked at a variety of jobs, until escaping to Ohio in 1834, where some Quakers assisted him. The exchange between William Wells Brown and the Quakers displays Brown's devotion to his master who named him William, as well as his self-determination: "I am unwilling to lose my name of William. As it was taken from me once against my will . . . " Then "said [the Quaker, a Mr. Wells Brown], 'I shall name thee William Wells Brown'" (Starling 142).

Two years later, in Buffalo, his home doubled as an important station on the Underground Railroad. In 1843, after Frederick Douglass came to Buffalo to hold antislavery meetings, Brown lectured for the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society.

Brown's memoirs, *The Narrative of William Wells Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself*, were published in Boston in 1847, followed the next year by his song-poems, *The Anti-Slavery Harp.* He then went on to lecture for the Massachusetts and the American Anti-Slavery Societies. In 1849, Victor Hugo invited him to the Paris Peace Congress. Brown was obliged to stay in England for five years after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. There he published the earliest version of his novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853). *Clotel* is generally considered the first novel written by an African American author, although Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, printed in 1859, is the first such work originally published in the United States. In line with other antislavery writers, Brown foregrounds the hypocrisy of Christianity and the complicity of all levels of society in that religion. During the Civil War, Brown recruited members of the Massachusetts 54th and 55th regiments, legendary black troops led by white officers. Intent on his quest for social justice, Brown fought to gain equal pay and improved medical services for the black troops.

Also in 1855, a fugitive slave wrote a novel that would change the definition of the genre of slave narrative and permanently alter an individual's perception of slavery. Written by Hannah Crafts and recently discovered by Professor

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *A Bondwoman's Narrative* suggests a need to reassess US culture on the subject of slavery and abolition. Theories of racial difference collapse in the presence of the narrator's unmediated, private voice. Crafts draws from the sentimental and gothic conventions, as well as antislavery polemic; she destabilizes the definition of the slave narrative as presently constituted. Traditionally, slave narratives provide a reader with basic biographical details (such as birth and death), while establishing a claim to an artistic identity as the writer philosophizes about the human condition. That *A Bondwoman's Narrative* remained unpublished is telling. What were the financial difficulties? What was the level of white support? How was Crafts prepared to deal with inevitably mixed consequences?

Along with Jacobs, Brown, and Douglass, David Walker pressed even further. Born to a slave father – whose birthplace is currently unknown – and a free mother on 28 September 1785, in Wilmington, North Carolina, he taught himself to read and write and traveled through the South to observe the hideous condition of slaves. After the founding of the abolition movement, he wrote for *Freedom's Journal*, an antislavery weekly. He concealed his radical pamphlet, *Appeal . . . to the Coloured Citizens of the World . . . (1829)*, in the pockets of clothes that sailors bought in his used-clothing store before re-embarking. In this way Walker hoped his philosophically pioneering pamphlet would reach southern ports and win distribution. Walker's exceptional call for armed resistance threatened white security so intensely that many people urged him to flee to Canada. He refused. His murdered body was found near his shop, inducing numerous reprintings of the *Appeal*.

The most celebrated African American of the nineteenth century was Frederick Douglass who marched, philosophically speaking, alongside Jacobs, Brown, Walker, and many others, known and unknown. Douglass's initial act of resistance against slaveowner Edward Covey enacted Walker's call for armed resistance. As Douglass himself puts it: The "turning-point in my career as a slave" came when a "Negro-breaker" tried to assault him. Douglass energetically retaliated and was not beaten again. "I now resolved," he wrote later, "that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping me, must also succeed in killing me." Returning to Baltimore, he learned the trade of a caulker and hired himself out, thereby coming into contact with the free-black community in the city. He disguised himself as a sailor to escape slavery.

In 1841, Douglass gave his first antislavery lecture for William Lloyd Garrison's Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and published his *Narrative of*

the Life of Frederick Douglass four years later to rebut current ideas about slaves' literacy. An overnight success, the narrative chronicled his personal life while it concurrently delivered a mordant critique of a slave-owning society. Ubiquitous racial bigotry, he asserted, meant even free people were only "half-free."

When his whereabouts as a fugitive slave were revealed, he undertook a two-year lecture tour of Great Britain, arranged by British antislavery friends. In 1846, these friends negotiated the legal purchase of his freedom from his master, Thomas Auld, in Maryland. Returning as a free man to the United States in 1847, Douglass founded his own newspaper, the *North Star*, in Rochester, New York. From 1847 to 1863, Douglass edited the most successful black-abolitionist journal, alternately under the logos, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* and the *Douglass Monthly*. In 1855, *My Bondage and My Freedom* appeared.

Like his friend, William Wells Brown, Douglass harbored fugitive slaves and supported the conspiracy that led to John Brown's heroic raid in 1859 at Harper's Ferry. Later Douglass came to agree with Walker and Brown that armed struggle was necessary to win abolition. He served in various political positions, and during Reconstruction, Douglass argued that freedmen should have access to land and private property. From 1889 to 1891 he served as minister to Haiti. He died in Washington on 20 February 1895.

Born in 1825 to free parents, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* in 1854, the same year she joined the Underground Railroad. During that summer, she spoke on "The Elevation and Education of Our People," after which she conducted a lecture campaign for the Anti-Slavery Society of Maine.

During Reconstruction, Harper lectured in southern states, urging people to work together, regardless of race. Although Harper fought for black women's suffrage, she believed that black men's need for suffrage was a more important goal. In addition to lecturing, in 1892 she published *Iola Leroy*, one of the earliest novels by a black woman. She died in 1911 of heart failure.

African and African-diasporic writers in the Caribbean region

Fewer books on slavery by slaves or ex-slaves were published in the Caribbean region than in Britain and in the Americas/United States. Those that have surfaced to date are the narratives of Mary Prince, Ashton Warner, Asa-Asa, Juan Francisco Manzano, and Esteban Montego. Manzano's account is, in general, an exceptional one, regardless of geography, having been the only one written by a slave during slavery in this region.

Several factors account for this scarcity of slave narratives, most of all a society rigidly divided into workers and landowners that discouraged even white writers from discussing slavery (Honychurch 1995: 102). Fear of punishment also played its part. Almost two million Africans lived in the Caribbean Islands out of a total population of nearly three million in 1825; about 400,000 "mulattos and mixed" were counted within the "non-negro" population. Altogether, the population count was 2,361,000 African Caribbeans and "mulattos" and a white population of 482,000 (Coulthard 1962: 9). Although Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807/08 and declared emancipation in 1834, emancipation in the British Caribbean did not effectively begin until 1839, when so-called apprenticeship ended (Claypole and Robottom 1989: 1).

According to Michael Craton 1982: 335–39, the chronology of resistance from 1638 to 1857 in the British West Indies was intense and continuous, ranging from a revolt in Providence in 1638; in Bermuda in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; in St. Lucia, Grenada and St. Vincent in the eighteenth century; in Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua, and St. Kitt's, slave revolts were frequent through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. They occurred also in Tortola, Guyana, Bahamas, Belize, Tobago, and Dominica in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in Trinidad in the nineteenth century. In 1737 in Antigua, a captured slave describes an Alcan priest named Quancou after Tacky's rebellions:

> I saw this Obey Man at Secundi's House after I waked at Midnight, I found him and Hunts Cuffy there. Secundi gave him a Chequeen, a bottle of Rum and a Dominique Cock and Quawcoo put Obey made of Sheeps Skin upon the ground, upon and about the bottle of Rum, and the Chequeen upon the bottle. Then he took the Cock, cut open his Mouth, and one of his Toes, and so poured the Cocks blood Over all the Obey, and then Rub'd Secundi's forehead with the Cocks bloody Toe, then took the Bottle and poured Some Rum upon the Obey, Drank a Dram, and gave it to Secundi and made Secundi Sware not to Discover his name to any body. Secundi then Asked him when he must begin to Rise. Quawcoo took a String Ty'd knots in it, and told him not to be in a hurry, for that he would give him Notice when to Rise and all Should go well, and that as he ty'd those knots so the Bacararas [whites] should become Arrant fools and have their Mouths Stoped, and their hands tyed that they should not Discover the Negro's Designs. (Craton 1982: 123, 190)

Victor Hugues's proclamation was in St. Vincent in 1786:

> Behold your chains forged and imposed by the hands of the tyrannical English! Blush, and break those ensigns of disgrace, spurn them with becoming indignation, rise in a moment, and while we assist you from the motives of the

> philanthropy and zeal for the happiness of all nations, fall on these despots, extirpate them from your country, and restore yourselves, your wives and children to the inheritance of your fathers, whose spirits from the grave will lead on your ranks, inspire you with fury, and help you to be avenged.
> (Craton 1982: 190)

Over fifteen islands fought for freedom from slavery for well over 300 years. The slaves in Jamaica, often called Maroons, held a celebrated, though contended, reputation as very fierce fighters (Campbell 1990: 11ff.).

One of the earlier Caribbean writers was Francis Williams, born to free parents about 1700 and "adopted" by the Duke of Montagu as a protégé. Williams studied the classics at an English grammar school and mathematics at Cambridge (Dance 1986: 493ff.). Between 1738 and 1748, he returned to Jamaica, and opened a school in Spanish town where he taught classics and mathematics to local white children. Williams welcomed each new governor with a dedicatory Latin ode, one of which is repeated in *History of Jamaica* by the commentator Edward Long. The poem for which Williams is most celebrated is a Latin ode to George Haldane, governor of Jamaica in 1759. In the words of critic Arthur Drayton, Williams transformed the formulaic prose of odes and subtly exposed the atrocities of slave experience. In Williams's own words:

> Under your leadership all that had been perpetrated ill-advisedly is now vain, never to recur in your presence. So all the people, not to mention the lesser throng, may see that you have relieved them of the yoke that would have clung to their necks and the evils which this innocent isle had formerly suffered with grievous torment. (Dance 1986: 495)

Thus Williams argues for human dignity and freedom, signaling a consciousness well-attuned to contemporary realities, despite the traditional form.

Francis Williams's circumlocuitous references to the horror of slavery could not readily be used by Ladies' Anti-Slavery Societies who pamphleteered door-to-door. Not so with Mary Prince's polemic, entitled *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, published in London in 1831, sponsored by the Anti-Slavery Society. It went into three editions that year, and was probably the first published slave narrative by a woman in English.

Born around 1788 in Bermuda (the date of her death is unknown), Mary Prince was the daughter of slaves and had at least ten siblings. At an ultimate degree of vulnerability, she stood up for herself after running away from her owner, then returning to her father, her heroic actions comparable to Frederick Douglass's in the same general period. She goes on to record vile experiences on Turks Island where she stood all day long in salt marshes, infested with boils

and in great pain. When she went to Antigua with new owners, she witnessed the murder of a pregnant, exhausted co-worker. In London, she "walked" from these very owners and made her way to the Anti-Slavery headquarters. Like Gronniosaw, Mary Prince dictated her experiences to an amanuensis, who probably edited out anything too "steamy" for the Christian readership. Her tale is one of suffering endured, but ultimately of the human spirit triumphant (Ferguson 1997: 48–53).

While Mary Prince dictated her experiences in London, Ashton Warner was penning his own experiences as a slave in St. Vincent. Unfortunately, he died while the volume was in progress, the proceeds going to his aged mother, as he requested. Warner describes the condition of slaves graphically, including the fact that his pregnant wife "was flogged for not coming out early enough to work, and afterward, when far advanced in pregnancy, she was put into the stocks by the manager because she said she was unable to go to the field" (Warner 1831: 45). He ends by echoing Mary Prince's contention: that they write to help the plight of others, not just themselves. In a sense, they speak with a community voice.

In Cuba, *Autobiografia* by Juan Francisco Manzano struck some slightly different notes, due to his unusual circumstances. Born in 1797 and living with his parents who were servants to aristocrats, he escaped to Havana. While serving as a page, he taught himself to read and write and was freed by a patron, Domingo del Monte, who admired Manzano's famous sonnet, *Mis treinta anos* (My Thirty Years) and collected the money to emancipate the slave. Del Monte also encouraged Manzano to write his *Autobiografia*, which was first published in 1840 in an English translation by Richard Madden.

Proffering an invaluable sociohistorical document, Manzano writes about his life as a slave, narrating his experiences as a child and young man who fears a cruel mistress. He stresses insecurity, dependence on arbitrary matters, and the futility of obtaining justice. One graphic detail concerns the accusation that he stole a chicken and then was tormented and punished into confessing to a crime he did not commit. Even when he proves his innocence, he cannot appeal.

In 1841, Manzano wrote a five-act tragedy titled *Zafira* and many articles for literary magazines. Four years later, colonial authorities imprisoned him for participating in a conspiracy, but he was released in 1845 when he was found innocent. From then until his death, Manzano published very little. The reasons for his long silence remain unknown. In 1868, Manzano's autobiography appeared in a book entitled *Coloured Poets*, which included biographies of four poets of color, all born slaves. The book's profits were used to manumit Jose de Carmen Diaz, a slave poet, again under the auspices of del Monte.

Esteban Montejo's *Biografia de un Cimarron*, edited by Miguel Barnet, and entitled in English *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1968), belongs in the category of the dictated slave narratives to which Mary Prince's and Gronniosaw's texts belong. Barnet is the amanuensis to Esteban Montejo, a centenarian-plus, who assumed many roles in his lifetime: first a slave, then a maroon, after that a resistance fighter, and finally a waged worker. Montejo speaks of his early moments of awareness:

> I felt within me the overwhelming spirit of the maroon from which I could not escape . . . I saw many horrors of punishment under slavery. That's why I didn't like that life. In the boiler house there were the stocks, which were the most cruel. There were stocks for lying down and for standing. They had wide slabs with holes through which they made the slave place his feet, hands, and head. They had them [the slaves] immobilized thus two or three months for some insignificant mistake. (Montejo 1968: 9)

Montejo reflects on his bold and resourceful life, focusing on his escape from slavery and years of solitary hill-dwelling as a maroon. As with Equiano, Mary Prince, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and countless others, rebellion is the keystone of Montejo's life.

Conclusion

The literature of slavery is vast and varied, its heterogeneity springing from a host of factors, among the most important of which were people coming from and being transported to different countries and continents; constantly changing landscapes; rich, diverse ancient cultures, where often kinship- and community-based concepts are in conflict with newly emerging cultures; and philosophically speaking people with freedom on their minds doing battle with their adversaries, owners, entrepreneurs, personnel of every description bent on human enslavement. Changing times, changing historical circumstances, changing attitudes, also played a large role.

So the literature of slavery, as a genre, is multifaceted and never stationary. Sometimes highly charged emotions explode on the page; at other times, people talk mutedly about the need for slaves to arm themselves. As Anthony Appiah puts it, "[t]he slave narrative is a polemical genre; it makes no bones about it" (1990: x). The literature of slavery is also, of course, housed in other genres: among them, the sentimental novel and other "fictions," a Latinate ode, a gothic tale, a sentimental or historical poem, especially autobiography, biography, travelers' tales, and as-told-to memoirs. Among its common

characteristics would be the refusal of silence, creative reconstruction, illiteracy, white protectionism, tactical omissions or expansions, docility and seeming docility, and some related stereotypes. Class and gender also play their roles because slavery cuts across these boundaries. Claiming counts too, especially the claiming of personhood, authorship, authenticity, intuition, inspiration, awareness, stoicism, witnessing, a sense of dignity and delicacy as well as bereavement, horror, incredulity, and anger.

Olaudah Equiano and Quobna Ottobah Cugoano said it well when they withdrew support from the Sierra Leone Company's scheme to repatriate Africans (who had been captured originally from many different African countries) to Sierra Leone. They heard the double-voiced narrative of that repatriation plan: "Let's help the 'black poor,' and let's send them on their way as well."

In the end, the literature of slavery and abolition displays the nature and construction of colonialism, how its exploitative ontology shaped texts and people, countries and continents. It remains relevant to this day because of its close connection to the literature of Civil Rights, to prison writings, to discourse about alleged contemporary slavery and to anti-apartheid writings. The condition of human freedom and of those who wage the struggle for that freedom on behalf of others is, as former President Nelson Mandela reminds us, a birthright that cannot be sold (1994: 523).

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15

Discourses of empire

ROBERT ERIC LIVINGSTON

"The conquest of the earth," declares Charlie Marlow, principal narrator of Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*, "which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." "What redeems it," he continues, "is the idea only." Thus does Marlow look back on his voyage up the great African river, at the moment when the King of the Belgians was tightening his grip over what he called the "Congo Free State," at the cost of close to six million African lives. The remark comes at the opening of Marlow's extended "yarn," both a bitter memory and the canny opening gambit of a master storyteller. Marlow's first words represent the closing remarks of a history whose moral climax turns on the evasion of last words. Though he has witnessed the horror that resounds in the life of that "remarkable man," Mr. Kurtz, Marlow's "inconclusive experiences" in Africa are – so we are given to understand – not amenable to final judgments.

Heart of Darkness is, for better and worse, both a chillingly clear-sighted account of imperial violence and a self-implicating instance of the moral blindness it denounces. Conrad's story raises the discourse of empire to an excruciating pitch of self-consciousness. Deliberately provocative and self-loathing, the text combines a frank acknowledgment of colonial brutality with an exquisite aversion to moral judgments; and it opts, ultimately, to align itself with what it sees as the corrupting lie of "civilized" morality. Both inviting and discounting its readers' desire to "look into it too much," *Heart of Darkness* continues to fascinate and scandalize: it forms an inescapable point of entry into the discourse of empire.

For however we may want to complicate the analysis of particulars, the brute fact remains that the "western" relation to Africa has been marked by structures of domination, an imbalance of power that comes to distort even the most benevolent of intentions. This disparity has produced a discourse

(defined, roughly, as knowledge built on power) largely self-validating and, until quite recently, inconsiderate of indigenous views or claims; just as Marlow's address to "ourselves" establishes the racial contours of his audience of insiders, so a history of conquest hardens the third-person position ("them") into objecthood. For "Africanist" discourse, as Christopher Miller terms it, the land and its inhabitants are at best a backdrop for imperial schemes, at most an obstacle to ambitious projects, be they economic, political, or moral (Miller 1985). Elaborated with little regard for indigenous claims or knowledges, the archive of western discourse on Africa has sheltered no end of self-willed blindness and fantasy, often of the most bizarre and noxious sort; its stock of stereotypes, having percolated into the public imagination, tends to recirculate at critical moments. To sketch the historical dimensions of imperial discourse is not, therefore, to presume on its disappearance. Indeed, analysis of such knowledge needs to be archeological, in Michel Foucault's sense, insofar as the discourse consists of layers laid down at different historical moments, so that an utterance in the present may partake of several disparate "discursive formations" (Foucault 1972). To reconstruct this discourse is thus to trace the convolutions of an understanding at once made possible and disfigured by a history of domination.

One further comment on the relation between "discourse" and literature may be in order here. It would be needlessly reductive to suggest that literary texts merely reiterate the terms of domination. Neither, however, would it be plausible to claim that such texts simply transcend ideology, or that they invariably enact a critical distance from the instances of racial prejudice or colonialist arrogance they portray. Writers are no less susceptible than readers to the lures of simplification and crude caricature. Due to their inclusion in esthetic canons and their widespread dissemination, however, literary texts often have a staying power that results in a certain privilege for their treatment of ideological motifs. Literature regularly both perpetuates the pernicious and makes it available to colder and more critical scrutiny.

In short, literature and imperialism are complexly intertwined, and any particular case requires careful and specific analysis. Nevertheless, the concept of "imperial discourse," as a formation that includes literary texts alongside travel, natural history, anthropology, and philosophy, seems crucial for moving our understanding beyond the first-line defense of esthetic autonomy. What *Heart of Darkness* records by enacting is the powerful tendency to retreat behind the redemptive "idea," to evade judgment by not looking too closely; as Conrad shows, such a tendency has deep roots in the gendering of moral judgment and historical action, and in what psychoanalysis calls the process

of idealization. The obverse of this tendency – the desire to have every text bear the cumulative weight of historical guilt – may be more excusable, but can hardly be more satisfactory. Critical judgment must keep both ethical and esthetic considerations in scrupulous play, especially where the demand for absolutes is strong. If a certain flattening of literary nuance is unavoidable, it seems a fair price for the gain in historical and cultural perspective.

What anthropologists politely term "culture contact" is rarely an egalitarian affair. Whatever the mundane occasions that draw people into proximity and exchange, such contacts are inevitably surrounded by a penumbra of differences – of language, behavior, belief, custom, and expectation. Where irregular contacts congeal into ongoing social relationships, differences are readily arranged into oppositions – between us and them, familiar and strange – that acquire explanatory force as marks of belonging. Such binary arrangements serve to stabilize patterns of contact, and, by making them intelligible, to perpetuate them. Where the relationship is asymmetrical, the simplicity of the binary scheme can legitimize hierarchy by giving it the unquestionable status of nature. Efforts to challenge or transform such naturalized oppositions must then fly in the face of "logic," reverse the terms of the opposition, or else displace one binary with another.

In the relation between Europe (a designation that, for our purposes, can provisionally be extended to the United States) and Africa, the pivotal contrast is, of course, between black and white. Nowhere is the simplifying effect of the binary more evident than in this reading of the vast range of skin pigmentation: there is, as biologists have regularly observed, as much variation within each side of this culturally charged contrast as between them. Yet this opposition retains a powerful foothold in ordinary language and the popular imagination, and consequently serves both to shape identities and to delineate terms of political struggle. Particularly given the predominance of visual media, what Frantz Fanon terms the "epidermal scheme" continues to be the master trope of the Euro-African relationship (Fanon 1967).

Historically, this basic structure has come to be encrusted with a host of futher binaries, each serving to reinforce the fundamental inequality. Thus, the black/white contrast has been given a moral valence, producing what Fanon again calls the "Manichean" view: the relationship is taken to embody a primordial struggle between good and evil, civilized and savage, or (now reversing the terms) between oppressor and oppressed, "the West and the Rest" (Fanon 1961). A similar set of oppositions finds its way into the cooler terms of Enlightenment rationality and its disciplinary offspring, the human sciences. Subject/object; modern/traditional; literate/oral: these pairs, while

less overtly biased, still serve to essentialize differences, and thus to confirm historic asymmetries, often against the express intentions of those who deploy them. Because the binary inhabits a social relationship that cannot fully be dissolved into discourse, even critical and self-conscious treatments can rarely extricate themselves from the positioning force of the opposition.

Recast in narrative terms, the structure of binary oppositions results in what is perhaps the prevalent mode of the European experience in Africa, namely, the quest-romance. In this mode, the self stakes its identity or integrity on an encounter with a threatening or seductive Other, whose power must be overcome and incorporated for the self's destiny to be realized. Such a narrative puts otherwise static oppositions into play, generating suspense from categorical contrast. In its quasi-Hegelian casting as the dialectic of master and slave, the quest-romance has often been taken as the key to understanding the European-African relationship (if not the structure of history itself); the conflict between colonizer and colonized can readily be allegorized – by Fanon, among others – in these terms. Even where the characters are less clearly word-historical spirits, however, the quest-romance lends narrative drive and purpose to what might otherwise seem ambiguous or prosaic encounters.

To say that the quest-romance is a prevalent mode in Africanist discourse is to suggest that it is not limited to explicitly literary texts, but underlies nonfictional accounts as well. Indeed, the trope of "exploration" that endows much travel writing with an aura of glamour and heroism is a clear example of quest-romance at work. Nor does the mode exclude overtly "realistic" treatments: the negative or dialectical quest-romance forms a familiar subgenre, in which the quest-hero learns to recognize the spell cast by his own imagination and thus to master a disenchanted world through self-discipline. Separated from its cosmological or mythological roots, that is, the quest-romance finds both epistemic and ethical inflections. Thus, for one significant strand of imperial discourse, Africa represents the great unknown, a terrain to be systematically secured for reliable knowledge; its very existence poses a challenge to western conceptions of rationality, even a provocative limit to the power of Enlightenment. The rigors of climate, disease, or cultural resistance that historically frustrated European knowledge-claims, when not moralized as inveterate hostility, gave rise to the figure of Africa as "blank darkness," as Miller puts it, the very trope of a threatening ignorance, productive of bafflement or hysteria (Miller 1985).

In another variant, Africa appears as the quintessential land of adventure, a place for European manhood to display its prowess. This version acquires

particular salience with the consolidation of modernity in Euro-America itself; Africa is seen to offer an outlet for actions and ambitions no longer credible in the "civilized" part of the world. Here the binary opposition transposes a spatial difference into a temporal one, producing what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls a "denial of coevalness" (Fabian 1983). As Marlow puts it, "Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings" (Conrad 1899: 35). According to Fabian, this chronological trope underpins vast stretches of the anthropological enterprise, as observer and observed are taken to inhabit different cultural or evolutionary times, with the "primitive" assigned the task of revealing the prehistory of the more developed individual. Like other binaries, however, this opposition provides ample room for reversal and reinscription: thus, for instance, European modernism embraced "primitivism" as an alternative to the stifling conformity of bourgeois civilization, while mass-cultural fantasies (*Tarzan, King Kong*) exploited similar inversions for titillating ends.

Turning now to a more chronological overview, we may discern three major phases of the European engagement with Africa. These phases can be distinguished by the predominant forms of interaction between Europeans and Africans, the social relationship that gives imperial discourse its characteristic problematic. At the end of the fifteenth century, following a long period of intermittent contact, the first phase crystallized around the slave trade; discourse about Africans, their history, and their customs, was dominated by commercial imperatives or, later, the polemics between pro- and antislavery forces. During the middle years of the nineteenth century, with the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, attention shifted to the possibility of appropriating the vast resources of the continent itself: this second phase brought the moment of colonialism proper, culminating in the "scramble for Africa" of the 1880s and accompanied by the growth of a "scientific" racism that justified domination in the name of a civilizational superiority. A third phase opens with the discrediting of imperialism in the wake of the First World War: faced, on the one side, by Wilsonian advocacy of national rights to self-determination and, on the other, by the example of revolutionary socialism, the imperial powers spent the 1920s and 30s fending off awareness of their own illegitimacy. After the Second World War, decolonization was officially on the world agenda. Protracted and uneven, the process of African liberation hardly spelled the end of imperial discourse; indeed, from one perspective, it may be preferable to speak of neocolonialism rather than postcoloniality. Nevertheless, the idea that discursive monopoly should give way to self-determination

and cultural dialogue is widely recognized, in principle if more rarely in practice.

Awareness of a great land to the south, beyond the Mediterranean littoral, goes back to antiquity; the classical ethnographers, Herodotus and Pliny, include information about the area, some specific, some vague and legendary, in their surveys of the world known to Greco-Roman civilization. The crucial aspect of the Greek paradigm, as V. Y. Mudimbe (1994) terms it, is its classing of Africans as *barbaroi*, those living beyond the limits of the *politai*. The precise meaning of this contrast is a matter of debate, though it undoubtedly varied with the fortunes of the *imperium* itself. Pliny's famous tag "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi" (Out of Africa always something new) – indicates the region's status as a source of marvels – fascinating but not entirely trustworthy.

Knowledge of the continent and its inhabitants remained largely secondhand throughout the European Middle Ages, based on tradition, rumor, and speculation. A lingering classical influence meant that the landmass as a whole was variously referred to as Ethiopia, Abyssinia, or Libya. Not until the sixteenth century did the name Africa emerge as the most common designation, thanks to the popularity of the *Description of Africa* (1550) produced by El-Hasan ben Mohammed el-Wazzan ez-Zayyati, known to the west by his humanist sobriquet, Leo Africanus. When Africa entered the medieval imagination, it was in the context of a preoccupation with the spread of Islam; hence the widespread interest in the legend of Prester John, a Christian priest-king reputed to dwell somewhere in "middle Asia," cut off from his natural allies in the Mediterranean by the advancing Arab armies. Although loosely based on memories of the Coptic Kingdom of Abyssinia, stories of Prester John exhibited such fabulous accretions as gold-digging ants and magical mirrors; various (forged) "Letters from Prester John," urging his co-religionists on to greater feats of crusading spirit, circulated throughout Europe for several centuries (Reader 1998: 349–54).

A fusion of the classical interest in "marvels" with the martial religion of the Crusades can plausibly be regarded as the matrix of quest-romance. The idea of a sacred mission – to defeat the Moors, to find Prester John – certainly prompted Portuguese efforts to establish an imperial presence in North Africa (an effort that, conveniently, kept the restive Portuguese nobility occupied for much of the fifteenth century). When an expeditionary force seized Ceuta (across the Strait of Gibraltar) in 1415, a chronicler records that the Moorish mansions they ransacked made Portuguese dwellings look like pigsties by comparison (Boxer 1969: 13). Yet Ceuta also formed a terminal port for the trans-Saharan

gold trade, and within a few decades, the Portuguese had managed to divert a substantial part of the Saharan trade to their own maritime shipping. The prospect of lucrative dealings, in gold, ivory, slaves, and spices, helped to inspire the Portuguese Prince Henry to style himself "The Navigator." While the nobility fought the Moors in North Africa, merchants and minor officials sponsored by Dom Henrique made their way around Cape Bojador, opened commercial relations in the Senegambia, proceeded to establish *feitorias* (fortified trading posts) down the West African Coast, eventually rounding the Cape of Good Hope (in 1488) and continuing up the East Coast to secure a share of the Indian Ocean trade as well. In 1490, the Portuguese dispatched a large mission to the kingdom of the Kongo and converted a segment of the ruling elite to Christianity, including Nzinga Mbemba, who took the title of King Afonso I in 1506, ruled as a Catholic monarch until 1543, and sent a number of young Kongolese nobles, including the future Bishop of Utica, to Portugal for their education.

As the Portuguese Empire spread, and especially following the development of the plantation system in the New World, the demand for labor created a booming market for human bodies. In the early years of the Portuguese expansion, slaves were generally captured by coastal raiding parties. "Often directed against unarmed family groups or undefended villages," C. R. Boxer writes, these raids "were written up by the Court chronicler, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, as if they were knightly deeds of derring-do equal to any feats on the battlefields of Europe" (1969: 24–25). The Portuguese court, that is, preferred to regard its African expeditions in chivalric rather than directly commercial terms: the flow of Guinean gold that enabled the royal treasury in 1457 to issue its new gold coin, significantly named the *cruzado*, sustained such vanities. Within a few years, however, the slave trade had been institutionalized, with upwards of 150,000 Africans, including relatives of the Christian King Afonso of Kongo, passing into Portuguese hands between 1450 and 1500.[1] The boom in coastal trading, meanwhile, aggravated economic and political pressures in the interior. Traditional forms of servitude and dependence began to collapse into chattel slavery, as human bodies became, first, a convenient form of currency and then a valuable, if troublesome, commodity. Periodic efforts, in Benin or Kongo, to stem the flow simply undermined their reputation as trading partners, and forced slave traders farther afield. Africa's reputation for cruelty, corruption, and political instability began to take shape, a helpful by-product, for the European conscience, of the process Marx termed "primitive accumulation" (Reader 1998: 377–433).

The chief literary monument of the Portuguese expansion is Luis Vaz de Camões's epic *Os Lusiades* (1572), conceived and published just as Portugal's imperial moment was drawing to a sudden close. Set *in medias res* in the Mozambique channel, the *Lusiads* celebrate the achievement of "the stalwart commander," Vasco da Gama (canto 1, line 12). Camões, whose involvement in various Indian Ocean ventures included two years in Mozambique, embroiders a mythopoetic account of Portuguese historical destiny with sharply drawn and vivid details of his own; his description of a water-spout ("As a purple leech may be seen swelling / On the lips of some beast . . . The more it sucks, the bigger it grows," canto 5, verse 21) is justly famous. From the first, the epic makes the civilizational stakes of da Gama's voyage explicit. "We are Portuguese from the Occident," announce the "powerful Lusitanians" forthrightly. "We seek the passage to the Orient" (canto 1, line 50), as the treacherous Sheikh of Mozambique plots their ruin: "Nothing showed in his face or gestures / As, behind a cheerful mask, he continued / Treating them with gentle condescension / Until he could act out his true intention" (canto 1, line 69).

Having escaped from the Sheikh, da Gama's crew finds refuge with the Sultan of Malindi. Cantos 3–5 are then taken up with a prolonged narrative (modeled on *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*) of Portuguese history, including an account of da Gama's voyage down the African coast and around the Cape. Among the episodes are two contrasting descriptions of landfalls on either side of the Cape (at St. Helen's Bay and Mosselbaai, respectively). In the first, the sailors bring back "a stranger with a black skin / They had captured, making his sweet harvest / Of honey from the wild bees in the forest" (canto 5, verse 27). The stranger is uninterested in gold, silver, or spices, but taken with "Tiny beads of transparent crystal, / Some little, jingling bells and rattles, / A red bonnet of a pleasing colour" (canto 5, verse 29); later an effort by Fernão Veloso to record the natives' customs ends in a brief skirmish ("It was not just those bonnets that they wear / Were crimson at the end of this affair!" canto 5, verse 33).

In the second episode, by contrast, the voyagers encounter a "cordial and humane" people: "Their wives, black as polished ebony, / Were perched on gently lumbering oxen, / Beasts which, of all their cattle / Are the ones they prize the most. / They sang pastoral songs in their own / Tongue, sweetly and in harmony, / Whether rhymed, or in prose, we could not gauge / But like the pipes of Virgil's golden age" (canto 5, verse 63). The contrast between the two episodes – one anthropological, the other pastoral – is pointed and significant: what separates them is the rounding of the Cape, which inspires

one of Camões's most remarkable inventions, the Titan Adamastor, who curses the travelers for their transgression of the world's natural limits:

> O reckless people,
> Bolder than any the world has known,
> As stubborn in your countless,
> Cruel wars as in vainglorious quests;
> Because you have breached what is forbidden
> Daring to cross such remote seas,
> Where I alone for so long have prevailed
> And no ship, large or small, has ever sailed,
>
> Because you have desecrated nature's
> Secrets and the mysteries of the deep,
> Where no human, however noble
> Or immortal his worth, should trespass,
> Hear from me now what retribution
> Fate prescribes for your insolence.
>
> (verses 41–42)

Adamastor's curse inscribes future disaster at the very origin of the Portuguese imperial venture, overshadowing da Gama's heroic narrative with Camões's own late-imperial pessimism. The pastoral trope that follows is thus self-consciously idealizing, a nostalgic glimpse of a paradise forever barred ("For all our desire to converse with them, / Neither with words nor signs could we prevail, / So we once again raised anchor and set sail" canto 5, verse 64).

Epic aggrandizement undercut by guilt and a sense of futility: it is a recurrent pattern in reckonings of European experience in Africa – the mark, perhaps, of a literary distance from the furious ambitions of the empire builders. Literary rather than critical, for the melancholy of epic evokes fidelity to an ideal ("what redeems it is the idea only") and may demand rededication instead of ethical reflection. Unfulfilled ambitions are an open invitation to self-sacrifice, as Conrad's Marlow testifies. *Os Lusiades* breaks off with a condemnation of the present ("my throat is hoarse," writes Camões, "not from singing but from wasting song / On a deaf and coarsened people" – canto 10, verse 145) and an address to King Sebastião to resume the epic:

> In your service, an arm inured to battle;
> In your praise, a mind given to the Muses;
> All I lack is due approval where
> Merit should meet with esteem.
> If heaven grants me this, and your heart

> Embarks on an enterprise worthy of song . . .
> My triumphant, happy Muse will extol
> Your exploits throughout the world.
> (canto 10, verses 155–56)

Six years after *Os Lusiades* appeared, King Sebastião embarked on a disastrous invasion of Morocco, effectively putting an end to Portuguese designs in Africa for several centuries thereafter.

If Camões's despair brings the epic moment to a close, the pastoral interlude in southern Africa sets the stage for a quite different discursive formation. In 1652, the Dutch East India Company established a permanent settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, in order to supply fresh produce to ships plying the routes between Europe and Asia. At first, the colony sought to limit its conflicts with the local Khoikhoi ("Hottentot") and San ("Bushman") peoples, but within a few years, a category of "free burghers" claimed the right to establish their own farms on the indigenes' land. With the arrival, in 1689, of 150 members of the Dutch Reformed Church, the groundwork for "Boer" or "Afrikaaner" identity had been laid. Weakened by smallpox and increasingly repressive legislation, native groups were forced into subordinate status: "By 1778 the new governor Van Plattenburg reported finding no autonomous Khoikhoi communities in the Cape Colony" (Pratt 1992: 40).

In European discourse about Africa overall, the Cape Colony remained an anomaly until the nineteenth century, steady expansion of the Boer population notwithstanding. Its significance lay in being a way-station in the greater African coastal trade, rather than as an enterprise in its own right. Yet the routinization of the trade that produced the colony also inaugurated a shift in the forms of discourse about Africa, from what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "navigational paradigm" to one organized around Enlightenment science and "natural history." The project of natural history, as Pratt puts it,

> asserted an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; it elaborated a rationalizing, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants, and animals. In these respects, it figures a certain kind of global hegemony, notably one based on possession of land and resources rather than control over routes . . . Claiming no transformative potential whatsoever, it differed sharply from overtly imperial articulations of conquest, conversion, territorial appropriations, and enslavement. (1992: 38–39)

Natural history seeks to inventory the world; disavowing its relation to power, it claims to pursue disinterested knowledge. Where the navigational paradigm

constituted itself around heroic figures like Vasco da Gama, the protagonist of natural-history writing is the self-effacing observer, mere servant of a progressive science of the world. Aiming, ideally, at a God's-eye survey of all that exists, natural history imagined the world arranged into a systematic grid of categories (Coetzee 1988: 12–19). Inspired in particular by Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735), which established the practices of classification as the leading edge of scientific understanding, monumentalized in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* (1749), this descriptive imperative favored a static picture of the world, eschewed whatever refused to fit neatly into its categorical grid, and thus devalued change and its cognitive organon, narrative. The definitive monument of natural history is doubtless the *Description de l'Egypte* (1821–29) in twenty-one volumes, a by-product of the Napoleonic invasion.

The emergence of natural history is, of course, one aspect of the project of Enlightenment, the displacement of a divinely authored cosmos by the methodical investigation of a disenchanted but rationally intelligible natural order. In Africa, this ambition exacerbated the perceived difference between Europeans and natives; the former became the subjects of Enlightenment, the latter objects of its gaze. Narrative and its attributes – change, history, moral choice – gravitated towards the producers of knowledge, while the apparatus of natural history inscribed others, human and nonhuman alike, in the ledgers of a world known objectively.

The disparity in power thus precipitated a difference in discursive genres, a difference subsequently taken, all too often, as equivalent to a distinction in kind. It is in the context of this misprision that the well-documented propensity for uninformed and dismissive remarks about Africa, by eighteenth-century European philosophers otherwise champions of Enlightenment, needs to be grasped (see Eze 1997).

Here it is worth noting the significance of the Protestant Reformation, long linked to such phenomena as the rise of capitalism and the disenchantment of the world. Within the Catholic Church, the Spanish conquest of the New World had left a legacy of doctrinal debate about the status of other peoples: "whatever else might be said of non-Westerners," Philip Curtin remarks, "they were officially human beings and potentially Christians with full spiritual equality. Because of the religious difference, this position did not necessarily extend to Protestant Europe" (1964: 33). Indeed, Protestants were more inclined to search out biblical precedents for their treatment of Africans, especially where slavery was concerned. Thus the rise of natural history was accompanied by the resurgence of quasi-theological explanations for the inequality between Europeans and Africans, for instance, that the latter were

descendants of Noah's son Ham, cursed by God to be "a servant of servants" (Genesis 9. 25). At the same time, even in Catholic territories, the gap between official Church doctrine and the actual treatment of native peoples remained, to put it mildly, considerable: "In reality what regulated the degree of exploitation was not the owner's nationality or religion but the extent to which there was a lucrative market for the products of slave labour" (Kiernan 1969: 196–97).

The discourse of Enlightenment had contradictory and ambivalent effects on the European understanding of Africa. On the one hand, according to Curtin, "18C Europeans knew more and cared more about Africa than they did at any later period up to the 1950's" (1964: 10). Product of an established and lucrative trade, such knowledge was far from being a mere tissue of generalizations and stereotypes. Works like the *Universal History* (1736–65), for instance, devoted as much space to Africa as to East, Southeast, and South Asia altogether: "The treatment of individual African countries included a short sketch of European activities; but the body of the work was concerned with the history, manners, and customs of the Africans themselves, and a quarter of the African section was given over to West Africa" (Curtin 1964: 13). On the other hand, the reliability of the information was due, in large measure, to its commercial value: those who were engaged in the slave trade needed to have a firm grasp on the customs of their business partners, not to mention the habits of their human merchandise. The profit motive sharpened the eye for precise distinctions, while pragmatic necessity rendered empirical observations as indisputable facts of nature. But the sheer volume of the traffic in human beings – recent scholarship puts the figure of slaves exported at over 61,000 per annum for the period 1701–1800 – and the associated rise in visible misery and brutality began to constitute a problem for the nascent Enlightenment conception of universal human freedom.

How to explain the sudden growth and influence of antislavery discourse from the mid-eighteenth century onward, after three centuries of near-universal acceptance, continues to be a matter of historiographical controversy.[2] Since Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), it has been common to connect the fortunes of abolition to the spread of capitalism; although Williams's own reduction of antislavery to an expression of economic interest has been largely discredited, it remains an unavoidable point of reference for subsequent studies. Much of the debate turns on what, exactly, is taken as needing explanation: the development of "humanitarian" sensibilities, the support for antislavery measures garnered among political and economic elites, or the ultimate outcome and long-term consequences of the move to

suppress the slave trade. If there can be little question that early abolitionists – whether outsiders like the Quakers or more established figures like William Wilberforce or Henry Thornton – were largely inspired by religious ideals and principles, the politics surrounding the eventual success of the antislavery cause were less consistently high-minded. The French Revolution's abortive experiment with emancipation traversed the same trajectory more rapidly, though it did result in the Haitian Revolution (see James 1938).

For our purposes, however, the significant question is how the escalating debate about slavery affected European discourse on African and Africans. The campaign for abolition was one of the first attempts systematically to mobilize a newly emergent public opinion behind a moral cause; the rhetorical strategies it devised to call attention to social evil have an uncanny familiarity. As Patrick Brantlinger observes, antislavery literature organized itself around the revelation of atrocities, the exposure of unspeakable savagery (1988: 175–76). The organized practice of the slave trade is epitomized by vividly etched scenes of cruelty; shown as disrupting the rule of natural sentiment and pastoral tranquility, such scenes acquire the force of revelation through repeated shock. The strategy uncovers certain presuppositions about human dignity and ethical standards, soon to be codified into conceptions of the rights of man; its product is a culture of sentimentality dependent on recurrent waves of revulsion and disposed to condescending benevolence and moral self-congratulation. Imperial discourse, that is, inflected humanitarian rhetoric with an attitude of moral paternalism towards Africa, in which a sense of obligation carried undertones of disapproval, a moralistic rhetoric that proved an irresistible target for later satirists like Dickens and Carlyle.

A moral rather than merely a political cause, the campaign against slavery intervened in the public sphere with arguments and exposés; but it was poetry that rose to the task of sentimental reform. Indeed, abolitionist rhetoric and the humanitarian sensibility it cultivated is one of the seedbeds of European Romanticism, a forcing ground for the extension of sympathies. A comparison between William Cowper's verse-sermon "Charity" (1783) and Robert Southey's "To Horror" (1791) neatly encapsulates the development. Cowper's text, moving through the measured antitheses prescribed by his heroic couplets, elaborates opposition to slavery within the framework of traditional Christian morality: "Canst thou, and honoured with a Christian name, / Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame? / Trade in the blood of innocence, and plead / Expedience as a warrant for the deed?" (quoted in Bender 1992: 89). A decade later, Southey draws on more Gothic conventions for the climactic stanza of his "To Horror": "Horror! I call thee yet once more! / Bear me to that

accursed shore, / Where on the stake the Negro writhes" (in Brantlinger 1988: 175). What is remarkable here is not only the change in esthetic conventions, to the point that, for Southey, the emotion precedes and virtually overrides its ostensible cause, but also the ideological shift that displaces the argument from questions of justification to the unquestionable reality of physical pain. In place of the communal rhetoric of shame and justice through which Cowper addresses the slave trader, that is, the Romantic text mediates its appeal through an individualized moral sensibility ("I call . . . Bear me"). As the image of Africa came increasingly to be associated with the graphic depiction of cruelty and suffering, such ethical immediacy would have grave effects on the European understanding of African cultures and politics.

At the same time, however, the Romantic emphasis on suffering and sympathy was not driven simply by esthetic motives, but responded to broader shifts in the debate surrounding the slave trade. For as the abolitionist cause gained public influence, pro-slavery arguments grew coarser and more vehement. With their moral standing impugned and their economic interests threatened, those who profited from slavery, particularly the plantation owners of the West Indies, defended their practices by deepening the divide between themselves and those they held as property. Where earlier traders accumulated detailed knowledges about the peoples with whom they dealt, polemical defenses of slavery were increasingly based on generalizations about Africans, often extrapolated wildly from the behavior of populations that had undergone the Middle Passage. Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), in particular, presumed on the basis of his experience with slaves in the West Indies to offer testimony about the "nature" of the Negro. Casting vicious prejudice in the form of natural history, Long insisted that blacks and whites belonged to different species. According to Curtin,

> Long divided *genus homo* into three species: Europeans and similar people, Negroes, and "orang-outangs" . . . He arranged Africans on an ascending scale from the half-legendary Jagas of Angola upwards through Hottentots, Fulbe and Mandinka peoples of West Africa, to the Wolof and Ethiopians, the highest type of African man . . . Long's greatest importance was in giving an "empirical" and "scientific" base that would lead on to pseudo-scientific racism. The part of the *History of Jamaica* dealing with race was reprinted in America in the *Columbia Magazine* of 1788, where it became a support for later American racism. It was used again and again for three-quarters of a century by British and Continental polygenists . . . and it provided a set of ready made arguments for any publicist who wanted to prove the "fact" of African inferiority.
>
> (1964: 44–45)

In Long and others, the stylistic habits of the Enlightenment – systematic classification, naturalistic rationalism, moral skepticism – bring a fateful veneer of authority to the defense of slavery. Otherwise nonsensical claims about Africans' lack of capacity to feel pain, exercise self-restraint, or behave rationally were passed off as scientific gospel. Most ominously, the disparity between Europeans and Africans was grounded, not in social, economic, or technological differences – not, in short, in human practices and institutions – but in "nature." Ethical considerations were subordinated to a discourse of realism.

Needless to say, the debate over slavery followed larger trends in European intellectual history. The opposition between "science" and "poetry," taken as competing sources of authority and styles of ethical conviction, runs like a fault-line through nineteenth-century discourse. Broadly speaking, the proslavery position gravitated towards conceptions of natural inequality, framing its arguments in naturalistic and aggregative terms and elaborating a discourse of racial types and civilizational stages. Opponents of slavery remained within the orbit of Christian universalism, even as traditional religion modulated, over the course of the century, into missionary evangelism, on the one hand, and appeals to subjective or idealistic motives, on the other. The abolitionist cause invested heavily in figures of heroic or sentimental individualism: in addition to the slave narratives that often testified equally to the horrors of bondage and the power of Christian conversion, the Romantics saw the exiled and deracinated slave as a potent metaphor for poetic aspiration, as in William Wordsworth's tribute to Toussaint L'Ouverture (1803): "Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men! . . . There's not a breathing of the common wind / That will forget thee; thou hast great allies; / Thy friends are exultations, agonies, / And love, and man's unconquerable mind" (lines 1, 10–13). In the 1820s, the Brontë children set their imaginary Glass Town Confederacy in West Africa, in transparent homage to the founding of Liberia (1816); subsequently recast as "Angria," this post-Romantic colony sketched out ideas of passionate rebellion and imprisonment that would find their way into the sisters' mature fiction. Baudelaire's "Le cygne," linking an enslaved Andromache to a nameless "negress" dreaming of "superb Africa," gave the figure a powerful incarnation in French poetry as well.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the cause of abolition had largely won the day, with England leading the way in barring the slave trade in 1833, France, guided by Victor Schoelcher, embracing emancipation in 1848, and the Civil War settling the issue in the United States during the 1860s. But legal and political victories did not entail triumph in moral or intellectual terms;

indeed the nineteenth century witnessed the eruption of race-thinking and racism on a grand scale. In Scotland, Robert Knox drew on his service as an army surgeon in South Africa (1817–20) to forge his system of "transcendental anatomy," most fully articulated in his monumental *The Races of Man* (1846): "Race is everything: literature, science, art – in a word, civilization depends on it" (quoted in Curtin 1964: 378). Benjamin Disraeli, and Edward Bulwer Lytton who served as Secretary of State for the Colonies, were only two of the many who drew inspiration from Knox. In France, the Comte de Gobineau based his own four-volume *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55) on Knox's work. Racial discourse also acquired a powerful new scientific vocabulary with the rise of Darwinism, especially as evolutionary biology tended to undermine the authority of Christian revelation. Although Darwin himself wrestled with the ethical implications of his evolutionary theory, "racists could use the theory of natural selection to 'prove' that human varieties must be vastly different from one another" (Curtin 1964: 364), while popular slogans about "the survival of the fittest" were given a racial or national gloss in "social Darwinism" and sanctioned a new ruthlessness in the pursuit of great-power interests.

As such ideas came to inform European thinking about cultural difference, antislavery discourse itself left a troubling legacy for Africa. Having washed their own hands of the trade, the British felt entitled to interdict the activities of others, a useful pretext for intervening more directly in African affairs. In *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (1840), Thomas Fowell Buxton, who inherited the mantle of abolitionism from William Wilberforce, proposed to organize the Niger Expedition in order to bring Christianity and "legitimate commerce" to West Africa. Buxton's tract illustrates the close kinship between antislavery rhetoric and missionary fervor: "Bound in the chains of the grossest ignorance," he declared, Africa "is a prey to the most savage superstition. Christianity has made but feeble inroads on this kingdom of darkness" (quoted in Brantlinger 1988: 177). Advocates of a more aggressive "forward policy" in Africa likewise found the tradition of focusing on shocking atrocities helpful in mustering public support. In a turn that recurs regularly up to the present day, European humanitarianism could imagine itself as an exemplary corrective to the conduct of Africans.

The very prevalence of abolitionist discourse, in other words, meant that images of the slave trade became, for public opinion in Europe, indelible emblems for Africa itself. Historical reform, in fact, quickly came to reinforce the contrast between rational progress in the west and the "immemorial customs" of Africans. In the words of Victor Kiernan, "Formerly, the argument in

defense of the trade, that removal from Africa was the Negro's only chance of redemption, had been repeated by men as prominent as [Lord] Nelson: now that he was no longer to be carried off to civilization, it might be right that civilization should be carried to him" (1969: 204). This shift laid the ideological groundwork for colonialism proper, as a passion for reform fed the conviction of a civilizing mission.

The counterpart to this enhanced self-righteousness was an intensified denigration of Africans themselves. As Brantlinger has demonstrated, it was during this period that the European myth of the "Dark Continent" ultimately crystallized (1988: 173–97). A rhetoric of "barbarism," distantly related to the Greek terminology of *polites* and *barbaroi*, was ratcheted up into the image of the "savage." Practices of human sacrifice and cannibalism, previously minor curiosities in western accounts of the continent's customs, became an obsessive motif: the encounter between cannibal and missionary is still a popular graphic residue (however humorously treated) of the stereotypes forged at this moment. Combined with ideas about racial typologies, this moral contrast congealed into a powerful representational schema, the "Manichean allegory" theorized by Fanon. The "Dark Continent" projected moral, racial, and geographical features onto the single axis of color (light/dark; white/black), etching the terms of cultural awareness deeply into the face of nature. Missionary discourse could speak fervently about saving souls, but the dominant idiom subordinated the fate of individuals to greater civilizational entities and the destinies of nations.

Contributing to the mythology of the "Dark Continent" was the reinvention of natural history in the more dynamic narrative form of geographical exploration. Mungo Park's 1799 account of his *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* had already yoked an ostensibly scientific purpose to an investigation of the Niger River.[3] Malarial fever limited European incursions during the first decades of the nineteenth century – Buxton's Niger Expedition came to grief upon losing forty-one of its western members to fever – but the development of quinine raised the survival rate, and set off a new fashion for African exploration. David Livingstone's sixteen-year stint in southern Africa, recorded in his *Missionary Travels and Researches* (1857), established his reputation as a Victorian saint.[4] Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, later renowned for his theories of eugenics, published *The Art of Travel, or, Shifts and Contrivances available in wild countries* in 1855, described as "a thesaurus of African lore [containing] advice on everything from how to deal with scorpion stings to how to treat porters" (McLynn 1992: 56). The rivalry between Richard Francis Burton and John Speke to trace the course of the Nile River produced two bestsellers,

Burton's *Lake Regions of Central Africa* (1860) and Speke's *Discovery of the Sources of the Nile* (1864).

That the authors of these texts became legendary, stamping the character of the pith-helmeted African explorer onto the popular imagination, is testimony to the transformation of a tabular natural history into a narrative of discovery and adventure, in which obstacles to knowledge are morally weighted. "The great explorers' writings," Brantlinger observes, "are nonfictional quest romances in which the hero-authors struggle through enchanted, bedeviled lands toward an ostensible goal: the discovery of the Nile's source, the conversion of the cannibals. But that goal is also sheer survival and return home to the regions of light" (1988: 180–81). Record of a successful struggle against "darkness," that is, the text itself illuminates the lives of its readers, building their store of knowledge and securing their imaginative identification with the heroic advance of enlightenment.

The power of this narrative formula ensured that it would be replicated and exploited, as it was most notably by Henry Morton Stanley. Born John Rowlands in Wales in 1841, Stanley took the name of a New Orleans plantation owner who befriended him after he jumped ship; he served on both Confederate and Union sides during the US Civil War, and later covered Hancock's "pacification" of the Cheyenne Indians for the *Missouri Democrat*. The military experience shaped Stanley's conception of exploration, which he undertook with all the ruthless dedication of an organized campaign, acquiring the epithet Bula Matari – Breaker of Stones – for his use of dynamite. But his venture into Africa was in large part a journalistic stunt, cooked up by the publisher of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett. Alert to the potential of newly global communications – a transatlantic telegraph line had been laid in 1869 – Bennett dispatched Stanley to Africa with the assignment to find David Livingstone, whose precise whereabouts had been uncertain for several years. Much of the excitement generated by Stanley's expedition was due to the speed of his progress through the continent, and the relatively immediate coverage it received in the *Herald*.[5] When he reached Ujiji (on the shores of Lake Tanganyika) in October 1871, the journalist greeted the missionary with a phrase quickly viewed as a classic in understated punchlines ("Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"). Stanley's account of *How I Found Livingstone in Central Africa* appeared in 1872, to widespread acclaim.

The encounter between Stanley and Livingstone heralded more than just a passing of the baton between generations of "explorers." It represented a major shift in the locus of Africanist discourse and thus in the legitimation of Euro-American involvement in the continent. Livingstone had gone to Africa as a

missionary, and although his exploring expeditions were often only tenuously connected to spreading the gospel, his reputation for sainthood was in part based on his opposition to the African slave trade. Stanley had no such moral justification: his motive was celebrity. "You are now as famous as Livingstone," Bennett cabled him in Aden, "having discovered the discoverer" (quoted in McLynn 1992: 91). The formulation is significant: henceforth, it would be news-value, and public interest as shaped and interpreted by journalism, that would steer western attention towards Africa. In keeping with the Social Darwinism so prevalent among the capitalist powers from the 1870s onward, self-interest and competition became the watchwords governing European behavior.

Among the quickest to realize the opportunities for aggrandizement made possible by the new discursive situation was King Leopold of Belgium, a monarch in search of a mission. In 1876, he convened a conference in Brussels with the purpose of opening "to civilization the only part of our globe where Christianity has not penetrated and to pierce the darkness which envelops the entire population" (quoted in Henessy 1961: 80). Out of the conference came an "International African Association" and then the "International Association of the Congo," both fronts for Leopold's designs on Central Africa. In 1879, Leopold hired Stanley to lead an expedition to the Congo region, setting up trading stations that would form the infrastructure for the "Congo Free State." Armed with modern artillery, Stanley waged a campaign of conquest, extorting "treaties" acknowledging the supremacy of the Belgian king from the native populations he encountered. In the Upper Congo, where Stanley's passage brought Arab slave traders in its wake, he became known as "Ipanga Ngundi" – Destroyer of the Country (Johnston 1910: 82). For his part, Stanley continued to boost his own intrepid reputation, publishing *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration* (1885), *In Darkest Africa* (1890), and *Slavery and the Slave Trade in Africa* (1893), not to mention *My Dark Companions and Their Strange Stories* (1893).

King Leopold's initiatives in Central Africa were viewed with alarm by the other European powers. To establish a legal framework for what threatened to become a frantic scramble for African territories, the powers arranged the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, in which the continent was decisively carved up and distributed among its European claimants. Leopold received exclusive rights to the region Stanley had staked out as the Congo Free State, owning it, as one observer put it, as completely as Rockefeller owned Standard Oil (McLynn 1992: 102). The Berlin Conference marked the onset of colonialism proper in

Africa: to secure their claims, states had to demonstrate their commitment to ruling the territories they owned.[6] For the inhabitants of Africa, the Berlin Conference left a legacy of arbitrary borders, drawn with little regard for language, culture, or kinship, and tailored to the demands of European national interests. The resultant map was a wrenching imposition of modern cartographic conceptions onto longstanding patterns of flexible identity and plural affiliation. Laying the groundwork for what Basil Davidson (1992) calls "the curse of the nation-state" in Africa, the Berlin Conference simultaneously allowed the continent to be imagined as a unity and inscribed it with ineradicable divisions.[7]

It is worth observing here that the plans for a colonized Africa largely preceded the actual practices of colonization. Cartography proved itself a technology of the imagination, capable of inciting a sustained project of social and political engineering. The map registers, not the reality of existing features, but the aspiration to systematic appropriation. Conrad's Marlow acknowledges the stimulus such charts offered to boyhood fantasy: "when I was a little chap, I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map . . . I would put my finger on it and say: When I grow up I will go there" (Conrad 1899). Fed by the exploits of celebrities like Livingstone and Stanley, pumped up by the forces of the new mass culture, cartography nourished a sense of global reach.

The assumption of world-ordering responsibility displayed at Berlin finds its echoes in popular culture of the time, as the ever-less-distant corners of the world become available for imaginative occupation. No longer a static prop but a stage for the adventure of European expansion, the global map comes to support the literary projections of European boyhood. The most resonant title is no doubt Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873), but the appeal of cartography crosses national borders. Karl May populated the world's frontiers with heroic Germans, in the process teaching German boys more about geography than they ever learned in school. In England, the novels of G. A. Henty *By Sheer Pluck: A Tale of the Ashanti War* (1884) and *The Dash for Khartoum* (1891) ranged far afield, following the formation of the imperial spirit across borders of both space and time. In France, Pierre Loti (*nom de plume* for Julien Viaud) won election to the Académie Française in 1891, at the age of forty-one, for his contribution to the literature of French exoticism, including the virtual invention of the *roman colonial* (Quilla-Villéger 1998: 193–97). Heir to a tradition of post-Romantic travel reaching back to Chateaubriand, Loti led

the peripatetic life of a "planetary pilgrim," discovering romance and disillusion in far-flung landscapes from Iceland to Arabia.

Like Conrad, Loti began his career as a naval officer; in 1873–74, he served aboard a ship monitoring the African coast from Dakar to Guinea. The experience became the basis for *Le roman d'un spahi* (1880), which detailed the travails of a French soldier stationed in Senegal.[8] Born in the Cévennes, the mountainous heart of provincial France, Jean Peyral – "a dreamer, like all mountaineers" (p. 25) – rapidly succumbs to the cynicism and lethargy of the colonial atmosphere:

> Environment, climate, nature, had gradually exercised all their enervating influence upon his youthful personality. Slowly he had felt himself gliding down unknown slopes – and today he was the lover of Fatou-gaye, a young Negro girl of Khassonké race, who had cast upon him I know not what sensual and impure seduction, what talismanic enchantment. (p. 20)

A decadent counterplot to traditional stories of social climbing, Loti's novel is fragmented and impressionistic, enlivening textual stasis with exotic descriptions and erotic reverie. A pseudo-scientific naturalism ("environment, climate, nature") here fuses clichés about military dissipation with beliefs about African primitivism and sexuality ("*Anamalis fobil!* . . . words whose translation would blister these pages . . . the first words, the motive and refrain of a diabolical song, delirious with licentious passion, the song of the spring *bamboulas*," p. 70). Peyral's degradation is effectively complete when Fatou-gaye steals and sells the soldier's watch, a paternal inheritance and "precious fetish" (p. 152); the loss confirms his irrevocable exile from civilized temporality. His hometown fiancée marries another; his African mistress bears him a son. In the novel's rather lugubrious conclusion, Peyral is killed in military engagement deep in the African interior, while Fatou-gaye commits infanticide.

If Loti's fictions typified *fin-de-siècle* decadence, Rider Haggard's novels resonated with the more vigorous strains of anglophone imperialism. Attached, at the age of nineteen, to the office of the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, South Africa, Haggard hoisted the British flag over the Transvaal following its annexation in 1877, and witnessed the initial phases of the Anglo-Zulu war, recorded in his first book, *Cetewayo and His White Neighbours* (1880). On trek, he encountered the son of a former King of Swaziland, M'Hlopekazi (Umslopogaas), whose stories of warrior life impressed the young Englishman inordinately. As a native sidekick to the hero Allan Quartermain, Umslopogaas became a fixture of Haggard's run of African novels. Starting with *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), Haggard virtually invented the mass-market blockbuster in England,

and parlayed his colonial experience into a lifetime's literary capital; he felt particularly free when writing about Africa, he declared, "the land whereof none know the history, [and] the savages, whom I love, although some of them are almost as merciless as Political Economy" (quoted in Pocock 1993: 63). He specialized in romantic tales about the Zulu, including *Nada the Lily* (1892) and a pseudo-historical trilogy about the rise and fall of the Zulu kingdom (*Marie*, 1912; *Child of Storm*, 1913; and *Finished*, 1917).

When the first of Haggard's African novels appeared, just as the Berlin Conference was drawing to a close, his publisher plastered London with posters announcing "*King Solomon's Mines* – The Most Amazing Story Ever Written" (Pocock 1993: 62). The episode is significant, for it testifies to the intimate relation between mass culture and journalism, whose construction of the news exerted increasing pressure on the politics of empire. Public interest in southern Africa had been kindled by the opening of the Kimberly diamond mines in 1871, and ignited by the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1885; together, these two finds attracted an influx of new migrants, both European and African, and prompted the creation of pass laws that laid the foundations of South African apartheid. As in the American myth of the Wild West, the combination of an unregulated frontier and a newly powerful popular press spawned legends, pseudo-epic figures for a new age of conquest. Few men embodied such myths more fully than Cecil Rhodes, whose De Beers Consolidated had, by 1891, gained a monopoly on diamond production in Kimberly and an enormous stake in the gold mines as well. Shrewd and ruthless in his dealings, both financial and political, Rhodes drew up a Trust Deed for De Beers that "permitted the company to engage in any business enterprise, to annex land in any part of Africa, to govern foreign territories and maintain standing armies on those territories, if necessary" (Reader 1998: 513). Moreover, Rhodes knew how to identify his own interests with those of the British Empire as a whole. Plans for an "Africa British from the Cape to Cairo" bore his imprint, as a famous cartoon of Rhodes as the continent-bestriding colossus records.[9]

From the mid-1880s, then, through the first decades of the twentieth century, European visions of Africa were driven by a speculative frenzy, fed by exorbitant ambitions and dreams of personal enrichment comparable, in their way, to the Spanish Conquest of the New World. A capitalist economy in full swing, however, demanded measurable returns on its investments, and justified the exploitation of African resources, both natural and human. Such an atmosphere made the ventures of King Leopold in the Congo more representative of the European presence in Africa than even Conrad could acknowledge.

The gloom that suffuses *Heart of Darkness*, while at one level an attribute of *fin-de-siècle* malaise, can likewise be regarded as a symptomatic expression of this realization.

The devastation wrought by the First World War spelled the end of the imperial enterprise. Ideologically no less than esthetically, it opened a generational rift in Europe, between pre- and postwar sensibilities, between those who believed in the mission of western civilization and those who could only regard such talk with irony, contempt, or melancholy nostalgia. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Lenin's view of imperialism as the last (or latest) stage of capitalism achieved widespread currency; the First World War was taken as the logical outcome of imperial rivalry and competition. Even those who rejected the Leninist thesis were unwilling to defend imperialism, looking instead to Woodrow Wilson's notion of self-determination, institutionalized in the League of Nations, as the guarantor of future peace. Only in Germany and Italy, defeated in the war itself, did the imperial cause retain its appeal. Indeed, Nazism and Fascism, as Hannah Arendt argued, turned the practices developed in the colonies onto the populations of Europe (Arendt 1951).[10]

The postwar moment marked the end of the imperial enterprise, but not, of course, the end of colonialism. The jingoist fever that fueled European expansion since the 1870s broke, and left behind vast territories viewed, more soberly, as problems for administration. With the judgment of generals largely discredited, rhetorical custody of the empire passed from the military to the civil service.[11] Restored communications and improved transportation also increased the number of intellectuals inspecting the colonial possessions. André Gide's *Voyage au Congo* (1927) and *Retour du Tchad* (1928), products of a mission sponsored by the French Colonial Ministry, echoed Conrad in bringing the treatment of the colonized into disrepute. Four years later, Michel Leiris signed on as "secretary-archivist" to the Dakar-Djibouti expedition organized by the ethnographer Marcel Griaule, recording his experiences and impressions at length in *Afrique fantôme* (1934). In *Remote People* (1931) and *Black Mischief* (1932), the English satirist Evelyn Waugh cast a similarly misanthropic eye on East and Central Africa, and later covered Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia (*Waugh in Abyssinia*, 1936). Graham Greene, more originally, visited Liberia (*Journey without Maps*, 1934).

A comparison between Leiris and Waugh will prove instructive for grasping differences between the French and English patterns of disaffection from empire. Influenced by Surrealism, associated with the avant-garde intellectual Georges Bataille, Leiris was drawn to Africa in the spirit of modernist

primitivism. African customs and beliefs seemed to offer a vital alternative to the stifling conformity of European civilization, and promised more intense experiences of the torments and ecstasies in life. Nourished by avant-garde interest in occultism, esoteric religion, and extreme psychic states, Leiris was fascinated by ritual practices and ideas of spirit possession; in Abyssinia, he attended a sacrificial ceremony, drinking and having himself anointed with blood. For the Parisian, in short, Africa looked to strip off the mask of civilization to reveal a more authentic being.[12]

Where Leiris's anthropological fantasies prompted a quest for primal spiritual power, *Black Mischief* takes the charade of civilization itself as its subject. Making the most of one winter spent visiting the region, Waugh invented an imaginary independent kingdom, ruled by "Seth, Emperor of Azania, Chief of the chiefs of Sakuyu, Lord of Wanda and Tyrant of the seas, Bachelor of the Arts of Oxford University" (Waugh 1932: 11). The notion of African self-rule is itself a comic conceit in Waugh's hands, harbinger of a world turned upside-down. In the novel's opening chapter, a rebellion against the emperor sets off an escalating series of pay-offs, betrayals, and murders before resulting in an unexpected victory for the status quo. Waugh's cheerful nihilism seeks, in a sense, to go Conradian disenchantment one better, by taking the claims of morality as the most ludicrous of pretexts. His satire is thus mercilessly even-handed. Despairing at one moment, the Emperor Seth is exuberantly modern-minded the next: "We are Progress and the New Age," he proclaims. "The world is already ours; it is our world now, because we are the Present . . . We are Light and Speed and Strength, Steel and Steam, Youth, Today and Tomorrow" (1932: 43). Meanwhile, remaining whites are shown "hanging around the bars and bemoaning over their cups the futility of expecting justice in a land run by a pack of niggers" (1932: 19). The device of free indirect discourse here allows the text to have its racist cake and diet, too; in the great tradition of conservative satire, Waugh delights in the spectacle of cultural degeneration, savaging moral laxity, miscegenation, stupidity, and corruption. From this perspective, the pretensions of colonialism are sheer folly; but so, too, are anticolonial aspirations and, indeed, all political schemes. For Leiris, Africa offered access to primitive powers; for Waugh, by contrast, primitivism is the febrile symptom of a diseased civilization.[13]

Waugh's text is, so to speak, deliberately superficial, using the colonial setting as a topical occasion for satirical wit. The novels of Joyce Cary present a more serious effort to portray the cultural effects of European rule, from a writer who served seven years (1913–20) as a colonial administrator in Nigeria. Cary's four African novels – *Aissa Saved* (1932), *An American Visitor* (1933), *The*

African Witch (1936), and *Mister Johnson* (1938) – are unusual in attempting to resist the structure of quest-romance and to employ instead the techniques of domestic realism in the colonial context. The premise is that imperialism itself can be de-romanticized, and African fiction writing brought within the mainstream of English fiction. In the background of Cary's texts stand the everyday routines of colonial administration – map-making, census-taking, road-building; in the foreground, the "cultural contacts" possible within this framework, particularly the various forms of conflict between "tradition and modernity." His setting is studiously contemporary, responsive to such cultural trends as the effects of tourism in *An American Visitor*, incipient nationalism in *The African Witch*. As a liberal, Cary takes ample note of colonialist prejudices; hidebound conservatives often supply a dash of comic relief in the novels, expressing shock at Africans dressed in European styles, for instance. But Cary's renderings of the Nigerian scene are regularly marred by the proprietary air of the old colonial hand. His sympathy has more than a touch of paternalistic indgulence, and he is given to authoritative pronouncements ("The faith in juju stands badly, a few dry years, a very little contamination from a government instruction destroy faith in the lingam," 1932: 8). Cary's novels arguably identify themselves with the rationalizing work of administration, the forces of progress, and the conventions of "mechanism," as he calls it. Within this apparatus, African beliefs and practices can be treated with compassion, curiosity, or exasperation, but they cannot, at bottom, be taken seriously. Natives fallen under the sway of European civilization, meanwhile, like the nationalist Aladi in *The African Witch* or the eponymous Mister Johnson, are ultimately regarded as victims, pathetic rather than tragic, of a historical process that exceeds them. In 1941, in the shadow of the Second World War, Cary produced a pamphlet, prefaced by George Orwell, on *The Case for African Freedom* (expanded in 1944), looking ahead to the issues of postwar reconstruction and advocating a commitment to African development. A brief historical survey, *Britain and West Africa* (1946) reiterated Cary's core belief that "The partition of Africa . . . was a blessing to the African masses. Its worse evils, even of the Congo under Leopold's concession, were not so bad as the perverse and ruinous cruelty of slave raiders and despots like the Ashanti kings" (Cary 1962: 176). Cary's dismissive picture of precolonial Africa provoked a rebuttal from the young Chinua Achebe.

If Evelyn Waugh viewed colonial society as yet one more instance of stupidity in the great parade of decadence, the Danish-born writer Karen Blixen, better known as Isak Dinesen, depicted life in Africa as an orderly counterweight to a Europe *entre-deux-guerres*. Set in Kikuyu country just north of

Nairobi, *Out of Africa* (1937) follows in the wake of Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) in picturing an Edenic world of eternal truths, pastoral labor, and big-game-hunting. The writing is deliberately simplified, sensuous, and keenly attuned to the natural landscape. In Dinesen's text, humans and their awkward histories dwindle before the spectacle of the Kenyan mountains; the "natives," as she typically calls them, are folded into the scenery, even when what is at issue is the politics of settlement. "I had six thousand acres of land," Dinesen writes,

> and had thus got much spare land besides the coffee plantation. Part of the farm was native forest, and about one thousand acres were squatters' land, what they called their *shambas*. The squatters are Natives, who with their families hold a few acres on a white man's farm, and in return have to work for him a certain number of days in the year. My squatters, I think, saw the relationship in a different light, for many of them were born on the farm, and their fathers before them, and they very likely regarded me as a sort of superior squatter on their estates. (1937: 9)

The term "squatters" here conveniently equates colonizer and colonized, both of them equally transitory in face of the permanence of nature. Dinesen's casual tone ("My squatters, I think . . .") bespeaks an aristocratic insouciance, an indifference to mere questions of rightful ownership or possession, as if moral questions were trivial compared to the realities of natural life.

In its naturalizing of the settler relationship, *Out of Africa* harks back to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Like Robinson, Dinesen presents herself as a splendid individual bringing productive order to an uncultivated part of the world: "In the wildness and irregularity of the country, a piece of land laid out and planted according to rule, looked very well. Later on, when I flew in Africa, and became familiar with the appearance of my farm from the air, I was filled with admiration for my coffee-plantation . . . and I realized how keenly the human mind yearns for geometrical figures" (1937: 7). Like the administrative projects that inform Joyce Cary's texts, this aerial perspective yields the satisfaction of long-term plans brought to fruition, the fulfillment of the cartographic ambitions adumbrated at the Berlin Conference. The counterpart of such magnificent self-regard ("the human mind yearns") is the virtually botanical tendency to regard the locals as a collection of essential specimens or types. As Dinesen herself confirms, this sense of mastery is deeply indebted to a military esthetic, a gaze enthralled by the spectacle of disciplined masses. "My father was an officer in the Danish and French army," she writes, "and as a very young lieutenant he wrote home . . . 'The love of war is a passion like another,

you love soldiers as you love young womenfolk . . . But the love of women can include only one at a time, and the love for your soldiers comprehends the whole regiment, which you would like enlarged if it were possible.' It was the same thing with the Natives and me" (1937: 18). Like the officer's love for his soldiers, the plantation-owner's love for her natives gives an erotic overlay to a fundamentally authoritarian relationship. The clarity of Dinesen's portrait, that is, rests on the presumption of an inviolable distance. The closest analogue to this vision can perhaps be found in the work of Leni Riefenstahl ("Africa means more to me than any other country . . . I shall be homesick for Africa, its people, its animals, its deserts and savannahs as long as I live," Riefenstahl 1982: 7), whose photographs summon a comparable spectacle of pagan virility and primitive racial splendor.

Doris Lessing evokes a similar atmosphere in *The Grass is Singing* (1950), on a considerably diminished scale and without the aristocratic *hauteur*. Set on a small farm in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), the novel rubs the assumption of unbridgeable racial distance up against the fact of physical proximity, raising psychic inhibition to the pitch of modernist hysteria (the title alludes to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*). Appearing at a moment when the British Empire was dying but before colonial independence had been secured, Lessing's text addressed the leading edge of metropolitan opinion, and was received as a timely protest against the "color bar" recently enshrined in South African law, thanks to the 1948 victory of the Afrikaaner National Party, under the name *apartheid*. In Dinesen and Lessing, as earlier in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1888), the fact that author and central character alike are unmarried – "free women," as Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) called them, ironically – tends to domesticate the structure of quest-romance so prevalent in masculine fictions, and to open room for a protofeminist take on the social conventions of colonialism. Born in Rhodesia, Lessing herself was, during the Second World War, close to the Communist Party and shared its opposition to imperial rule, though, as *The Golden Notebook* testifies, generally without managing to cross the racial divide itself.

Decolonization first challenged and then stripped imperial discourse of its legitimacy; much of postcolonial theory, from Fanon onward, can be regarded as an extension of the struggle for self-determination into the western institutions of knowledge. In the process, artifacts of imperial culture, such as the colonial novel, have become a source of esthetic and ideological embarrassment, sites of a prolonged contest over the meaning of imperialism to western culture as a whole. At the same time, however, the stalled projects of national liberation, and the troubled formation of the African postcolonies,

have left room for the re-examination, and even the redeployment, of imperial discourses. Rarely, to be sure, are such efforts as forthright as the call for a new colonialism issued by Norman Stone in the wake of political breakdown in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi (Stone 1996). More sophisticated versions at least acknowledge the untenable legacies of imperial rule, legible in the continued fragility of the postcolonial states, and seek to devise more or less subtle strategies for negotiating the ensuing crisis of representation. Our survey can thus draw to a close by juxtaposing two significant efforts to reinscribe the traditions of imperial discourse. A comparison can be particularly illuminating in this case, since both V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) base themselves on the history of independence in the Congo. In doing so, both writers pay explicit homage to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, confirming Central Africa's standing as imaginative epitome of the continent itself.

Born in Trinidad of East Indian parentage, Naipaul early adopted as his own a stance of modernist deracination, following, as his author's note recurrently declares, "no other profession" but that of author. During the 1960s and 70s, as the decolonization movement gathered force, Naipaul constituted himself as a neo-Conradian witness to the wake of empire; in both travelogues and novels, his own ex-colonial identity lent authority to his increasingly disenchanted impartiality. Deliberately, even provocatively, refusing to take sides in the rhetorical conflict over the colonial legacy, Naipaul adopted a position of superiority perilously close to contempt: his writings compile an almost exhaustive catalogue of postcolonial failure, rage, and self-loathing, delivered with the icy precision of the truth-teller. No naïve spokesman for the glories of empire – indeed, his ear for the echoes of humiliation and envy is unsparing – Naipaul nevertheless urges an implacable stoicism, a nihilistic detachment laid out in the first paragraph of *A Bend in the River*: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (1979: 4).

Like Conrad, Naipaul leaves the Central African setting of his novel unnamed, allowing it to evoke more than a single national history. But he signals his revisionary ambitions by having his central character/narrator, Salim, approach Central Africa overland, from the East rather than the West Coast. In place of the river-pilot Marlow, whose status as a company man is at once a source of complicity and a saving grace, Salim comes from an East-African-Indian trading family; in the wake of independence, he sets off for Central Africa to become a shopkeeper, not so much to make something of himself as to stave off the threat of becoming nothing.

Methodically antinarrative, almost eerily affectless, *A Bend in the River* abjures traditional novelistic satisfactions in favor of an anatomy of resentments. The novel echoes the trajectory of independence in the Congo, from what Naipaul calls "the second rebellion" to the rise of the "Big Man" and the radicalization of nationalism associated with the campaign for *authenticité*. But events as such are relentlessly held at a distance: the characters in "the town" experience history at several removes, as a puzzling and ultimately lethal spectacle. "If there was a plan," Salim remarks toward the end of the novel, "these events had meaning . . . But there was no plan; there was no law; this was only make-believe; play; a waste of men's time in the world" (1979: 267). In place of significant plot, the novel proceeds through a series of fitful hopes and recurrent disillusions; in place of dialogue, which might reveal, through a clash of perspectives, an incipient social relation, Naipaul assembles a string of monologues. Like Waugh without the jokes, the novel takes grim delight in repeatedly exposing the pettiness of the characters, the vanity of their aspirations and the bitterness of their inevitable limitations. The premise of this bleak parade is the utter irrelevance of moral codes to the panorama of futility that is African history. "It's not that there's no right or wrong here," one character declares in an epigram worthy of Conrad's Marlow, "there's no right."

Naipaul's modernist nihilism has been understandably controversial. Appearing in 1979, in the wake of the phase of radicalism it records, *A Bend in the River* was freighted with enough ideological baggage to provoke the scorn of critics sympathetic to the liberation movements and the admiration of liberals tired of Third-Worldist rhetoric. The historical recession of Cold War antagonisms, however, may have deprived the novel's disenchantment of its contrarian novelty; its bleakness seems more wearying than warranted. In return, however, the text's affinities with the novel of postcolonial disillusionment, a genre to which African writers from Achebe and Armah to Ngugi have contributed, have become more visible and poignant. Moreover, as Michael Gorra has argued, Naipaul's fully Conradian skill as an ironist precludes any simple identification of author and character / narrator, pre-empting and problematizing casually dismissive judgments upon the text (Gorra 1997).

Naipaul, in other words, extricates the novel from imperial discourse by pursuing the modernist strategy laid out by *Heart of Darkness,* turning skepticism against all forms of political commitment. Adopting the paradigmatic perspective of petty commerce, *A Bend in the River* does not so much regret imperial power as mourn the loss of its saving illusions; for Naipaul's text, the retreat of the civilizing mission exposes sadly misplaced hopes for civilization

itself. By contrast, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) aims rather to expose the history of neo-imperial – particularly US – involvement in Africa. Its central characters are a family of Baptist missionaries, Nathan Price, his wife Orleanna, and their four daughters, who set off for the Congo in 1959, only to be caught up in the turmoil surrounding decolonization. The novel proceeds serially, with each of the women recounting the gradual breakdown of Reverend Price's redemptive mission.

Where Naipaul depicts a world of impotent rage and anomie, Kingsolver imagines a richly textured quotidian life in the Congo, the children's perspective often supplying a welcome streak of humor. Here the tradition of domestic realism, with its attention to the concerns of women, gathers into a feminist reproach to imperial arrogance. Moving from the sudden coming of independence and the US-backed murder of Patrice Lumumba through the career and eventual fall of Mobutu, the novel attempts to embed the serial disenchantments of postcolonial history within a sharply drawn political chronicle, on the one hand, and the doggedly renewed hopes of daily existence, on the other.

The Poisonwood Bible is particularly noteworthy for its efforts to engage with African writing. The novel draws equally on *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, constructing an intricate counterpoint between the disorientation of its American characters and their partial regrounding in African realities. Most interestingly, perhaps, Kingsolver explicitly thematizes issues of translation and (mis)interpretation. The novel's title alludes to Reverend Price's mispronunciation of a Kikongo word "meaning 'most precious' and 'most insufferable' and also 'poisonwood.' That one word brought down Father's sermons every time, as he ended them all with the shout 'Tata Jesus is *bängala*'" (1998: 504–05). Meanwhile, one of the daughters, Adah, suffers from a mysterious ailment that leaves her virtually speechless but gifted with preternatural verbal facility. Adah thus punctuates the text with a near-Joycean stream of puns, palindromes, and ironically subversive symbolism, disrupting the tranquil realist surface of the novel.

By making the Price women reluctant witnesses to the Reverend's self-righteous mission, Kingsolver gains a certain critical leverage over the forms of imperial discourse. The resistance to teleological closure provided by domestic realism – the story of daily life goes on, after all – manages to defuse the moral structure of the quest-romance, to expose its rigidities and idealizing blindness. At the same time, however, the text adumbrates an anti-imperialist allegory that threatens, particularly towards the drawn-out end of the novel, to lapse into its own schematic closures. As Kingsolver follows out the daughters' lives,

The Poisonwood Bible itself modulates into a utopian vision of Africa, hopes briefly vested in a revolutionary Angola, but then reverting to the dream of a pristine kingdom of Kongo, a private myth shared by the novel's only married couple, Leah Price and Anatole Ngemba. As Nathan Price's most dutiful daughter, Leah's marriage to a Lumumbist teacher and activist – they have children named Pascal, Patrice, and Martin-Lothaire – itself resembles the sacrificial fulfillment of a missionary endeavor. The novel thus suggests, without being able to explore, the kinship between Christian and secular political commitments.

In their different ways, *A Bend in the River* and *The Poisonwood Bible* seek to sum up the literary legacy of empire. For Naipaul, the demise of Conrad's redemptive "idea" leaves little more than morally bankrupt politics and shabby attempts at ideological self-deception. The aftermath of empire means an interminable disillusionment. "In time it would all go," Salim muses. "That certainty of the end . . . was my security" (1899: 202). For Kingsolver, by contrast, imperial history continues to provide a source of narrative coherence, as Euro-American interference stands in the way of the ultimate redemption of domestic life. The novel's anticlerical satire, along with its residual vision of interracial union as political progress, attach *The Poisonwood Bible* to a tradition of Enlightenment humanism that can perhaps be regarded as the silver lining of imperial discourse. Whether such a tradition can ever be fully disentangled from the history of domination is a question still awaiting an answer.

Notes

1. When Afonso wrote to the King of Portugal to protest the seizure of his subjects, the king "dismissed Afonso's complaint, and far from offering even the slightest support for his wish that the Portuguese trade in slaves from the Kongo cease, replied to the effect that the Kongo had nothing else to sell" (Reader 1998: 375).
2. See the illuminating exchange between David Brion Davis, Thomas L. Haskell, and John Ashworth assembled in Bender 1992.
3. In an application to the African Association (later fused with the Royal Geographical Society), Park described his motives: "I had a passionate desire to *examine into the productions* of a country so little known, and to become *experimentally* acquainted with the modes of life and character of the natives" (emphasis added); Quixote-like, he set off on his travels accompanied by "a slave named Johnson and a Mandingo interpreter called Demba . . . he packed no more scientific equipment than a sextant, a magnetic compass and a thermometer . . . his entire arsenal consisted of a couple of fowling pieces and a brace of pistols" (McLynn 1992: 13–14). Park's status as a legend was secured when he died by drowning on a subsequent expedition to the Niger.

4. The full title of Livingstone's work is revealing: *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa: Including a Sketch of Sixteen Years' Residence in the Interior of Africa, and a Journey from the Cape of Good Hope to Loanda on the West Coast; Thence across the Continent, down the River Zambezi, to the Eastern Ocean*.
5. Stanley's biographer, Frank McLynn, accounts for Stanley's dramatic progress as follows: "He left for the interior with some 200 porters and soldiers . . . He took on two white assistants and hounded them to death by refusing to stop when they contracted fever. Six months into the expedition both men were dead; but not before in desperation they had attempted to assassinate Stanley. By refusing to stop for adequate rest Stanley also killed off large numbers of his porters, who were debilitated by smallpox and other illnesses, and induced many more to desert" (1992: 89).
6. It was this provision that both inspired Leopold to institute the notorious system of forced labor that cost so many African lives, and authorized the inspection tours by outside witnesses that eventually drummed up outrage against Leopold's policies. See especially the reports on the Congo and the "Open Letter" to Leopold issued by the African-American journalist George Washington Williams, excerpted in Kimbrough's edition of Conrad 1899: 82–125.
7. Today, writes John Reader in 1998, "the continent is divided into forty-six states (plus five offshore island states), more than three times the number in Asia (whose land-surface is almost 50 percent larger); nearly four times the number in South America. The boundaries dividing Africa's forty-six nations add up to more than 46,000 kilometres (compared with under 42,000 in all Asia). . . . Fifteen states are entirely landlocked, more than in the rest of the world put together" (1998: 573–74).
8. Translated as *The Sahara*, by Marjorie Laurie. All references are to this edition.
9. Rhodes's ideological significance for the imperial cause can perhaps be gauged by a biographical entry prepared for the 1928 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, apparently by Lord Lugard, the colonial governor of Nigeria: "A will exists, written in Rhodes' own handwriting, when he was still only twenty-two, in which he states his reasons for accepting the aggrandizement of the British empire as the highest ideal of practical achievement. It ends with a single bequest of everything of which he might be possessed for the furtherance of this great purpose . . . Five and twenty years later, his final will carried out . . . the same intention" (vol. 19: 258).
10. The thesis of the colonial roots of national cultures has recently been reiterated by Marc Fumaroli (*L'état culturel: une religion moderne*, 1991) and Gauri Viswanathan (*Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, 1989).
11. The essays of George Orwell, including "Shooting an Elephant" and "Marrakech," provide a compelling picture of the new generation of civil servants, forced into poses of authority ill-suited to their sensibilities. A good indication of changing standards for the evaluation of empire can be gleaned from the works of E. M. Forster. *A Passage to India* (1924) did much to define interwar attitudes, but its concerns are already delineated in *Howards End*

(1912), where the Wilcoxes' African rubber holdings are seen as promoting racial arrogance and bad manners.

12. Such feelings were closely connected to the heady experience of colonial power. Under the cloak of "scientific research," the expedition "requisitioned" vast quantities of ritual objects, going so far as to threaten villagers with police reprisals if they refused to surrender certain sacred figures. Michel Leiris registers the terror and panic induced by these threats, and the intoxicating sensation of sacrilege that resulted (see Wynchank 1992).
13. Waugh's counterpart in the French tradition is probably the doctor, novelist, and antisemite Céline (Louis-Ferdinand Destouches), who conjured up the imaginary French colony of Bambola-Bragamance in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932, *Journey to the End of Night*), a title with deliberately Conradian echoes.

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16

African-language literatures of southern Africa

DANIEL P. KUNENE

The beginnings of written literatures among the indigenous peoples of southern Africa are rooted in the nineteenth century, a period of intensive and extensive missionary activity in that region. As the word made visible, writing was ushered in by translations of Bible tracts, followed at a slower but steady pace, by the Bible and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The writer most likely to be published was one who advocated the abandonment of indigenous customs and cultures and the acceptance of their rivals from the west. A typical and much quoted example is that of Thomas Mofolo's *Moeti oa Bochabela* (Sesotho, 1907) (*Traveller of the East*), which described the premissionary Lesotho as a place steeped in darkness in which "people ate each other like the animals of the veld," and was accepted with great enthusiasm by the Paris Evangelical Mission Society, while *Chaka* (Sesotho, 1925), a much superior work artistically, was kept from publication for a long time by the same missionary group because they did not like its message. Typically, in *Moeti oa Bochabela,* Mofolo created a protagonist, Fekisi, who rejects his people and their customs, and undertakes a journey similar to that of Christian in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Fekisi's "escape" from his culture is replayed over and over as African-language writers simulate Bunyan's hero, especially in the early missionary period. Henry Masila Ndawo's *Uhambo lukaGqobhoka* (Xhosa, 1909) (Gqobhoka's Journey) is another outstanding example of this motif. In his preface, Ndawo says that his first-person narrator, Gqobhoka ("Convert"),

> Tells us that every single person is born together with two companions, Light and Darkness. One of them [Light] does not stray from his original character till he comes face to face with the Final Judge. As for Darkness, he would one day be a roaring lion seeking someone to maul. Sometimes he would be a leopard, or a python. (1958: iii)

With their beginnings in the second half of the nineteenth century as literacy took root and spread, in the early part of the twentieth, African-language

literatures assumed an identity, through thematic defining elements that were unabashedly political. The two basic themes were, first, the mostly overt, but sometimes implied, Manichean theme of good versus evil as constantly opposing forces represented by light or God or the soul (Good) on the one hand, and darkness or Satan or the body (Evil) on the other. Good and evil were, of course, often contending forces in African oral myths as well. But the integrity of the art form, namely the stories in which they were embodied, was always primary. The danger, to the emerging literatures, of this preoccupation with morality, was that it forced the writers to put the message before the art. Furthermore, the emerging literary tradition's definition of good and evil was politically motivated. The good comprised the new Christian dispensation, and the evil consisted of the traditional African life with all its cultural underpinnings. Or, if universal human traits were addressed, it was always in a simplistic manner in which characters represented absolutes, where the evil character was forever evil, and the good forever good, like animals in fables.

The second theme, strongly linked to the first, arose from the forced migration of the young men to the cities, especially Johannesburg, to find work either in the mines or secondary industries. After all, taxes were to be paid in cash. Furthermore land, under the native reserve scheme, was too small to raise cattle for sheer subsistence, let alone such ritualistic functions as the payment of *ilobolo* (Zulu), i.e., cattle given as part of the traditional marriage contract. Money was now the accepted substitute for cattle in these transactions.

All this meant that the traditional tight-knit social structure of earlier times was being seriously undermined. To reflect their concern about this state of affairs, the writers began to create characters who were "swallowed up" and corrupted by the city, and whose only salvation was a return to the innocence of the simple rural life. Thus was born the "prodigal son" theme that was to dominate African-language writing for decades. Matlosa's novel *Molahlehi* (Sesotho, 1946) (The Lost One), and Moloto's *Motimedi* (Setswana, 1953) (The Lost One), complete with their symbolic names, are good illustrations of this phenomenon. Good and evil found their concrete manifestation in stereotypical sets of characteristics. The good character was the obedient child, who went to church regularly, worked diligently at school and obtained good grades, and grew up to be a virtuous and exemplary adult. If one adds to these the adverse circumstances imposed on the character by human design, such as a cruel stepparent, then one has Nyembezi's novel *Ubudoda Abukhulelwa* (Zulu, 1953) (Manhood is not Reckoned by Age), or Guybon B. Sinxo's *Umzali Wolahleko* (Xhosa, 1933) (The Misguided Parent), as supreme examples. The evil character was the opposite of all this, and was doomed to a life of failure and misery.

The two types of character occurred in the same story as protagonist and foil, similar to oral tales in which siblings (usually girls) are launched on a journey into the unknown, face the same sets of trials, and the good one is rewarded, and the bad one punished. The literature was thus more than didactic; it was unabashedly moralistic.

But even before literacy had taken root, missionary influence on the traditional oral arts had begun to be felt. The story of Ntsikana, the nineteenth-century Xhosa chief who, somewhere between 1816 and 1820, declared his conversion with the words "This thing that has entered me enjoins that we pray, and that all must kneel" (quoted in Jordan 1973: 45), has been told many times as a legend of many versions. The core of it is that Ntsikana, variously described as "a great composer, singer and dancer, as well as a polygamist, adulterer, and diviner" (Jordan 1973: 44), became converted either directly by the Reverend Joseph Williams of the London Missionary Society, who arrived in the territory of the Ngqika people in 1816, or by the pervasive presence of the new religion. His "conversion" was marked by a renunciation of such traditional customs as polygamy and "tribal" dances that he considered incompatible with the new religion, and his creation of a worship group, or "church," that was a syncretism of Christian ritual and Xhosa musical idioms, and praise poetic images and rhythms. Of all his hymns, "UloThix' omkhulu" (You Are the Great God) became the best known because it was reduced to writing.

Ntsikana's hymn properly belongs to the genre of poetry variously labeled "praise," or "heroic." To Ntsikana, God was a hero as shown by the attributes the poem assigns to him. The praises are carried largely by epithets that reveal God as a benevolent Being: as a "Shield," a "Fortress," and a "Refuge," he protects *Truth*. And we know that truth is the highest value that human beings can aspire to, for it reveals their own godliness. God is also praised as the "Creator" who created life and the heavens and the galaxies; a "Hunter" who hunts for souls; and a "Peacemaker" who brings together those who reject each other; and also as the "Great Cloak" that is draped over us. All these are eulogies (see Kunene 1971: xxii–xxiii and 15n) more easily recognizable as such in their original Xhosa form, and thus Ntsikana the hymn-maker was also Ntsikana the praise poet eulogizing his warrior-hero, God.

A. C. Jordan states that Ntsikana's hymn was "the first literary composition ever to be assigned individual formulation – thus constituting a bridge between the traditional and the post-traditional period[s]" (1973: 51). The available evidence suggests that William Govan Bennie was the actual scribe who used Ntsikana's disciples, Zaze Soga and Makhaphela Noyi Balfour, and

his son William Kobe Ntsikana as informants about their mentor's life (see Bennie 1936). Jordan is right about the ascription of this verbal art piece to an individual, rather than to the anonymity of a folk tradition. But there is something more, namely, that, as Bennie's informants, Ntsikana's disciples' accounts belong somewhere between legend, myth, and biography, and not "history" as documented evidence. Ntsikana died in 1820, two years after Joseph Williams, and many have interpreted this as symbolic of his devotion to his "mentor."

Xhosa, Ntsikana's language, belongs to one of two major linguistic groups in southern Africa, namely the Nguni and the Sotho groups. In addition to Xhosa, the Nguni group includes, Zulu, Ndebele, and SiSwati, while the Sotho group includes Sesotho (also popularly known as Sesotho sa Moshoeshoe, i.e., Moshoeshoe's Sesotho, and by linguists and anthropologists as either Sotho or Southern Sotho), Setswana (known to linguists and anthropologists as Tswana), and Sepedi (Pedi or Northern Sotho). The speakers of these languages were introduced at about the same time to western cultures and modes of thought through colonization and Christianization, which often worked hand in hand. Christianity challenged the Africans' notions of religious meaning and the rituals by which these were expressed in the people's daily lives. Among the many instruments and methods employed by the missionaries was the introduction of literacy. Christianity was, after all, a religion of the Book. Their proselytizing work required that the Bible be translated into the various African languages, and, more importantly, be read by their would-be converts. The establishment of schools was thus a natural consequence of these conspiring circumstances.

Some outstanding writers, educators, and spiritual leaders emerged from these early years of missionary activity among the Xhosa people. Tiyo Soga, born at Gwali in 1829, is known, *inter alia*, for his translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. He also wrote numerous letters to the Xhosa newspaper *Indaba* (News) and published fragments of his large collection of African fables, proverbs, praises, customs, legends, histories, and genealogies of chiefs. Like many African converts, especially those who trained as ministers, Soga engaged in composing hymns, including the well-known "Lizalis' idinga lakho" (Fulfill Your Promise). These were in the Christian tradition, rather than Ntsikana's African idiom.

William Wellington Gqoba, born 1840, learned the trade of wagon building, but was also a translator of note in English and Xhosa. Between 1884 and 1888 he was editor of the newspaper *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (The Xhosa Messenger), the successor of *Indaba*, which was an important organ in the literary development of the Xhosa, and to which Gqoba himself contributed

numerous articles. He composed two long dramatic poems. "Ingxoxo Enkulu YomGinwa NomKristu" (Great Discussion between the Non-Believer and the Christian) has two participants who bear the symbolic names "Present-World" and "World-To-Come" and espouse the positions symbolized by their names about the importance of the matters of this world versus those of the heavenly kingdom. It is divided into three parts and comprises a total of 896 lines. "Ingxoxo Enkulu Ngemfundo" (Great Discussion about Education), totaling 1,741 lines, brings together young people of both sexes, among them such characters as "Sharp-Eyed," "Crooked-Eyed," "One-Sided," "Miss Vagrant," "Miss Gossip," "Miss Truthful," and "Miss Upright." Their arguments are succinct encapsulations of the obstacles faced by the newly educated African in a white-controlled political environment. Jordan summarizes the opinions of the majority of debaters as follows:

> They are critical of the educational practice of the day. They are denied access to certain fields of knowledge; they are poorly paid. There is a conspiracy among the rulers, and it is this: "If they cry for Greek and Latin and Hebrew, given them a little. But make no mistake about the wages. Keep the wages low." (1973: 65–66)

One of them, "Tactless," complains about taxes and land dispossession: "a tax on firewood, a tax on water, a tax on grass even. We are deprived of our pastureland. – Today the land belongs to them." This position is countered by a small group of "moderates" who consider their opponents "ungrateful."

These "Discussions" deserve more than a passing mention. As realistic vignettes of serial problems resulting from a relentless imposition of the new order, they reveal many responses that would otherwise go unnoticed. The sense that missionary schools denied Africans "access to certain fields of knowledge" is one that was echoed in Lesotho as far back as 1886, when a teacher and later minister of the church, Cranmer 'Matsa Sebeta, who was also deeply involved in the debate concerning the Sesotho orthography, established an independent black-owned school at Matelile, with strong support from the chief of the area. Sebeta claimed that there were "certain subjects" he was not allowed to teach at the missionary school because they were not yet ready for the Basotho, which can be interpreted to mean the Basotho were not yet ready for them (Kunene 1989: 24–25).

Other political problems that emerge are: heavy taxation of blacks, even of basic necessities, a burden that was commented upon by Reuben T. Caluza, the Zulu composer, most of whose texts were directed at exposing and critiquing prevailing social problems. An example of such narrative lyrics is "Sixoshwa

emisebenzini" (We Are Driven away from Our Jobs). In this piece, Caluza was reacting to the "civilized labor policy" sponsored by the Afrikaner Premier J. B. M. Hertzog in the mid-1920s, aimed at reducing white unemployment by laying off blacks and installing whites in erstwhile "menial" jobs reserved for blacks, which were now magically transformed into "civilized" jobs. This process was described by the newspaper *The Friend* as "a white man's front against the Africans, created for the purpose of raising white wages and ensuring jobs for 'poor whites,' the overwhelming majority of whom were Afrikaners" (Wilson and Thompson 1971: 379).

Space does not permit more than just a passing mention of other important Xhosa writers of the early twentieth century. They include John Henderson Soga, son of Tiyo Soga, John Knox Bokwe, a noted musician who, among other things, wrote a biography of Ntsikana; D. D. T. Jabavu, born in 1885, who wrote accounts, in Xhosa, of his travels to such places as Jerusalem, America, India; and also some substantial works in English, including a biography of his father, John Tengo Jabavu; Walter B. Rubusana, editor of the anthology *Zemk' Inkomo Magwalandini* (1906) (The Cattle Are Going, You Cowards), among his other writings. Enoch Sontonga, the schoolteacher and musician who, at the close of the nineteenth century, composed the text and music of "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" (God Bless Africa), which has become the National Anthem of South Africa and other African countries, deserves special mention. Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi is known for his dilemma drama *Ityala lamaWele* (The Case of the Twins) in which each twin claims seniority to the other, in order to take charge of the estate of their late father, and they bring their case to the king's court. But Mqhayi was perhaps best known as a poet and dramatic oral performer of his own poetry.

Lastly one should mention the best Xhosa novelist to date, namely, A. C. Jordan, author of *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* (1940) (translated into English in 1980 by the author as *The Wrath of the Ancestors*), which created a great deal of excitement at its publication, as it departed radically from the usual schoolchildren type of book.

The above activities among the Xhosa had a close parallel in Lesotho where the first missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) arrived in 1833. The usual flurry of activity, especially printing excerpts from the Bible, took place. But the major event in terms of communicating through the printed word came about thirty years later when the Reverend Adolphe Mabille established the newspaper *Leselinyana la Lesotho* (Sesotho) (The Little Light of Lesotho), whose story parallels in many ways that of *Ikwezi* (The Morning Star) among the Xhosa.

In his *The Mabilles of Basutoland*, Edwin Smith writes that "Filimone Rapetloane wrote the introduction to the first number" of *Leselinyana la Lesotho* (1992: 127), quite obviously at Adolphe Mabille's invitation. Rapetloane, a teacher with very basic training, had been encouraged and given lessons by the Mabille family whom he helped in their translation work: "The importance of Rapetloane in the literary history of Lesotho cannot be over-emphasized, for here was a man, at the very first moments of the birth of literacy among his people, being involved at various levels in the launching of that literacy" (Kunene 1971: 49). Rapetloane's introduction is a little literary piece in its own right in which he creates two characters with the symbolic names of Sethoto (Fool) and Bohlale (Wisdom), who engage in an argument about the usefulness of the paper *Leselinyana la Lesotho*. It refers specifically to the communication, through letters, between Ramohato (Moshoeshoe) and "the queen of the white people" (Queen Victoria). Once again we see Bunyanesque features in the symbolic characters "Fool" and "Wisdom," whose argument harks back to the Xhosa "Great Discussions" by Gqoba.

Adolphe Mabille, by his own admission, had as his primary reason for the establishment of this paper, the challenging of the Basotho's customs, such as *bohadi*, that is, the symbolic payment of cattle to the bride's people in negotiating marriage, and in order to turn them away from such customs towards Christian ways. However, it did not take long before *Leselinyana* became the vehicle for an emerging literary tradition. In the years following its inception, it started publishing the traditional oral tales of the Basotho. Reverend François Coillard (often using the initials F. C.) set this in motion, and some Basotho began to follow his example. Typically, the missionaries, and later their Basotho imitators, sought to find analogies in these stories with some Christian messages. There was always a contrived appended explanation of a perceived parallel with some Christian tale, as for example, the story of Christ's offer to come to the Earth as The Savior, and the story of Senkatana, the precocious baby who grew into a fully armed young warrior in a matter of minutes, and offered to go and kill the Kgodumodumo, a monster that had swallowed all the people and their animals. He kills the monster, releases the people, who make him their king, but afterwards unaccountably turn against him and plot his death.

Azariele Sekese published his 226-page *Buka ea Pokello ea Mekhoa ea Basotho le Maele le Litsomo* (Sesotho) (Book that is a Collection of the Customs of the Basotho, and their Proverbs and their Folktales) in 1893. "H. D." (Hermann Dieterlen) gave the book an enthusiastic review as the first book "written by a Mosotho," and not one of the French missionaries. Sekese also wrote the

fable *Pitso ea Linonyana le Tseko ea Sefofu le Seritsa* (Sesotho) (A Meeting of the Birds, as well as the Dispute between the Blind Man and the Cripple), which was published in 1928 – though there was a version of *Pitso ea Linonyana* that appeared in the *Leselinyana* in the latter half of the nineteenth century. A humorous but cutting satire on the miscarriage of justice against the powerless in Chief Jonathane's court, the first part takes the nature of a fable in which the smaller birds complain against the tyranny of the larger ones that cannibalize their own kind. The second part, namely the dispute between the blind man and the cripple, is in the nature of a dilemma tale involving not only justice, but also fairness. It is typically a story that ends up involving the audience in arriving at some just resolution. Needless to say, the debate is always lively precisely because there is no acceptable resolution.

One of the major writers to emerge from this new literary culture was Thomas Mofolo. His first novel, *Moeti oa Bochabela,* was serialized chapter by chapter in the *Leselinyana* before finally being published in 1907. The effect on the readers was electrical, and at least one reader suggested its publication even before the serialization was over. The Basotho readers quite clearly recognized the strong oral storytelling features in the narrative, which resonated so well with them.

The missionaries were excited for different reasons. Fekisi, the protagonist, was so much like Christian, Bunyan's "Pilgrim," and his journey so unequivocally inspired by his rejection of the old customs and ways of the Basotho, that he was doing the missionaries' job for them. Yet here too the author, in spite of himself, reveals some of the old religious beliefs of the Basotho, in the form of Ntswanatsatsi, the Basotho's "Eden," so to speak, which, for a considerable part of the story, runs parallel with the new Christian beliefs in influencing the direction of the story.

Mofolo's second published novel, *Pitseng* (1910), displayed a cautionary attitude that was totally lacking in *Moeti*. He took courtship and marriage, and openly endorsed it as an institution that was revered by the Basotho, and that was integrated into the culture of parental respect, respect for elders in general, and for the authority of socially appointed figures like teachers and ministers, that held society together. He lamented that this institution was being desecrated by the modern, educated, and westernized Basotho youth. He digressed many times to suggest that the new should not be accepted blindly on the assumption that it was all good, and by the same token the old should not be rejected out of hand on the assumption that it was all bad. It is evident from this that the renunciation of Basotho customs that was often so self-consciously flaunted, was more often than not skin deep, with a strong

undercurrent of resistance often manifesting itself in some form of nostalgia, as illustrated by Sekese's research, but even more patently in the above novel by Thomas Mofolo.

Some Basotho writers who emerged from and carried forward this literary activity included Zakea D. Mangoaela, who compiled a collection of the praises of kings in his *Lithoko tsa Marena a Basotho* (Sesotho) (Praise Poems of Basotho Kings), Edward Lechesa Segoete, author of *Monono ke Moholi ke Mouane* (Sesotho, 1910) (Riches Are Mist, They Are Vapor), recounting the worldly actions of a man, Khitsane, who starts off "rich," experiences one misfortune after another and loses all his possessions, and ends up poor but spiritually rich after being converted to Christianity. The story is told in a series of flashbacks to the young man, Tim, who is in danger of following the same disastrous path.

Resistance to what might be called "negative change" sometimes manifested itself through an appropriation of the very religion the missionaries preached. It was often a deliberate and unabashed political statement. Among the Zulu, the person whose name is associated with this kind of mobilizing of the people's religious feeling into an intellectual political force was Isaiah Shembe, the founder and leader of *Isonto lamaNazaretha* (Church of the Nazarites). As a spiritual leader, Shembe composed hymns that reflected a syncretism of the Christian faith and strong belief in the validity of Zulu culture and religiosity. Absalom Vilakazi describes him as "a child of his culture, a Zulu," who "came on the scene when Zulu culture and many of its patterns like kinship grouping and family solidarity, the respect for seniors, and the ideal of Zulu womanhood . . . were breaking down due to the contact with western civilization and Christianity. Western ways which were not understood were being copied, and the result was social chaos" (1986: 28).

In some respects Shembe resembled Ntsikana. Many of his hymns were praise poems for God and Christ, as is illustrated by hymn 150, which gives warrior attributes to UMkhululi (The Savior, or The Emancipator). By contrast, hymn 21 recognizes the devastation of the people by the laws of the white colonizers, and asks desperately why "The Lord of the Sabbath," "The God of Adam," "The God of Abraham," has forsaken the people in their time of need: "Why have you forsaken us?" is the mournful refrain of this hymn which states, "We have become homeless vagabonds" in our own land. Part of hymn 216 "is concerned with self-identification and historical allusions" (Vilakazi 1986: 101–02) that link the Zulu people to their traditional kings, Senzangakhona, Shaka, Mhlangana, and Dingane.

This appeal to Zulu identity with historical links to past kings was a strong component of the texts of the previously mentioned Zulu composer, choir-master and self-taught pianist Reuben T. Caluza. One particular composition of his was entitled "Elamakhosi" (Song of Kings), in which he refers to many Zulu kings by name, quite clearly to recall and revalidate a glorious past. But Caluza was also an outspoken social critic who engaged the political issues of the day in the texts of his songs. The enactment of the Natives Land Act of 1913, which uprooted blacks from the land and rendered them homeless, and was the subject of severe criticism by Sol T. Plaatje in his *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), also became the launching pad for Caluza's political commentaries in his songs. At that time he wrote the song "I-Land Act," whose constant motifs were, firstly, that "we have become homeless vagabonds in the land of our fathers," and secondly a call for the different African groups to unite to fight for their rights. This song was later sung routinely at political meetings.

Many of Caluza's songs addressed themselves to the evils of migrant labor, which broke up families, separated lovers, widowed women, and orphaned children while the men disappeared indefinitely in the gold mines and industrial centers such as Johannesburg and Durban. The texts were narratives that often included a first-person narrator who travels to these centers in search of his lost relative. There are implied participants in this saga in the nature of the people from whom he made inquiries. There are sometimes apostrophic calls to the brother to come back home, for his absence has created a lot of suffering. But Caluza also engaged in lighthearted satirical commentaries of human foibles and superstitions. His songs demonstrated the unity of the performative arts among the black people. Story, song, and dance became one dramatic presentation. No Caluza song was sung without some choreographed body movement.

Caluza studied, and then taught, at an educational institution established by one of the most innovative, versatile, and indefatigable products of missionary training, namely, John L. Dube, who was born in 1870, was taught in missionary schools, and got the opportunity to study in the United States where he came under the influence of James Booth, an English Baptist missionary who preached the doctrine of "Africa for the Africans." Having also seen and been impressed by Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, Dube returned to Natal and established a college first called the Zulu Christian Industrial School at Ohlange, but later renamed Ohlange Institute. In addition, Dube established a newspaper called *Ilanga laseNatali* (The Natal Sun, Zulu). Thus, Dube became not only a recipient of missionary efforts, but creatively took over the initiative in bringing about literacy among his own people. He

wrote one historical novel entitled *Insila kaShaka* (1933), later translated by J. Boxwell as *Jeqe, the Bodyservant of King Tshaka* (1951).

Later more Zulu writers came on the scene. R. R. R. Dhlomo wrote mostly historical novels, which were more biographical than imaginative, namely *UDingane* (1936), *UShaka* (1937), *UMpande* (1938), *UCetshwayo* (1952), and *UDiniZulu* (1968). Thus Dhlomo maintained the preoccupation with Zulu identity through a study of the lives of their kings. B.W. Vilakazi, whose life was cut short by an untimely death at the age of forty-one while employed at the University of the Witwatersrand as a Language Assistant, was a brilliant poet whose poetry ranged in style from the traditional heroic/praise, to the lyrical inspired by English poets. He produced two volumes of poetry, namely *Inkondlo kaZulu* (1935, Zulu Songs) and *Amal' eZulu* (1945) (Zulu Horizons), which have since been translated into English by Frances Louie Friedman under the title *Zulu Horizons*. Vilakazi also wrote three novels, namely, *Noma nini* (Whenever It May Be), *UDingiswayo kaJobe* (Dingiswayo, Son of Jobe), and *Nje nempela* (Verily So), all of them having historical settings. There is clearly a fascination with Zuluness evinced by some of the Zulu writers we have seen so far, a characteristic not shared by other southern African groups.

Closer to our time is C. L. S. Nyembezi, who, like his mentor B. W. Vilakazi, taught at the University of the Witwatersrand as a Language Assistant, was later appointed Professor of Bantu Languages at the University of Fort Hare, and, resigning as a matter of conscience when university apartheid was introduced, joined the editorial staff of the publishing house of Shuter and Shooter in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, from which he retired in 1984. Nyembezi's major contribution to Zulu literature was in the form of three novels, namely, *Mntanami! Mntanami!* (1969) (My Child! My Child!), a conflict of parental control that goes out of hand, leading to one of the sons, Jabulani, absconding to Johannesburg where a powerful love story (the real story) begins; *Inkinsela YaseMgungundlovu* (1961) (The VIP from Mgungundlovu), in which a crook from the city tries to rob the country folk of Nyanyadu of their cattle, and minor family conflicts arise because the children see through the deception while their parents are lured by the promised riches; and *Ubudoda Abukhulelwa* (1953), in which an orphan cruelly treated by his foster mother, who is also his aunt, develops a resilience that leads him to success through dogged determination.

While Nyembezi's intention in *Ubudoda* is to chastise step- or foster parents whose favoritism leads to hardship for the stepchild, he indirectly holds up a mirror to the social, economic and political inequalities of South African society. Granted that his aunt throws Vusumuzi to the wolves through her inexplicable and undisguised hatred and ill-treatment of him, it is the "wolves"

in the form of white racists, policemen who are not only permitted but indeed encouraged by the system to terrorize black people, the whites who control the economy and underpay the politically disenfranchised blacks, who are ultimately the "Valleys of Despond" that Vusumuzi has to wade through to reach his glorious destination.

Many black writers responded directly to the crisis of political disenfranchisement of Africans. Sol T. Plaatje, whose name was mentioned earlier in conjunction with that of Reuben Caluza, is a case in point. The two writers exposed the evils of the Natives' Land Act of 1913, Caluza through his songs, and Plaatje through his book *Native Life in South Africa*. The latter was a powerful indictment of the government of the then-recently formed Union of South Africa (1910). Born in 1876 and thus a contemporary of Thomas Mofolo, John L. Dube, and S. E. K. Mqhayi, among others, Plaatje has come to be known as the author of the novel *Mhudi* (written in English, published in 1930), and a translator of several of Shakespeare's plays into Setswana, his native language. *Diphosophoso* (*Comedy of Errors*), *Dintshontsho tsa boJuliase Kesara* (*Julius Caesar*) were published during his lifetime, but the manuscripts *Maswabiswabi* (*The Merchant of Venice*), *Matsapatsapa a lefela* (*Much Ado About Nothing*), and *Othello* (*Othello*) remained unpublished until after his death.

In 1901, Plaatje started a Tswana newspaper entitled *Koranta ea Becoana* (The Tswana Newspaper) of which he was editor till 1908 when it stopped publication for lack of funds. Then later, in 1912, he established another newspaper, named *Tsala ya Batho* (Friend of the People). Plaatje also took great interest in Tswana language and culture. His contributions in this regard include a 1916 publication entitled *Sechuana Proverbs and Their European Equivalents,* a collection of over 700 proverbs accompanied by approximate equivalents in English, French, Dutch and German, and *Sechuana Readers in International Phonetics,* supervised by the English phonetician Daniel Jones of the University of London, also in 1916.

In 1969, the anthropologist John Comaroff tumbled upon what turned out to be a diary that Plaatje kept during the Siege of Mafeking in the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902).[1] In addition to the day-to-day events and experiences, the diary also reveals Plaatje's talent as a creative artist as he throws in pieces of brilliant and humorous character sketches that appear to be caricatures of some of the people he knew or met during the siege. These little sketches must have provided much needed relief from the tedium and uncertainty of life in captivity.

Other Tswana authors include D. P. Moloto, described by Josh R. Masiea as "the first author to write a Tswana novel" (1985: 639). Moloto's first novel,

entitled *Mokwena,* and published in 1943, has a rural setting in which the protagonist, Mokwena, lives a traditional life. But the inevitable conflict between Tswana customs and Christian beliefs is not far behind. The protagonist of Moloto's second novel, *Motimedi,* published in 1953, has the appropriately symbolic name, Motimedi ("the lost one"); he is lost in more senses than one. First, he leaves his rural home, and "gets lost" in the city. Secondly, he is lost in a much deeper sense, in the cultural and moral desert of the city away from the security of family and community in the rural area.

Finally, M. O. M. Seboni's *Rammone wa Kgalagadi* (Rammone of the Kgalagadi Desert) continues the theme of the conflict between traditional customs and the new dispensation when his protagonist, Rammone, leaves the country for the city and experiences the cultural desert we described for Motimedi.

From the above, it is clear that literacy was never intended, in the first place, for the creation of literature for its own sake. Ownership of the printing presses gave the missionaries absolute control over what could or could not be published, which amounted to a virtual censorship. It is therefore appropriate to conclude this survey with an assessment of the influence of this control on the African-language writer. In the earliest part of writing, the predominant theme was that of the creation of what the missionaries considered a wholesome human being. The purpose of literature was to present moral lessons in which the characters depicted "good" and "evil." And since their purpose was to change the ways and customs of those among whom they preached, the missionaries too often defined evil as the continued belief in, and practice of, traditional customs. One of the consequences of this was the Prodigal Son theme, where a young man decides to leave his home in the country and go to the city to seek his fortune, and escape from parental and societal control. Happiness, if any, does not last long before the young man gets into trouble, is without a job, gets tangled up with the law, sometimes contracts disease, and then, like the biblical Prodigal Son, "arises and goes to his father." The theme of the total renunciation of the traditional way of life by defining it as evil, and undertaking a journey in search of goodness, is one that found a perfect model in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* which explains why this book was such a constant companion of the Bible in the new missionary-inspired consciousness.

The South African government, in implementing the migrant labor system, and later the Bantu Homelands policy, was not far behind in taking advantage of the African-language writer through the education system, especially Bantu education, and Afrikaner-controlled publishing houses such as APB and

Die Nasionale Pers. They perpetuated the Prodigal Son theme, with a twist, namely, that the protagonist leaves the country now politically defined as his "homeland" according to his "tribe," but finds city life unappealing and with many disadvantages, and chooses to return to his "homeland" as the place where he can be best fulfilled.

In both these scenarios, the authority (whether missionary or government policy), dangled the carrot of the school market before the writer. The economic benefit for the publisher and the prestige for the writer came second only to the enormous benefit to these authorities through capturing the pliable minds of the young to perpetuate their policies.

But despite these deliberate hurdles, some writers did write novels that addressed adult themes, thus freeing themselves from the strictures of the Bible and government policy, and at the same time engaging in the complex storytelling techniques that writing makes possible. In other words, the art was demanding its freedom from being hostage to interests that retarded its growth.

Although this chapter concerns itself almost exclusively with literatures written in the African languages, I have broken this rule a little bit when that seemed unavoidable. To have left out Sol T. Plaatje simply because his novel *Mudhi* and his *Native Life in South Africa* were written in English would have been a travesty. It would have meant restricting myself to his *Sechuana Proverbs,* which would have given a very skewed idea of who and what he really was in the field of writing.

Finally, whichever way one looks at it, the dynamics of South African society in the early to mid-twentieth century formed a tangled web that we try in vain to separate into such constituent parts as literature, politics, religion, economics, and the like. Such a separate existence of these elements is an illusion. They belong together no less than the parts of a human body. Once we place the writing in this context, as part of an organic whole, it begins to make a great deal more sense, and we will not be in danger of vivisecting a society, but will see and appreciate it in its totality.

Note

1. While doing research in Botswana, and having made it known that he was interested in old papers that might be sitting in someone's house, Comaroff was handled a bundle that turned out to be Plaatje's diary in long hand. This was in 1969. In 1970, the University of California at Berkeley asked me to review Comaroff's first draft for them. It was published in 1973 by Ohio University Press under the title *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje*. The current, revised,

edition, was published under Plaatje's name, by Meridor Books and James Currey Publishers in 1990.

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[Note: the following information about other reported translations of Shakespeare's works by Plaatje is quoted from Herdeck 1973: 347: "*Maswabiswabi* (Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*); *Matsapatsapa a lefela* (Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*); *Otelo* (Shakespeare's *Othello*); the last three in manuscript." In addition to this source, these titles are also found listed on the reverse side of the title page of the 1957 edition of *Mhudi* as translations "by the same author."
The following further information will be found useful in resolving some of the nagging questions about Plaatje's translations of Shakespeare. It is quoted from Tim Couzens and Brian Willan's *Solomon T. Plaatje, 1876–1932: An Introduction*, in *English in Africa* 3.2 (September 1976): 1–99 (entire issue). Couzens and Willan quote from *The Star* of 26 July 1930 as follows: "News has been received from the French mission Press of Morija, Basutoland, of the issue of the first of four Sechuana translations of Shakespeare's works by Mr Sol Plaatje, author and journalist of Kimberley. Interviewed today, Mr Plaatje said the first translation was Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* . . . Mr Plaatje said he had translated *Julius Caesar* in 1917 . . . *Othello* was translated partly in 1923 . . . Other works still in the press are *Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice,* and *Much Ado About Nothing*" (p. 9).]
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17

Gikuyu literature: development from early Christian writings to Ngũgĩ's later novels

ANN BIERSTEKER

Written literature in Gikuyu is one of Africa's most dynamic and lively literatures. There are strong and active traditions of fictional and journalistic writing in the language. There have also been publications in a wide range of additional genres including studies of history and culture, autobiographical writing, and religious publications. Engagement with issues of human rights, economic and social equality, and political freedom has been central to many works written in Gikuyu and to nearly all contemporary writing in the language. Works written in Gikuyu were frequently banned by the British colonial government and more recent works have been suppressed by the two post-independence governments of Kenya.

The earliest publications in Gikuyu were Gikuyu / English (1903, 1904, 1905) and Gikuyu / Italian (1910, 1919 / 1921) vocabulary lists and grammatical sketches produced by Protestant and Catholic missionary presses primarily for the benefit of British and Italian missionaries in their work converting Gikuyu speakers to Christianity. These publications were produced as part of conversion and Bible translation projects, but were not made widely available. The Gikuyu / Italian materials were produced by Catholic missionaries from Italy. The New Testament of the Bible was first published in Gikuyu in 1926. The Old Testament was not published until 1951, but some books of the Old Testament were available earlier. Early missionary press publications directed at converts included religious publications such as J. M. Kelsall's *Ũhoro wa Ngoma ĩrĩa Njũru na Mũgate* (1931) (Information concerning the Njũru and Mũgate Dances). The major writers in Gikuyu have all been educated in Christian schools and have been familiar with biblical language, imagery, and narratives.

Nearly all writers in Gikuyu have also been and are trilingual in Gikuyu, Swahili, and English. Their writing has been informed by their reading of literatures in these three and other languages. In his political statements published

in 1921 and 1922, Harry Thuku wrote in Swahili. Most of the memoirs of those who fought in the 1950s armed struggle, including those of J. M. Kariuki and Karari Njama, were written in English, as was Bildad Kaggia's autobiography *The Roots of Freedom*, and political history. For many writers the decision to write in Gikuyu has been a strategic political decision based upon consideration of the viability of alternative language choices. The earliest published works by speakers of Gikuyu were probably letters to the editor and articles written in English and Swahili by Harry Thuku and other members of the East African Association during the early 1920s.

The first newspaper published in Gikuyu was *Muigwithania* (The Unifier), a monthly publication founded and edited by Jomo Kenyatta (then Johnstone Kenyatta) on behalf of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). Kenyatta was at the time the General Secretary of the KCA and in this role he worked to expand the political base of support for the organization. *Muigwithania* was first published in 1928 as part of this effort. Its name is generally translated as "the reconciler," but a more literal translation would be "one who causes people to listen to each other." Bruce J. Berman and John M. Lonsdale suggest that the role of reconciler is the role that Kenyatta saw himself playing (1992: 17). The newspaper carried news items as well as advice features and reports on meetings of the KCA and on the activities of KCA officials. When Kenyatta traveled to London in 1929 as the representative of the KCA he continued to edit *Muigwithania* and sent editions by mail to Kenya. The issues edited in London included editorials as well as reports on events in London. In one issue Kenyatta reported on the opening of parliament and then stated what he saw as the lessons of this experience for his readers (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 23). *Muigwithania* was later edited by Henry Mwangi Gichuiri, Crispin I. K. Keiru, and Josphat M. Kamau (Rosberg and Nottingham, 1966: 100). Carl G. Rosberg, Jr., and John Nottingham state that the "monthly appearance of [*Muigwithania*] was eagerly awaited throughout Kikuyu country" (p. 101). They also report that "Publication of the newspaper lapsed in the early thirties, but it was revived in June, 1935 and continued to appear intermittently up till the out-break of the Second World War" (p. 102). After the Second World War, the paper was banned by the colonial government (p. 212).

By the mid-1930s a wider range of publications was available to readers of Gikuyu, including Stanley Kiama Gathigira's 1934 ethnographic *Mĩikarĩre ya Agĩkũyũ* (The Customs of the Agikuyu) and Justin Itotia wa Kimacia's 1937 *Endwo nĩ Irĩ na Irĩĩri* (One Fortunate to Have Prosperity and Heirs). The most significant and widely read ethnography written by a Gikuyu speaker was Jomo

Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya,* published in 1938. This work had a significant impact on pan-Africanist writing and it is considered to be a classic text in the field of anthropology. Kenyatta later became the first president of Kenya. *Facing Mount Kenya* was written in the mid-1930s while Kenyatta was studying anthropology with the eminent scholar Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics.

Stanley Kiama Gathigira's ethnography treated subjects such as clans, construction of homes, types of work, marriage, childbirth, religious practices, initiation, the role of elders, courts and the settlement of disputes, crops and foods, types of oral literature, ceremonial pollution, oaths, war, and death. Justin Itotia wa Kimacia's work included statements of moral and ethical positions, stories, and narratives of various types. *Facing Mount Kenya* addressed many of the same topics as the earlier works in Gikuyu, but Kenyatta addressed these topics in greater detail and placed more emphasis on issues of economic and political life.

Certainly a primary reason why ethnographies were written during this period was because cultural practices were major issues of contention among the missions, the colonial government, and the Kikuyu Central Association. Missions had been teaching against cultural practices such as "female circumcision," polygamy, certain dances, and not burying the bodies of all who died, but gradually mission ideologies and ways of imposing those ideologies began to be widely questioned. In 1929 many of the missions in central Kenya united in a policy to end the practice of "female circumcision." To implement this policy they barred from attending mission schools the children of those who refused to denounce the practice. The KCA opposed these policies and independent schools began to be established for children who had been barred from mission schools. Ethnographies were a means by which positions on these controversial issues were articulated and debated.

Gathigira first entered politics in the 1928 Nyeri Local Native Council elections as the successful candidate of the Progressive Kikuyu Party, a party sponsored by the Church of Scotland Mission. He stated in the preface to his ethnography:

> Ndiandĩkĩte maũndũ macio nĩ getha andũ marũmagĩrĩre marĩa moru, aca, nyandĩkĩte tondũ nĩnjũĩ atĩ gũtirĩ rũrĩrĩ rũngĩhota gũthiĩ mbere wega. (1934: iii)

> I have not written about these matters so that people should persist in those that are bad, no, I have written because I know that there are customs that might be able to continue in a positive sense.

Gathigira also expressed the hope that his work would be useful to European missionaries who "marutaga wĩra gũkũ Gĩkũyũ wa kũgarũra ngoro cia Agĩkũyũ cierekere Mwathani Jesu Kristo" ("work here in Gikuyu land to turn the hearts of Gikuyu people to the Lord Jesus Christ") (1934: iv). The longest section of Gathigira's book deals with the issues of initiation and circumcision. He argues against what he clearly saw to be "female genital mutilation" and he argues that it was not Europeans who raised this issue, but rather it was Agikuyu Christians who felt compassion for the suffering of women (1934: 55–56).

Facing Mount Kenya perhaps most specifically addressed the positions on Gikuyu cultural practices that were articulated by Kenyatta's fellow student in Malinowski's seminar, L. S. B. Leakey, who was also writing an ethnography of the Gikuyu that would be published forty years later (Leakey 1977). Yet it is likely that Kenyatta was also aware of Gathigira's work as well as of earlier ethnographies that had disparaged Gikuyu culture, such as those of Father C. Cagnolo and Katherine and William Scoresby Routledge. *Facing Mount Kenya* was a powerful answer to all of these works. Kenyatta did not deny that his work was political but he stated:

> My chief objective is not to enter into controversial discussion with those who have attempted, or are attempting, to describe the same things from outside observation, but to let the truth speak for itself . . . At the same time, I am well aware that I could not do justice to the subject without offending those "professional friends of the African" who are prepared to maintain their friendship for eternity as a sacred duty, provided only that the African will continue to play the part of ignorant savage so that they can monopolize the office of interpreting his mind and speaking for him. To such people, an African who writes a study of this kind is encroaching on their preserves. He is a rabbit turned poacher. (1938: xviii)

Facing Mount Kenya eloquently articulated KCA positions on the cultural issues of the 1920s and 1930s in central Kenya but, more importantly, it was a powerful critique of colonialism that had a long-term impact on struggles against colonialism and on writing within and about those struggles in a wide range of languages and contexts.

Facing Mount Kenya was first published by Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd. in London while Gathigira's *Mĩikarĩre ya Agĩkũyũ* was first published by the Sheldon Press. In contrast *Endwo nĩ Irĩ na Irĩĩri* was self-published by Justin Itotia, and was one of the first works published by an independent (i.e., non-missionary and non-government) press. Such presses have been central to the

development of literature in Gikuyu because they have enabled writers to address issues and topics in works that would not have been published by the heavily censored missionary and government presses. To publish works in Gikuyu and works that addressed political and social issues of concern to Gikuyu speakers, it became necessary for writers to establish their own presses. These presses have played a critical role in the dissemination of literature in Gikuyu. Editions they have published have generally been inexpensive and have been sold by street vendors as well as in bookshops.

Disagreements between missionary publishers concerning orthography led to the establishment of the first Gikuyu orthography committee, the United Gikuyu Language Committee, in 1949. Such disagreements have remained a continuing problem for writers and publishers of materials in Gikuyu. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta used the orthography that had been developed by Catholic missionaries when he made reference to terms in Gikuyu. This orthography did not distinguish all of the vowel sounds of the language and did not require diacritics. The orthography adopted by the committee used the tilde (~), in contradiction to general linguistic practices, to distinguish vowel height. The Qur'an: *Kũrani Theru: Kikuyu Translation of the Holy Qur'an with Arabic Text*, was first published in Gikuyu in 1988, although a Muslim prayer was published in 1937 (believed to have been translated by Haji Mwalimu Hamis).

In 1980 an orthography committee composed of Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, Gerald G. Wanjohi, Rev. John G. Gatũ, Rev. John Mbũrũ, Karega Mũtahi, Kĩnũthia wa Mũgĩĩa, Magayũ K. Magayũ, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Peter Kĩarie Njoroge planned to begin work on revising the orthography. Subsequently, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Gakaara wa Wanjaũ have used double vowels to mark vowel length in their publications. Continuing work on orthography revision has been undertaken by the editors of *Mũtiiri* (The Supporter) and other scholars and by the recently established ŨŨGĨ language committee. ŨŨGĨ is an acronym of Ũrumwe wa Ũkuria wa Gĩgĩkũyũ. The word "ũũgĩ" also means "knowledge" or "wisdom."

Gakaara wa Wanjaũ was the most prolific of the second generation of Gikuyu writers. He was born in 1921 and began his writing career in 1946 when he published *Uhoro wa Ugurani* (And What about Marriage). This publication included the story *Ngwenda Unjurage* (I Want You to Kill Me). *Ngwenda Unjurage* concerns the suicide of a young woman whose father had kept greedily demanding additional bridewealth payments from her fiancé. When the young woman pleaded with her father to be reasonable, he beat her severely,

locked her in the house and returned the bridewealth payments to the young man telling him never to return. The story's title comes from a final declaration that the daughter makes to her father:

> Baaba, nĩ ndooka rĩu na ngwenda ũnjũrage nĩ ũndũ ndũrĩ na bata na ni . . . Nĩ ngũthaithĩte mũno wĩtĩkĩre hikio nĩ mwanake ũrĩa ndũire nyendeete na nĩũregeete, ũkaanuma na ũkaahũũra nĩ ũndũ wa gũkũũria o gwiki. Nĩ ũnyonetie wega biũ atĩ nĩ wendeete indo makĩria, ũkariganĩrwo nĩ niĩ. (6)

> Father, I have come to you now, and I want you to kill me, because you have no use for me. . . . I have begged you to let me marry the man I've loved all this time and you have refused and cursed and beaten me just for asking you. You've really let me see that you prefer money and you've forgotten about me. (Gakaara 1946. Bennett translation, p. 4)

Ngwenda Unjurage was reprinted in 1951, 1961, 1966, 1967, and 1985.

Gakaara was one of an activist group of publishers and writers who during the late 1940s and early 1950s produced political newspapers, booklets, and pamphlets in Gikuyu. Writers in this group included Bildad Kaggia (who was then the General Secretary of the Kenya African Union (KAU)), John Kabogoro Cege, Isaac Gathanju, Kĩnũthia wa Mũgĩĩa, Stanley Mathenge (who later became a leader in the armed struggle), Victor Mũrage Wokabi, Mũthee Cheche, Morris Mwai Koigi, Mathenge Wacira, and Henry Mwaniki Muoria. Many of these writers were members of, and wrote in support of, the KCA and the KAU. The KCA had been banned in 1940 and a number of members had been detained, but groups of members continued to meet secretly even after the KAU was formed in 1944, and Jomo Kenyatta became its president in 1947. The works of this group of writers were nationalist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist. Most of the works produced by the group were published by Henry Mwaniki Muoria and Gakaara wa Wanjaũ.

Booklets and pamphlets published by Gakaara Book Service during this period included: Gakaara wa Wanjaũ's *Mageria Nomo Mahota* (an April 1952 translation of his 1951 Swahili publication *Roho ya Kiume na Bidii kwa Mwafrika*: The Spirit of Manhood and Perseverance for Africans), *Witikio wa Gikuyu na Mumbi* (1952) (The Creed of Gikuyu and Mumbi), Mwaniki Mugweru's *Kamuingi Koyaga Ndiri* ([1946]/1952a) (It Takes a Group to Lift a Mortar) and *Wiyathi wa Andu Airu* (1952b) (The Freedom of Black People), and *Kenya ni Yakwa* (1952) (Kenya is Mine) and *Miikarire ya Thikwota* (1952) (The Lives of Squatters). *Mageria Nomo Mahota* was later reprinted as an appendix to Gakaara's prison diary (see Gakaara wa Wanjaũ 1983a). The first chapter of

Mageria Nomo Mahota is "Tugutura Tutangikaga Nginya-ri?" (For How Long Will We Endure Oppression?). The chapter begins:

> Athungu ni moi wega ati twi na uhoti, ugi ona umenyo wa gwika maundu manene ta nduriri iria ingi ciothe cia thi, ni undu ona ithui turi na meciria ota o, no tundu Athungu ni mendaga gutura bururi-ini uyu witu magiikaraga magithahagia maundu maitu ona gutumenereria ni getha ati na ithui twimene. (1983a 222; orthography that of the original)

> It is the strategy of our white rulers, in order to ensure their dominant stay in this land, to cast aspersions on our abilities and even to sow seeds in us of self-hate and self-doubt; and this in spite of the fact that the white rulers are well aware that we are endowed, like all the other nationalities of the world, with the mental abilities and skills and wisdom to manage our own affairs for our own benefit and well being; they are quite well aware that we have a mind as good as theirs. (trans. by Ngigĩ wa Njoroge: 228)

In 1951 and 1952 four booklets containing political songs were compiled by Kĩnũthia wa Mũgĩĩa, Mũthee Cheche, Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, Stanley Mathenge, and Ndiba. The booklets were published by Henry Mwaniki Muoria and Gakaara wa Wanjaũ. Kĩnũthia wa Mũgĩĩa's *Nyimbo cia Kwarahura Agikuyu* (Songs to Awaken the Agikuyu) was the first of the books of songs to be published in October/November 1951 by Muoria's Mumenyereri Press. Kĩnũthia, the compiler, was a KCA and KAU activist. Muoria, the publisher, was an Assistant Secretary General of KAU and the editor of *Mumenyereri* (The Observant One), a weekly newspaper in Gĩkũyũ that had a circulation of 11,000 before it was proscribed. Mũthee Cheche (a pseudonym, probably that of an author by the name of Mũthemba from Kiambu) published the second song book. The third song book, *Nyimbo cia Gikuyu na Mumbi* (Songs of Gikuyu and Mumbi), was compiled and published on 15 August 1952 by Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, at the time also the editor of the newspaper *Waigua Atia* (What's New?). Gakaara composed some of the songs himself. Others were collected by Stanley Mathenge, who was then a young friend of Gakaara's. During the liberation struggle Mathenge became the legendary General Mathenge who was never captured and reportedly escaped to Ethiopia. Gakaara and Kĩnũthia were subsequently arrested in October 1952 along with the KAU leaders. Ndiba from Nyeri compiled the fourth song book, *Nyimbo cia Kwarahura* (Rousing Songs).

On 21 October 1952, leaders of the KAU were detained and publications found in their possession, including copies of the song books, were seized. Bildad Kaggia, Kungu Karumba, Jomo Kenyatta, Fred Kubai, Paul Ngei, and

Achieng Oneko were arrested and charged with "membership and management of Mau Mau" on 17 November 1952. The song books became primary and highly contested evidence in the trial as the prosecutors sought to prove that possession of the booklets and being named in the songs was proof of "membership and management of Mau Mau" even though it was acknowledged that none of the accused had compiled or published the song books. Since that time the songs in these books have been reissued in a variety of published and audiotape formats. They have been anthologized with earlier political songs as well as with songs that were composed during the armed struggle. Table 17.1 is an example of the first three verses of one of the songs and of three different translations.

In studying the history of political songs in Gikuyu it is useful to consider and distinguish contexts of composition, transmission, and performance and to bear in mind the conditions under which the texts were preserved and transmitted. The case of the books of political songs published by Kĩnũthia wa Mũgĩĩa, Mũthee Cheche, Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, Stanley Mathenge, and Ndiba provides relevant examples. In some instances the compilers or people known to the compilers composed and wrote the songs. In other instances, as illustrated above, lyrics seem to have been re-worked from those published in Christian hymnals. Some songs, in addition were heard at political meetings and written down and published by the compilers. There is considerable evidence that the songs were widely distributed in written form and that they were frequently sung at political meetings. This complex history of composition, transmission, and performance was subsequently reduced by L. S. B. Leakey in his discussion of the songs in *Defeating Mau Mau*. In his discussion, Leakey referred to the writers and publishers of the songs as "bards"/"singers" of "hymns"(1955: 55, 62), presumably to strengthen his argument that the songs were produced by "The leaders of the Mau Mau movement"(1955: 53) rather than by those who produced the song books. Leakey may have heard the songs sung, but as the translator for the prosecution in the Kapenguria trial he had access to the published versions that he translated in *Defeating Mau Mau*.

In 1963, at the time of independence in Kenya, a number of the songs from the 1952 song books were reclaimed and republished by one of the original compilers and publishers, Gakaara wa Wanjaũ. Gakaara's *Nyimbo cia Gukunguira Wiathi* (1963) (Songs to Celebrate Freedom) contained four groups of songs. The first group consisted of songs concerned with Olenguruone, a 1948–50 forced resettlement. The second group was made up of songs from the song books. The third group of songs were composed during the liberation struggle. The fourth group consisted of songs composed between 1961 and 1963.

Table 17.1 *Examples of original verses and translations.*

Karechu Mũruku's "Ngwĩka atĩa Thirwo Nĩ Thĩĩna" (*Nyimbo cia Mau Mau* 12)[a]	L. S. B. Leakey's translation of "Kigenyo" (hymn 27) for the Kapenguria prosecution	The Kapenguria defense team's translation of "Kigenyo" (hymn 27)	"Police Harassment" Maina wa Kinyatti's version (96)
	False Witness	*False Allegation/False Story*	
Ngũrora Nairobi ngakora Haraka	I go to Nairobi and I find Haste	When I go to Nairobi I find there that all is Haraka/When I go to Nairobi I come into contact with the police/When I go to London all I get is "Move on there"	In Nairobi I am harassed by the occupying forces And if I return to the countryside I am a Mau Mau "gangster".
Ndacooka Gĩkũyũ ndĩ wa Mau Mau	When I return to Kikuyu I am of Mau Mau	When I go back to Kikuyu I am alleged to be Of Mau Mau (Slater 1955: 92). Version 2/verse 1: If I go into town I am harried by the police; if I go into the country somebody calls me Mau Mau (Slater 1955: 131).	

		Chorus
Ngwĩka atĩa, ngwĩka atĩa, Thirwo nĩ thĩĩna Ngwĩka atĩa, ngwĩka atĩa, Thirwo nĩ thĩĩna	What shall I do, what shall I do, to be freed of my sorrows? What shall I do, what shall I do to be freed of my sorrows?[b]	*What shall I do?* *What shall I do?* *To be free from this slavery?*
Nĩ ngũruta mbeca cia gũcaria ũtheri, Na rĩrĩa ũkoneka, ngaikara ta ndua.	I will give money to search for light And when it is found I shall be like a big beer gourd	I'll pay any price For the light of liberation, And when it comes I will live in dignity.
Nĩ twĩrutanĩrie twĩ Nyũmba ya Mũmbi, Tũnyitane ithuothe ta thiga rĩa koine.	Let us all work hard together, we of the house of Mumbi. And hold ourselves together like the corner stone (Slater 1955: 91).	We must struggle together as one people, Let us all unite And become like the foundation stone.

[a] Another version of this song is found in D.Kĩnũthia Mũgĩa's *Ũrathi wa Chege wa Kĩbiru*.

[b] Rev. Robert Philip volunteered in his testimony that, "the chorus itself is not an original composition, it is a chorus from one of our well-known hymns" (Slater 1955:91).

The songs from the 1952 song books received international recognition through their re-publication in Ruth Finnegan's much cited 1970 work, *Oral Literature in Africa.* Finnegan's edited versions of the songs were based entirely on the versions published in Leakey's *Defeating Mau Mau.* Finnegan reassessed and challenged Leakey's opinions of the songs and of the liberation struggle in her comparison of the struggle in Kenya to other African nationalist struggles. Yet like Leakey, Finnegan considered the songs part of African political "oral" literature, even though the lyrics for these songs for the most part had been written and had been published.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the 1952 songs became part of the struggle in Kenyan academia over the meaning of Mau Mau in Kenyan history. In his 1976 paper delivered to the Historical Association of Kenya, "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya: A Study of Mau Mau Hymns," Bethwell A. Ogot presented an "ethnic" view of the songs that was consistent with his arguments and those of his associates concerning the liberation struggle. It was their contention that Mau Mau was an internal struggle between groups within Gikuyu society and not a nationalist liberation struggle. Maina wa Kinyatti challenged Ogot's views of the songs and of the liberation struggle in Kenya in his 1980 *Thunder from the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs.* This is the most complete collection of songs available.

Wanjikũ Mũkabi Kabira and Karega Mũtahi included a version of one of the 1952 song book songs as well as other 1950s resistance songs in their 1988 *Gĩkũyũ Oral Literature.* Wanjikũ and Karega's work provides evidence of the entry / re-entry of the songs into oral literature and of the transmission of the songs in oral literature after published versions had been proscribed. In 1989, at the beginning of "the second liberation" in Kenya, Gakaara wa Wanjaũ published *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau* and the musician Joseph Kamaru produced a cassette tape, *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau.* Cassettes of speeches of the late president Jomo Kenyatta were also produced. The cassettes were very popular and were frequently played in Nairobi and central Kenya *matatu* (privately owned public transport vehicles). Subsequently the government banned the playing of "vernacular" music and speeches in *matatu.* In 1994 music in Kenyan languages other than Kiswahili was banned from radio broadcasts and a new cassette of "Mau Mau songs," *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau*, which contained songs from the 1952 song books, was released by Irungu wa Kario.

While the independent presses in the late 1940s and 1950–52 were producing a wide range of lively political, creative, and cultural works, Eagle Press, the colonial government publisher, also became more active in publishing in

Gikuyu. One of its 1950 publications, presumably produced in response to the independent press coverage of the activities of nationalists such as Jomo Kenyatta and Mbiyu Koinage, presented George Washington Carver as an alternative role model (J. M. Rutuku's translation of Janet Schwab's *Mũndũ Mũirũ Mũũgĩ Mũno–George Washington Carver* [A Very Wise Black Person – George Washington Carver]). A Highway Press publication during this era was a translation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (*Rũgendo rũa Mũgendi,* 1949).

Gakaara wa Wanjaũ was arrested on 21 October 1952 and was detained until 20 July 1959. During his years in detention Gakaara secretly kept a prison diary that was published as *Mwandĩki wa Mau Mau Ithaamĩrio-inĩ* (1983a)/*Mau Mau Writer in Detention* (1986). The diary documents the experiences of Gakaara and other prisoners who were among the first arrested under a state-of-emergency decree on 21 October 1952. Many of these prisoners along with others were later transported to the Lamu prison and then to a prison camp on Manda Island. In 1956 Gakaara was transferred to the Athi River prison camp where he was forced to work on the building of a dam; it was here that he was later to write "anti-Mau Mau propaganda." Gakaara wrote a play, *Reke Aciirithio nĩ Mehia Maake* (Let the Guilt of His Crimes Weigh Heavy on His Conscience), which was performed a number of times in the camp during July 1956. Initially the play was well received but Gakaara was subsequently accused of writing a play "to foster hatred between detained people and loyalist home-guards" ([1983a]/1986: 191). He was interrogated and delayed from seeking parole.

Gakaara was transferred to a detention camp close to his home in February 1958 but was then "banished" to Hola, which "had become the dumping ground of the unreformable Mau Mau hardcore" ([1983a: 156]/1986: 199). The infamous Hola massacre took place here in March 1959. A heavily armed platoon of over a hundred soldiers set upon approximatedly eighty-five detainees and beat them: "Eleven detainees were battered to death; many others were maimed" ([1983a: 157]/1986: 201).

Gakaara was released from Hola in August 1959 and then lived as a restricted person in his home until May 1960. He had sent the pages of his diary home with fellow detainees when they were released and his wife had collected them upon her release from Kamĩtĩ Women's prison in 1957. After his release, Gakaara selected the songs that were eventually published in *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau* (1989) (Songs of Mau Mau). In 1961 he worked in Nairobi as a staff member of *Sauti ya* KANU (The Voice of KANU), the paper of the Kenya African National

Union. Later he returned to Karatina and again set up his own publishing company. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o urged Gakaara to publish his diary. The diary was awarded the NOMA prize in 1984. In 1986 Gakaara was detained and tortured on the basis of false charges that he had been associated with the Mwakenya movement.

Gakaara is probably most well-known to readers of Gikuyu because of his fictional works. He published a wide range of fictional works including forty installments in the wa-Nduuta series published in the magazine *Gikuyu na Mumbi*. In 1964 a short story by Gakaara won second place out of 300 entries submitted to Chemchemi Cultural Centre's short-story competition. The central character of the *Gikuyu na Mumbi Magazine* series, KĩWaĩ Wa-Nduuta, is a middle-aged former freedom fighter who struggles to survive and make sense of life in contemporary Kenya. The best-known installments in the series are three that were republished together as the short novel, *Wa-Nduuta: Hingo ya Paawa* (The Time of Power). In this 1983 novel Wa-Nduuta and his friend Conjo happen to arrive in Nairobi in the early morning of 1 August 1982, the day of the attempted coup. As they attempt to find out about the coup and then to escape the violent aftermath, they witness and become involved in the violence that took place in various parts of the city on that day and subsequently. In the final section of the story wa-Nduuta returns to Nairobi to recover Conjo's body. Others stories in the series deal with social issues such as alcohol abuse (*Wirirage Gutiri na Riene*, no. 2, and *Wa-Nduuta Gukinya Ikara kwa Bibikubwa* (Wa-Nduuta Comes to Stay at Bibi Kubwa's, no. 19), theft (*Wa-Nduuta Gukinya Ikara kwa Bibikubwa*, no. 19), violence (*Hingo ya Paawa)*, fraudulent land schemes (*Wa-Nduuta Kugaya Mugunda wa Thothaiti na Hinya* (Wa-Nduuta and the Dividing of the Society's Farm by Force, no. 31), family planning (*Wa-Nduuta Ugo-ini wa Kunyiihia Uciari* (Wa-Nduuta and the Matter of Decreasing the Number of Births, no. 24), and remembering the liberation struggle (*Wa-Nduuta Gukunguira Miaka 20 Ki-Mau Mau* (Wa-Nduuta Celebrating Twenty Years Since Mau Mau, no. 34). In *Wa-Nduuta Gukunguira Miaka 20 Ki-Mau Mau* Wa-Nduuta and Mũmbi, who were both guerillas in the liberation struggle, explain the history of the struggle to Mũmbi's children, who initially laugh when they hear their mother and Wa-Nduuta speak of Mau Mau. Mumbi's children become enthralled by the history they learn from their mother and her friend. When Wa-Nduuta returns home to his wives and tells them what happened they decide to invite their daughter and Mumbi and her children to their home for a celebration of the liberation struggle.

Gakaara wa Wanjaũ also published works in Swahili, and he frequently used English and Swahili in his fiction for stylistic effects. For example, in *Hingo ya*

Paawa the central character Wa-Nduuta hears the cries of a young Indian woman who is being sexually assaulted by a soldier:

> Bacha kuua! Mimi bana kataa kitu! Pilisi, pilisi, pilisi! kataa bana, ua bana! (1983c: 10)
>
> Don't kill me! I won't refuse anything! Please, please, please, I won't refuse! Don't kill me.

The young woman here speaks in broken Swahili. Wa-Nduuta speaks in Standard Swahili when he picks up the gun the soldier has left near the door, and orders, "Mikono juu! Tena juu!" ("Hands up! Up! Further!"). He then tells the young woman, "Toa nguo zake zote na uzilete hapa!" ("Take off his clothes and bring them here!") and he continues speaking Swahili to order the soldier to run outside in his underwear, "Kimbia! Toroka na uende mbio kabisa!" ("Run! Get out of here as fast as possible"). Wa-Nduuta adopts Swahili as the language of the military to threaten the soldier and then puts on the soldier's uniform to complete his disguise and to escape (1983c: 10).

Gakaara was also committed to the promotion of writing in African languages. He developed a series of instructional materials for use in teaching Gikuyu, the *Thooma Gĩgĩkũyũ Kĩega* (1988) (Read Gikuyu Well) series and he developed educational materials (the *Mwalimu wa Lugha Tatu* (Teacher of Three Languages) series for primary-school teachers who teach in trilingual instructional contexts where English, Swahili, and one of twenty Kenyan languages are the languages of instruction.

Historical studies written in Gikuyu have included Gakaara wa Wanjaũ's 1971 *Agikuyu, Mau Mau na Wiyathi* (The Agikuyu, Mau Mau and Freedom), his *Mwandĩki wa Mau Mau Ithaamĩrio-inĩ/Mau Mau Writer in Detention* (1983a, 1986), P. Kibaara Kabutu's 1963 *Mbaara ya Wiyathi wa Kenya Kuuma 1890–1963* (The War for the Freedom of Kenya from 1890–1963), D. Kĩnũthia Mũgĩa's 1979 *Ũrathi wa Cege wa Kĩbiru* (The Prophecy of Cege wa Kĩbiru) and Albert Wakang'ũ Mũnene's 1995 *Mũtaarani Mũgĩkũyũ* (The Gikuyu Advisor). A large number of ethnographic and cultural works have also been written in Gikuyu. In addition to works already mentioned, these have included: Gakaara wa Wanjaũ's *Kienyu wa Ngai Kirima-ini gia Tumutumu* (1952) (A Young Man at Tumutumu Hill), *Kiguni gia Twana* (1951) (The Benefit of Children), and *Mihiriga ya Agikuyu* (1967) (Clans of the Gikuyu), B. Mareka Gecaga's *Kariũki na Mũthoni* (1946) (Kariuki and Muthoni), Mathew Njoroge Kabetũ's *Kaguraru na Waithĩra* (1961) (Kaguraru and Waithĩra) and *Kĩrĩra kĩa Ũgĩkũyũ: Kuuma Mũndũ Amonyokio o Nginya Rĩrĩa Akahinga Riitho Aarĩkia Kwĩgaya* (1947) (The Wisdom of Gikuyuland: From the Time a Person is Born until S/he Shuts His/Her Eye

Having Made a Will) and Philip M. Ng'ang'a's *Mũũgĩ nĩ Mũtaare* (1996) (A Wise Person is an Advisor).

While most of these works have focused on standard ethnographic topics such as marriage and kinship, Gakaara wa Wanjaũ's undated *Ugwati wa Muthungu Muiru* (The Danger of the Black European) critiqued the linguistic and cultural practices of those he described as "Black Europeans." The book mocks the pretensions of Agikuyu who fashion themselves according to colonial models. In the first illustration in the book a father is welcomed home by his daughter who addresses him by saying, "Harũ ndandi" ("Hello Daddy"), to which he responds, "Harũ mbembi" ("Hello Baby") (p. 5). The second illustration depicts a man and a woman speaking English in an urban setting. They are being laughed at and are called "fools" by a European observer because of their claims of discomfort in using Gikuyu and of having forgotten how to speak Gikuyu (p. 9). In the dialogue that follows another illustration a woman applies to a clerk for a housework position in his home. She speaks to him in Gikuyu. He pretends that he doesn't understand the language and speaks rudely to her in English (p. 14). In a fourth illustration a stern teacher forbids unhappy students from speaking Gikuyu and tells them that they will be beaten if they speak the language (p. 17). The cover and final illustration in the book is of a man with a rooster in his head that speaks for him in English when he opens his mouth (p. 20).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is the most well known writer in Gikuyu. In 1976 while chair of the University of Nairobi Literature Department he worked, along with Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, with the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Cultural Center in the development and production of the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*. The play was developed cooperatively and incorporates historically significant resistance songs in Gikuyu. The initial productions of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* were perhaps the most enthusiastically received productions in the history of Kenyan theater. The play was regularly produced in the 1980s and 1990s, although some productions were closed down by government authorities. The play has had a continuing influence on the growth and expansion of resistance and of popular theatre in Kenya and elsewhere. The production and its reception were also the initial inspiration for Ngũgĩ's decision to continue writing in Gikuyu. In 1999, the play was translated into Tigrinya, a language of Eritrea. In January 2000, Ngũgĩ had his first opportunity in twenty-five years to see a performance of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* when it was produced in the Tigrinya translation for the "Against All Odds" conference in Asmara, Eritrea. Ngũgĩ, Nawal El-Saadawi, Ama ata Aidoo, and Mbulelo Mzamane were the chairs of this conference that celebrated African-language literatures.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was arrested on 31 December 1977. During the year of his detention he decided to write the novel *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ*, his first novel in Gikuyu. *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ*, later translated as *Devil on the Cross* (1980, 1982), concerns a group of people who have received invitations to attend a feast of thieves and robbers. The characters meet in a local taxi/bus on their way to the feast, a feast organized by the devil that becomes a competition between the planners to determine who has been and will continue to be the most exploitative. Ngũgĩ wrote this novel in prison on toilet paper. The novel was first published in 1980, as was the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which he wrote with Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩ.

Upon his release from prison on 12 December 1978, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o composed the musical drama *Maitũ Njugĩra* (Mother, Sing for Me). This work incorporates eighty songs of resistance that were composed in eight Kenyan languages. According to Ngũgĩ, approximately 10,000 people attended the open rehearsals of the play, which were the only performances that took place before the production was closed down by government authorities. During this period Ngũgĩ published his prison diary *Detained* (1981) and also wrote a series of children's books in Gikuyu: *Bathitoora ya Njamba Nene/Njamba Nene's Pistol* (1984), *Njamba Nene na Mbaathi ĩ Mathagu/Njamba Nene and the Flying Bus* (1982), and *Njamba Nene na Cibũ Kĩng'ang'i/Njamba Nene and the Cruel Chief* (1986).

Ngũgĩ was forced into exile in 1982. There was a coup attempt in Kenya on 1 August of that year while Ngũgĩ was in Britain promoting the publication of the English translation of *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* (*Devil on the Cross*). Upon learning that he would be implicated as a conspirator in the coup and possibly executed, Ngũgĩ decided to remain in Britain. In 1986, Ngũgĩ published his first major work in exile – *Decolonising the Mind* – in which he made his famous declaration to write subsequently in Gikuyu and Kiswahili.

Ngũgĩ's *Matigari ma Njirũũngi* was published in 1986. This novel is a prose poem about neocolonialism and the ways in which it is comprehended by a survivor/survivors of the wars against imperialism. The characters in the novel struggle to understand and resist neocolonialism through the discourses of nationalism, Christianity, and liberalism. When these discourses prove unworkable in their struggles they turn to what Ngũgĩ in *Decolonising the Mind* termed "the language of struggle." The author notes in the preface to the translation of *Matigari ma Njirũũngi* (1986b) that the novel itself was forced into exile when the Kenya government searched for the main character and then confiscated the remaining copies of the novel from the publisher's warehouse. In addition to publishing fiction in Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ has also published articles

of literary criticism. He published "English: A Language for the World?" in the *Yale Journal of Criticism* in 1990 and has published both criticism and poetry in the journal *Mũtiiri*.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ dedicated their translation of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* to writers in Gikuyu and in particular to Gakaara wa Wanjaũ. Ngũgĩ's early novels (*Weep Not Child, The River Between, A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood*), short stories, and plays (*The Black Hermit* and, with Micere Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) were written and published in English. He also wrote and has continued to publish works of criticism (*Writers in Politics*, *The Barrel of the Pen, Decolonising the Mind, Moving the Center*) in English. Numerous scholars have found evidence in Ngũgĩ's fiction of his reading of novels in English. In his criticism, Ngũgĩ has frequently made reference to his reading of literature in Swahili and to his study of progressive, socialist, and anti-imperialist writers. Ngũgĩ's commitment to engagement and dialogue with the "languages of struggle" as he has explained in *Decolonising the Mind* has clearly been informed by his understanding of the history of writing in Gikuyu as well as by his readings of the works of Franz Fanon and Paolo Freire. Critics of Ngũgĩ's decision to write in Gikuyu have not indicated that they are aware of his study of Fanon and Freire nor have they acknowledged his understanding of the history of writing in Gikuyu. His critics often have dismissed Ngugi's decision to write in Gikuyu as an "ethnic" or "tribalistic" action that contradicts his socialist commitments. Yet those who have read Fanon and Freire or Ngugi's own descriptions of his struggles to write in Gikuyu and to establish dialogues with workers and peasants find his decisions on issues of language consistent with his progressive commitments.

There have been a number of recent intertextual studies of literature in Gikuyu. Simon Gikandi (1991, 2000), Gĩtahi Gĩtĩtĩ (1995), and Alamin Mazrui and Lupenda Mphande (1995) have provided ground-breaking studies in this area in their considerations of intertexuality in Ngũgĩ's works. Gikandi (1991) considers the ways in which Ngũgĩ uses Mau Mau legends and coded language in *Matigari*. In his 1995 study Gikandi reflects upon Ngũgĩ's use of Mau Mau songs and Gikuyu language versions of Christian iconography. One of the most important recent studies of Ngũgĩ's work is Gikandi's *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Gĩtahi discusses the figures of the gĩcaandi poet and of gĩcaandi poetry in *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ*. Mphande and Mazrui clarify the ways in which Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has revised in his most recent novels the intertextual practices of engagement with forms of orature evident in his earlier works.

Eileen Julien asserts that Ngũgĩ's *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* as well as *Decolonising the Mind* challenge notions of the novel and of orality as "essences." She argues that in *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* "oral language" is presented as "a quality of Kenyan culture *now*" (1992: 143; emphasis in original). According to Julien, "The contemporaneity" of *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* "demonstrates that orality is neither of the past nor the elementary stage of an evolutionary process" (1992: 144). What she says of *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* seems equally valid to a discussion of *Matigari*:

> It does not use the "oral tradition" as a bulwark to inspire confidence or action by association with a people's past grandeur or wisdom and virtue. It is neither the "source of truth" nor an exemplary quality of African culture to be retreated into or represented textually; rather it offers verbal means and procedures for constructing and analyzing an issue. (1992: 146)

Through parody *Matigari* also challenges notions of biblical parables, legends, allegories, radio speeches, as well as Ngũgĩ's own earlier works as static authoritative texts. Julien's argument that spoken art forms are a means to analyze and discuss issues in *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* may also be applicable to Gakaara's fiction where Wa-Nduuta is neither hero nor anti-hero but a survivor who uses the range of verbal resources available to him to "get by" in the world.

Consideration of gĩcaandi and of the history of some political song books may extend and clarify the arguments concerning "orality" made by Julien in her discussion of *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ.* In studying literature in Gikuyu it becomes apparent that what might seem obvious distinctions between orature and written literature may not be clearly evident. In *Caitaani Mũtharaba-inĩ* the character Gatuĩria asks, "Who can play the gĩcaandi for us today and read and interpret the verses written on the gourd?" (1992: 59). As this question makes clear and as has been explained in more detail in recent studies by Gĩtahi and Kimani, the performance of gĩcaandi involves extemporaneous sung poetic composition based upon readings and interpretations of ideographic symbols engraved on a calabash. The performance is dialogic as the poets comment upon each other's compositions. Simultaneously both poets read and interpret the ideographs. Kimani argues that "the text on the gĩcaandi gourd acts as an embodiment of the authority of the inscribed text" and that reading the gĩcaandi is "a recognition and re-activation of ideas previously expressed in preceding performances" (1993: 188). It is also possible that the gĩcaandi ideographs embody an even wider set of metaphors. Assessment of gĩcaandi ideographs is speculative without close comparison of a number of gĩcaandi

gourds and without detailed explanations in Gikuyu of the symbols, yet even comparison of the two gourds diagrammed in Vittorio Merlo Pick's study (1973) suggests that the symbols are part of a shared system in which metaphors are pictured. For example, on both gourds, long narrow shapes that extend the length of the gourd and are filled with small dots embody rivers / running water seemingly as a metaphor for communication across boundaries. The cowrie shell that is explained as "the blacksmith's wife pregnant" seems mnemonic of key elements of the frequently told story in which the pregnant wife of a man who has gone to work at the forge is tormented by an ogre. Do the gĩcaandi ideographs embody metaphors? Are they the basis of a writing system that is used exclusively in the expression of verbal artistry? Reading gĩcaandi is clearly a topic that merits further study.

In 1994, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o founded the journal *Mũtiiri* (The Supporter), devoted to literary criticism, poetry, and memoirs. Writers who have contributed to *Mũtiiri* have included Cege Gĩthiora, Gĩcingiri wa Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, Gĩtahi Gĩtĩtĩ, K. K. Gĩtĩĩri, Kĩmani Njogu, Maina wa Kĩnyattĩ, Ngĩna wa Kĩarĩĩ, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩriĩ, and Waithĩra wa Mbuthia. The journal has also included translations into Gikuyu of poems by Abdilatif Abdalla, Alamin Mazrui, Ariel Dorfman, and Otto Rene Castillo. Gĩtahi Gĩtĩtĩ has recently published a volume of poetry, *Mboomu Ĩraatuthũkire Nairobi na Marebeta Mangĩ* (The Bomb Blast in Nairobi and Other Poems). The poem that provides the title of the volume concerns the 7 August 1998, US Embassy bombing in Nairobi.

Newspapers that are currently being published in Gikuyu include: *Mwĩhoko: Gũtirĩ Ũtuku Ũtakĩaga* (Trust: There is no Night without End), *Mũiguithania* (The Reconciler), and *Kihooto: Kĩhooto Kiunaga Ũta Mũgeete* (Justice: Justice Prevails over the Drawn Bow), published by the Mũrang'a Catholic Diocese. These newspapers publish news articles and commentaries on current events as well as poetry, fiction, and essays on history and language. Well-known Kenyan writers who contributed to 1997 issues of *Mwĩhoko* included essayist and novelist Wahome Mũtahi, editor Sam Mbure, and playwright Bantu Mwaũra. *Mwĩhoko* is a monthly publication with a circulation in 2001 of approximately 30,000 copies per issue. Earlier the Catholic Diocese of Mũrang'a published *Inooro. Inooro* was banned in 1992.

The survival and growth of Gikuyu literature despite the extensive colonial and post-independence efforts to ban and to suppress it ensure the future of literature in Gikuyu. Gikuyu literature's resistance and radical history and on-going engagement with political and social issues have made writing in Gikuyu relevant to contemporary readers and writers who continue to contribute to its growth. The growth of literature in Gikuyu has encouraged the

development of literatures in other Kenyan languages and writers in Gikuyu such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Gakaara wa Wanjaũ have been actively involved in the promotion of literature in Kiswahili and other Kenyan languages. Literature in Gikuyu has a secure position as a Kenyan national literature, as an East African and African literature, and as a literature of what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has termed "the real language of humankind: the language of struggle" (1986a: 108).

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18

The emergence of written Hausa literature

OUSSEINA ALIDOU

This chapter looks at the development of Hausa written literature from the formative stages to its modern status, beginning with a critical analysis of the dynamism and fluidity of the very identity of "Hausaness" it seeks to represent, as well as the sociohistorical and political conditions that have influenced its evolution over time, which demonstrate an important interplay between history, literature, language, and society. In mainstream Hausa scholarship, Hausaland has traditionally been seen to include northern Nigeria and, on rare occasions, Niger. This relatively narrow focus on the West African region populated by the Hausa people will be maintained in this chapter. But this demographic space will also be interrogated as a way of opening up new possibilities in the study of literary activities in the Hausa language in the Hausa diaspora, in places like the Sudan, Northern Ghana, and the Middle East, and of comparative literary experiences between the Hausa "motherland" and the Hausa diaspora.

Hausaness: language, culture, and identity

Hausaness as an identity does not encompass a monolithic unit. It is a convergence that reflects Ali Mazrui's notion of a triple heritage of indigenous African, Islamic, and European elements, and which extends, historically, from pre-Islamic, precolonial time to the present era. Demographically, it incorporates descendants of the original Hausa seven states, the descendants of other ethnic groups such as the Fulani, Arab, Tamajaq, and Nupe who have been linguistically and culturally assimilated as a result of sociohistorical contact, political affiliations, intermarriages, and other more recent "converts" in the region arising from both colonial and postcolonial dynamics. Each group in this constituency has become a supplier of valued cultural ingredients that today make up Hausa identity. But because a Fulani contribution to Hausaness has

been prominent, the phenomenon may now be more appropriately described as the Hausa–Fulani formation.

In metaphorical terms, then, Hausaness is a space with many entrances that provide admission and accommodation to individuals of divergent ethnic and cultural origins. Each member occupies a portion of that space without being fully cognizant of the structural layout of the whole. Within the Hausa society, a certain intracultural relativity prevails, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations of what Hausaness actually means – for it certainly means slightly different things to its different members depending on their location within that Hausa space.

Geographically Hausaness is a space that transcends present-day northern Nigeria, the supposed locus of Hausa "authenticity" as reflected in mainstream Hausa studies. It is thus a product of a dynamic interculturalism among people and ethnicities that share a collective consciousness about that identity in spite of the scattering of their entities across contemporary postcolonial boundaries. At the same time, however, Hausaness is constantly being reconfigured in its different locations, as its literary history has amply demonstrated, without losing its shared core values. In cultural terms, Hausaness must be understood "[not as] a given entity, but a resource that is being constantly re-worked both by jigsaw-makers and by jigsaw-doers. As tradition is invented so culture is also reconstructed" (Furniss 1996: 7).

Written Hausa literature: the formative years

While one can argue that in most Afro-Islamic cultures, the development of literacy, which led to the emergence of written literary traditions, coincided with the spread of Islam, these cultures differ in their choices of languages of written classical literatures. Although the Swahili, for example, developed a local written tradition based on the Arabic script over four centuries ago, Islamic Swahili culture hardly produced literary works in any genre in the Arabic language. This contrasts with the early development of a written literary tradition among the Somali. Until recently, traditional Somali written literature was composed primarily in Arabic, with literature in the Somali language being predominantly oral. Somali culture thus did not fully develop an *ajami* literary tradition in the Somali language. The genesis of Hausa literary tradition, on the other hand, combines both the Swahili and Somali experiences: Arabic literature and Fulfulde literature are the precursors of the written Hausa *ajami* literature which developed later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, if not earlier.

In the early seventh and eighth centuries, the trans-Saharan trade fostered not only multicultural contacts among sub-Saharan ethnic groups such as the Hausa, Fulani, and Tamajaq, but also contacts between these groups and North African Arabs and Turkish populations. The contacts were very instrumental in the early spread of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa in general and more especially among the Hausa and later, the Hausa–Fulani.

During the fourteenth century, *jihadist* and Muslim scholars foresaw the limitation of an Islamic theological training which precluded new converts in the non-Arab world from acquiring a knowledge of Arabic language; to them Arabic was essential in gaining an adequate understanding of Islam. As a result the Islamic University Mosque of Sankore in the province of Timbuktu, situated in present-day Mali, was created and modeled upon older Islamic Universities of North Africa such as the University of Al-Azhar (founded 972 CE) and the Universities of Fez and Cordova to cater for students of Islamic studies from the western Sudanic belt. The graduates from the University of Sankore were in charge of spreading this formalized intellectual tradition of Islamic learning in newly converted regions. In the words of Hamidu Alkali:

> The period of instructional studies, which is parallel to a kind of Teacher-Training, depended on the ability of the individual. On completion of his training, the individual scholar would receive from his master, Murabi, Ustaz, a ja'izah (reward) which qualified him to explain to others in the way and manner his master had done. As the work of these scholars proved successful, more subjects were added to the curricula of the University. The study of Arabic grammar and literature was considered essential for the understanding of the Kur'an . . . The University of Sankore was said to contain copies of almost the whole of Arabic literature. (Alkali 1967: 10–11)

Thus, from both the early contacts with North African scholars in the fifteenth century and the scholastic training at the University Mosque of Sankore, an Arabic Islamic literary tradition began to emerge in Hausaland (Pilaszewicz 1985: 202).

Some studies also contend that since the early seventeenth century, the Bornu empire tradition of Arabic writing had strongly affected Hausa states, and had produced Hausa writers who contributed to the Arabic written literature in Bornu (see Gérard 1981b and Pilaszewicz 1985). These studies cite the earliest work of *nazm*, or versification, produced during that era by Abdullahi Sikka from Kano entitled "al-'Atiya li'l-mu'ti" (The Gift of River, or The Gift of the Donor), which reflects the author's advanced training in Sufi mysticism as

developed in Hausaland. They also mention the work of a famous Hausa poet and religious commentator, Ibn al-Sabbagh, known in Hausa as Dan Marina, "the Son of the Dyers." He composed a poem of both political and historical significance in the form of a treatise – "Mazjarat al-fityan" (The Admonition to Young Men) – celebrating the victory of the Bornu King Ali B. Umar over the "pagan" tribes in the Benue Valley in present-day northern Cameroon.

The same studies also indicate the preeminence of Hausa scholars during the eighteenth century in Islamic jurisprudence. This is revealed in the works of the most eminent Islamic jurist of the time, Muhammad al-Barnawi of Katsina, also known as Dan Masani ("Son of the Scholar"). Al-Barnawi was a well-known disciple of Dan Marina, who was credited with writing more than ten Arabic treatises. In addition, we should not overlook the significant influence of Islamic intellectual centers such as Agadez, located in the northern part of present-day Niger, as well as those in Egypt and the Maghrib, on the late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century scholars, among whom were the Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio.

Mention should also be made of the different levels of training that existed and continued to mark the distinction between the training of elementary school teachers known as the *mu'allim* (*malam*) and that of advanced Muslim scholars, the *'ulema* or *'ulemasi* who graduated from Sankore Mosque University. The *mu'allim*'s knowledge is limited to the study of the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (Sayings and traditions of the Prophet), and religious practice, with an Arabic language proficiency that extends beyond their recitation of basic religious texts. They use their native languages to interpret and convey their religious knowledge to other people who have no basic literacy skills in Islamic education. The *'ulema*, on the other hand, are also analysts and interpreters of Islamic doctrine within the scholastic tradition.

While there is no exact determination of when *ajami* literacy, the tradition of writing Fulfulde and Hausa in a modified version of the Arabic script, began, it is quite reasonable to surmise that it emerged as a byproduct of the dialogic interactions between the Arabized literate *'ulema*s and their subaltern *mu'allim*s. *Ajami* literacy in Fulfulde and Hausa emerged as an indigenous tradition in the course of an evolving Hausa Islamic identity. Given also the highly mercantile tradition of Hausa society and its interaction with Middle Eastern traders, it is quite possible that the earlier writings in *ajami* were limited to trade transaction diaries, accounting notes, and other forms of literature related to business. These elementary forms of written texts might have predated both the bulk of manuscripts of homiletic Hausa poetry and the chronicles discovered in the early nineteenth century.

Relying entirely on the availability of written documents to trace the beginnings of a writing tradition in Hausa culture is quite problematic. First, there is the question of the value put on the written document, which differs from one culture to another. In Islamic Hausa culture, a product of Islamic knowledge is a collective property. An author (of written or orally produced literary pieces) sometimes parted with the single original version of a text in the spirit of sharing, advancing knowledge, and enriching the text through contributions from others. Thus, individual authorship becomes subsumed by collective appropriation of the work, which, in the absence of widespread literacy, gets reconfigured orally at the expense of its written original.

There is also the question of the nonexistence or rudimentary nature of print during that era that might have hindered the possibility of producing more than a limited number of copies of an original work. A fair amount of writing was and continues to be done on the wooden slate still in use in most Afro-Islam traditional schools. Such writing was read and memorized for future public recitation and, after fulfilling its functions, was washed off and the liquid absorbed for its medicinal or protective power. What is crucial here is the centrality of the power of memory in the oral transformation of a text that was originally written. Original authorship is not denied but becomes, in the process, virtually inconsequential.

It is also important to bear in mind the quality of the materials on which texts were written during that era. Commenting on the manner in which the works of Nana Asma'u (1793–1864), daughter of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, were preserved even as late as the early nineteenth century, for example, Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd observe:

> These *Ajami* [poetic] compositions [and treaties written by Nana Asma'u] were written with vegetable dye inks on unbound sheets of paper, and traditionally kept together in a leather bookbag called by the Hausa term *gafaka*. This is the way Nana Asma'u produced and stored her manuscripts, in the manner of her day. Her collected works have remained in storage in her home since her death in 1864. Owing to the vagaries of time and circumstance, it is possible that some of her works were lost by various means: perhaps some were loaned out and lost or destroyed; perhaps others disintegrated before they were copied, or were lost to weather and insect damage. (1997: xvii)

Given such rudimentary methods of preservation, then, it is not inconceivable that writing may have begun much earlier in Hausaland than the available evidence seems to suggest.

The birth of a Hausa *ajami* literary tradition

The wind of Islamic reformist movement in the early eighteenth century influenced to a great extent the shift of writing toward mainly creative literary texts of didactic and homiletic thrust. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio (1754–1817), the Fulani Islamic reformer who launched a *jihad* between 1804 and 1810 against the Hausa leaders, did so strategically on two grounds: first, to gain the solidarity and trust of his Hausa followers serving in his battalion, most of whom belonged to the class of peasants and commoners who suffered from the oppressive authority of Hausa leaders; and secondly, to strengthen this alliance with the new converts through Islamic education. By 1808–09 Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio had replaced all the Hausa kings by members of his family who became the new emirs of the conquered Hausa states and consolidated the power of his empire under the Sokoto Caliphate with Sokoto as the administrative capital.

The *jihad* leader was aware that proper Islamic practice requires investment in Islamic education. However, most of his religious writings were not accessible to the majority of his followers who were not literate in Arabic or Fulfulde. Among these the Hausa speakers were predominant. In fact, by the time of the *jihad* most Fulanis and members of other ethnic groups had been culturally and linguistically assimilated to Hausa identity at a time when the Hausa language had already acquired a regional status as a lingua franca. But the Shehu himself produced little in Hausa, having been more fluent in Arabic and Fulfulde. It was not until

> the reign of Muhammad Bello (1817–1837) that the foundations of Hausa writing were laid by Usman's brother, Abdullah b. Muhammad (1766–1829), his daughter Asma'u (also known as Nana) bint Shehu (1794–1863) and such of his early disciples as Asim Degel and Muhammad Tukur. They handled in Hausa the favorite genres and the main themes of Islamic writing. (Gérard 1981b: 58)

As Mack and Boyd (2000) rightly point out, what these pioneers of writing in Hausa accomplished was not merely a translation of the Shehu's works, but their actual adaptation to the dictates of Hausa language and culture. They did to Shehu's works what Fitzgerald did to Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*.

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's seminal works translated into Hausa focused on an Islamic orthodoxy against the Afro-Islamic syncretism prevalent in much Muslim Hausa practice and also on the unity of the Islamic *umma* (community), Islamic jurisprudence, and political leadership. These works cut across various literary genres although Dan Fodio's most favorite genre was Islamic

versification, poetic compositions of a homiletic nature. His revival writings in Arabic include his first treatises, *Ihya al-sunna wa-Ikhmad al-bid'a* (1793) (Revivification of Orthodoxy and Extinguishing of Innovation), *Nûr al-albâb* (The Light of the Mind), *Masa'il Muhimma* (1802) (Important Matters), *Al-qasida al-Sudaniya* (1794) (The Sudanic Ode); *Kitab-al farq* (Book of the Difference between the Governance of the people of Islam and the Governance of the Unbelievers); *Bayan wujub al-hijra ala al-'ibad* (Explanation of the Necessity of Hijra to the Worshippers Divine Islamic Jurisprudence and Moral Ethic of Divine); and *Sirj al-Ikhwan* (The Lamp of the Brethren). "Tabbat Hakika," written in Fulfulde, is one of his most popular poetic compositions. The dedication of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's (close and extended) family members to the spread of the religious intellectual vision of their leader was an effort of tremendous collaboration:

> Verse written in one language by the Shehu was translated into another language by another member of the family. One member of the family would transform verse by another member of the family out of couplets into quintains by undertaking a *takhmis* [adding an explanatory or exemplification lines]. Sometimes translation would render additional commentary such that the new would constitute more an alternative version of the old translation.
> (Furniss 1996: 200)

Apart from the phenomenal input of the Fodio dynasty to the *jihad ajami* literature, it is important to take into account the original contributions of other *jihad* scholars of the time who used their literary creative abilities to express their affiliation to Islamic brotherhoods other than Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's *Qadiriyya*. These include the famous religious poets of Katsina, Muhammadu na Birnin Gwari, known for his popular poem entitled "Gangar Wa'azu" (The Drum of Admonition), Malam Shitu Dan Abdurra'uhu, who contributed two lengthy poetic compositions – "Jimiyya" and "Wawiyya" – in both Arabic and Hausa in strong support of Sufism and the Tijaniyya brotherhood, and Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's own dissident grandson who developed a new satirical genre within mainstream *jihad* verse to protest against his ostracization from the Sokoto Caliphate. To sum up, then, it is the mediated translation of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's works from Arabic or Fulfulde into Hausa undertaken by members of his family, and the remarkable contributions of his disciples and dissidents, which marked the beginning of a Hausa *ajami* literary tradition.

Because the Islamic revival movement was a religious war against the "pagan" and a call for orthodoxy for the already converted Muslims, the

poetic content it inspired was both homiletic and didactic. Many Hausa studies contend that much of Hausa classical poetry of the nineteenth century was thematically a continuation of classical Arab-Islamic poetry. These classical subgenres include: *wak'ok'in wa'azi* (poems of warning and admonition), poetic compositions that describe the practical paths to hell and paradise on Judgment Day and inform the believers of the difference between the two; *wak'ok'in sira*, religious poems that focus on the life of the Prophet and other Muslim saints; *wak'ok'in madahu* (prophetic panegyric poems) whose content calls for the believer's devotion to God and his Prophet; *wak'ok'in farilla*, which describe Muslim legal obligations; *wak'ok'in hisabi*, devoted to numerological poems; *wakokin taurari*, poems related to astrology; and *wak'ok'in tauhidi,* poems devoted to theology and philosophy (see Hiskett 1975; Pilaszewicz 1985: 202; Gérard 1981a; and Furniss 1996).

There is some debate regarding the original structure of Hausa *ajami* poetry. Some scholars argue that nineteenth-century Hausa religious poetry was structurally inspired by classical Arabic poetic meters and can be described using the Arabic *xalilian* metric system. Others contend that rather than being an offshoot of Arabic, it is better accounted for by a more indigenous structure whereby the rhyme represents the unit of division into stanzas (Furniss 1996: 210). The debate then is framed in terms of a discourse of foreign hegemony versus that of nationalistic authenticity.

Of special note in the development of an *ajami* literature is the contribution of the *jihadist* women scholars, which has so far received little attention in mainstream Hausa scholarship. This marginalization has been a common trend even with regard to such prominent figures as Nana Asma'u, a leading intellectual authority in her own right. There has been a gender bias that has reinforced a false image of total absence of a women's intellectual and literary tradition in Afro-Islamic cultures in general and in Hausaland in particular. It is against this backdrop that the pioneering works of Jean Boyd in *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u 1793–1865, Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader* (1989) and Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *The Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Daughter of Usman Dan Fodiyo* (1997), and Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd in *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (2000) attain their monumental importance in filling the gap in the historical and critical study of the Hausa *ajami* literary tradition. By bringing to light the *ajami* literary work of the nineteenth-century Muslim women in Hausaland, Mack and Boyd have posed a fresh challenge even to western-trained feminist thinkers (of both western and African background) on the need to recenter modern Muslim women intellectuals working within a native (i.e., non-western)

epistemological framework. These pioneering works, in other words, are a call for the adoption of more gendered approaches to the study of cultural (re)production.

European colonization and resistance *ajami* literature

The impressive Hausa classical literary movement that developed in the nineteenth century under the leadership of Fulani *jihad* lords was confronted in the early twentieth century with two destabilizing forces. First was the late nineteenth-century internal dissidence between the followers of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's *Qadiriyya* orthodoxy who continued to adhere to the original mission of the movement, on one hand, and the breakaway Mahdist scholars, on the other. The latter developed a new poetic genre that combines the traditional didactic and homiletic content with satirical commentaries about the corrupt state of the *Qadiriyya* leadership. As Stanislaw Pilaszewicz points out, for example, the political denunciation of exploitation and abuse of the poor by some of the *jihad* lords constitutes the theme of both Muhammadu na Birnin Gwari's Hausa poem with the Arabic title "Bi'llahi Arumi" (I Desire It through God) and Iman Daura's "Kogi" (The River), both written at the end of the nineteenth century (1985: 207). In spite of its religious concerns, this dissident trajectory opened up the space for the emergence of a secular tradition in Hausa written poetry.

The second force was of a menacing British invasion that threatened to erase Hausa precolonial history from the collective memory and triggered the desire of certain members of the Hausa *ajami* literati to produce historical texts and chronicles in order to document the reign of renowned emirs, important historical events that marked their reigns and also life in Hausaland during the pre-*jihad* era (Gérard 1981a; Pilaszewicz 1985). *The Chronicle of Kano*, also known as the *Song of Bagauda*, written in verse in the late nineteenth century, for example, covers the history of the town of Kano from the period of its legendary leader Bagauda to the reign of the Emir Muhammadu Bello. Other chronicles include the *Chronicle of Sokoto,* completed in the 1920s and authored by Abubakar Dan Atiku, the *Chronicle of Zaria*, which provides an historical account of the emirate of Zazzau, and the *Chronicle of Katsina*, which offers a list of the rulers of the town of Katsina up to 1807. The same period also produced *ajami* historiographies of other towns and important historical events that affected non-Hausa kingdoms as shown in the work of Hausa *malams* from the area.

The theme of Islamic resistance against British colonial occupation informed the poetic compositions of both Ibrahim Nagwamatse (1857–1922) and the Hausa trader Al-Hajj Umar Ibn Bakr (1858–1934) from the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) who wrote in both Arabic and Hausa (see Hodgkin 1966: 442–43). Ibn Bakr is best known for his famous Hausa poem, *Labarin Nasara* or *Wak'ar Nasara* (The Story of the Christians), written in 1903, which is an attack on British colonization as it destabilized the Sokoto Sultanate's authority, leading to the fragmentation of its consolidated constituency and the exile of the sultan to the east. The following excerpt from his poem reflects Ibn Bakr's disdain of the new rulers:

> Idan ka ce akwai wahala ga tashi
> Lahan duka na ga masu biyan Nasara.
> Idan iko kakai kak ko k'I tashi
> Ina iko shi kai ikon Nasara.
> Idon sun ba ka kyauta kada ka amsa,
> Dafi na sunka ba ka guba Nasara.
> Suna foro gare mu mu bar zalama,
> Mazalunta da kansu d'iyan Nasara.
> Bak'ar fitina gare su da kau makida,
> Ta b'ata dinin musulmin Annasara
>
> You may say it is difficult to rise up
> All fault lies with those who follow the white man.
> If you have power, and so refuse to rise up,
> Where is your power since it comes from the white man?
> If they offer you a gift, do not accept it,
> It is poison that the white man offers you.
> They are warning us not to be oppressive,
> But they themselves are acting oppressively,
> They are evil and are trying, by trickery,
> To destroy the religion of Islam.
>
> (from Furnis 1996: 207)

European colonization and Hausa literary identity

In 1903, Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's dynasty was invaded from the south – the regions situated in present-day Nigeria and northern Ghana – by the British and, from its northern borders (which includes part of the southeastern present-day Niger Republic and the northern part of present-day Cameroon) by French forces. After years of resistance, which for the Islamized indigenous population was regarded as a second *jihad* in Hausaland, a segment of

the population associated with the Mahdist movement migrated eastwards to constitute a new Hausa-Fulani diaspora in Maiurno in present-day Sudan (Abu-Manga 1999; Al-Nagar 1972; and Yamba 1990). Thus began the division of Hausaland into demarcated French and British spheres of colonial authority.

French colonization was based on the so-called direct policy that implied French control of the colonial administration at all levels and cultural assimilation of the indigenous population through imposition of the French language. The British, on the other hand, adopted in their territories, in northern Nigeria more particularly, what is known as "indirect colonial policy," in which colonial rule was exercised through local authorities, and local languages, cultures, and traditions were to a large extent allowed to prevail.

These colonial developments and the ensuing colonial policies precipitated three forces that impacted on Hausaness and its literary tradition in colonially divided Hausaland. The new formation of diasporic Hausa in the Sudan embodied an Islamic Arabized identity, resulting in a reversal from Hausa *ajami* literacy / literary production to a Hausa–Fulani literature in Arabic. In French-controlled territories such as in the Niger Republic and Northern Cameroon, French assimilation policies officially quashed the Hausa *ajami* tradition by imposing a formal education exclusively in French. This policy also hindered the use of the Hausa language whether in *ajami* or Roman script in formal education in "francophone" Africa in general and Niger in particular where Hausa is the mother tongue of more than 50 percent of the country's thirteen million inhabitants and represents the most widely spoken lingua franca. The use of local languages in education and administration was banned during the colonial era and up to the 1970s when the failure of instruction in French became a serious national issue of debate. Inadvertently, then, French educational policy ended up reinforcing the oral literary tradition among the majority of Hausa-speaking peoples who did not have access to formal French education in the Niger Republic. The more organic *ajami* literacy became totally marginalized and remains marginalized, and its educational potential in the postcolonial period was deliberately disregarded by the western-trained elite. In effect, therefore, French colonization and its aftermath meant the near-death of Hausa *ajami* literature in Niger.

The British, on the other hand, encouraged the use of local languages and to some extent promoted literacy and formal education in those languages in northern Nigeria where more than forty million Hausa speakers reside. However, the British were not keen to retain the use of Arabic script and allow the continuation of Hausa *ajami* literary creativity. To the colonialists, *ajami* was a

strong repository of Hausa-Islamic identity and an antithesis to the European colonial hegemonic agenda. Thus, by the 1860s European missionaries had begun to use the Roman script for writing the Hausa language and by 1903 this new system was established as a policy for recording Hausa texts by the department of colonial education. This marked the beginning of Hausa writing in the Roman alphabet in the former British colonies.

The introduction of the Roman script for writing Hausa met with resistance from some of the members of the traditional intelligentsia. And this reaction to the use of the Roman script for writing Afro-Islamic languages was not unique to Hausa. During the same period, for example, Islamic scholars on the East African coast opposed the conversion from Arabic to Roman script for writing Kiswahili on linguistic grounds.[1] Their rationale was that the new script would eventually obliterate the authenticity and sophistication of the Kiswahili sound system.

The first literary works to appear in the Hausa language during the early stages of the romanization of its script were primarily translations of gospel literature by European missionaries. The Gospel of St. Matthew was translated into Hausa in 1860 by Jacob Friedrich Schön. This was followed by a tradition of recording collections from the oral genres. Between 1911 and 1913, for example, Frank Edgar, then a British colonial administrative officer in Sokoto, published three impressive volumes, *Litafin Tatsuniyoyi na Hausa* (Book of Hausa Tales and Traditions). These were transliterations of oral folktales from Sokoto collected and transcribed in *ajami* by the *malammai*, the teachers trained within *ajami* tradition. Neil Skinner provided a critical restructuring of Edgar's collections by making a distinctive classification between Hausa *tatsuniyoyi* (trickster stories, caricatures, etiological stories) and *labaru* (short oral narratives relaying the heroic account of *jihad* leaders, legendary saints and leaders, stories of wars and other stories of miraculous events of the past). Both *tatsuniyoyi* and *labaru* are didactic genres with a moral thrust.

The western impact and the emergence of new literary genres

In order to consolidate the romanization of Hausa script in northern Nigeria, the British colonial government established, in the early 1930s, the Translation Bureau at Zaria under the supervision of Rupert East, who was also an instructor at the Katsina Teachers' Training College. East coordinated the development of educational materials in the Hausa language for use in schools, collaborated with some Hausa scholars to translate literary works from Europe

and Asian cultures – *The Thousand and One Nights* and *The Assemblies*, for example. These translations were undertaken with the hope that they would inspire the literary imagination of potential Hausa writers to create modern prose fiction in all genres with a thematically secular orientation. This goal was pursued through creative-writing competitions organized by the Translation Bureau in the 1930s.

For several decades, the new script and the Hausa secular literature it sought to promote through the introduction of fiction writing remained unappealing to the majority of the members of the Hausa traditional literati who resisted the process. Both the attempt to introduce prose fiction and the foreignness of the genre were considered antithetical to the traditional literary paradigm, which associated the art of writing with either religious functions or recording of important and serious historical events. Storytelling, especially the *tatsuniya* or folktale associated with (older) women, was linked to "mere" entertainment and amusement. Thus, for the intellectual operating within the traditional *ajami* epistemology, the new literature that the Zaria Bureau of Translation was promoting was not concordant with the Hausa cultural realm of demarcation between what belongs to the world of facts worth recording in writing, and imaginative stories based on "falsehood" and not amenable to writing.

Interestingly, all laureates of the 1933–34 competitions were graduates of Katsina Teachers' Training College where East himself taught. The literary competition thus revealed a divergence between the traditional Hausa literati and those who had embraced the western literary influence. The writers from the former framework continued to suscribe to the *ajami* or Arabic writing while developing more and more secular prose, but still within the realm of non-falsehood. Those of the latter paradigm, on the other hand, produced a new literature that incorporated new genres such as the novel and play. The genres and subgenres that constitute modern Hausa literature in Roman script, however, are neither a replica of literary forms found in European literature nor romanized versions of the traditional Islamic Hausa literature. The features of this new literature are, in fact, a manifestation of the convergence of the various literary traditions that influenced its emergence.

Rupert East's prose-fiction competitions of the 1930s produced five novels that set in motion a new tradition in Hausa literature through its striking secular orientation as well its incorporation of themes that were absent in the more traditional written literature. These include crime and punishment, topics that draw on emotion (love, hatred, and revenge), social issues (crimes, prostitution, alcoholism) and their consequences (punishment, cultural alienation, social degeneration, and sorrowful end). The themes, plots and characterization of

these European-instigated Hausa novels are developed within the imaginative world of realism and fantasy with a moral didacticism intimately rooted in Hausa Islamic education.

Jiki Magayi (The Body is the One to Tell) is a novel jointly written by Rupert East and Malam J. Tafida. It is a story of young Abubakar's revenge against a wealthy man, Shehu, who used a charm to seduce his bride Zainabu. The realization of what took place set Abubakar to get even with Shehu through the quest for an equally powerful if not more damaging charm. Abubakar eventually returns home and successfully injects Kyauta, Shehu's only offspring from that marriage, with a satanic potion acquired in the magic forest of Dawan Ruk'uki', which instills in the child severe criminal tendencies, eventually leading to his accidental murder of his biological father, Shehu. With the help of his mother, Kyauta escapes trial and learns from her the foundation of his own decadent behavior. Based on this knowledge, Kyauta decides to avenge himself by decapitating Abubakar. However, Kyauta miraculously escapes the danger of another criminal act, for he finds Abubakar already dead. Kyauta returns home to repent for his previous crime by giving back to the community whatever he had acquired from his days of degeneracy, and returns to an honest lifestyle.

Shaihu Umar is a historical novel written by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1912–66), former Prime Minister of the Federal Government of Nigeria. It presents a story about the destiny of two captives, a child named Umar who is also the main character of the novel and his mother, in the hands of an Arab slave-trader in Egypt. In spite of the harshness of slave conditions, Umar receives good treatment from his Arab master, who ensures that Umar gets adequate Islamic education, eventually becoming a shehu (religious leader). He becomes a learned Muslim scholar and is miraculously reunited with his mother in a foreign land, though she dies shortly after. Shaihu (Shehu) Umar manages to escape being captured by other Arab slave raiders in the Sahara. He returns to his native Hausaland, which he finds in a state of decay resulting from his people's lack of spiritual ideals. Shaihu Umar sets himself the task of educating the "pagans" in his Islamic ways and reinstating Islamic morals in the society.

This historical fiction reveals Tafawa Balewa's strong inclination toward Islamic didacticism and his ability to provide a detailed depiction of life in Hausa society before European colonization. Its moral decay is presented as the key factor that makes it vulnerable to European invasion. Shaihu Umar has a powerful determination to reinscribe Islamic social and moral values, which include submission to God, honesty, diligence, and virtue as a basis for sustaining

a strong culture. Shaihu Umar reminds the reader of Okonkwo's struggle to maintain the valued traditions of Umuofian precolonial society in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. However, Shaihu Umar's peaceful, patient, and merciful nature, which defines his relationship with members of the community, is in sharp contrast with Okonkwo's strong and violent character. Tafawa Balewa's setting of the novel in Kantogora, a Hausa–Fulani town situated in present-day Niger, probably reveals his transnational Hausa consciousness, an understanding of Hausaness that goes beyond the boundaries drawn by European colonialism. This subtlety of setting as an ideological metaphor recurrent in Nigerian writers' work is often overlooked by literary critics.

Gandoki, written by Muhammadu Bello, was selected as the best among the five novels presented in the 1933 competition. It is a fictional autobigraphy of Gandoki, an Islamic mystic warrior shocked by the capitulation of his culture to British colonial authority and values, some of which he eventually begins to appreciate. Thus, Gandoki is a warrior with an orientation that is opposite to Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* whose quest for power and fame prevents him from compromising and adjusting to the reality of his people's adoption of new western ways, eventually leading him to his tragic suicide. The story in *Gandoki* is a follow-up to that of *Shaihu Umar,* for it offers the westernized elites a positive perspective of the impact of British colonization on Hausaland.

Ruwan Bagaji (The Water of the Cure) by Abubakar Imam was another major contribution to the emerging modern Hausa literature. The novel is a satire of greedy and corrupt *malams* in Hausa culture embodied in two main rival characters, Alhaji Imam and Malam Zurke. Drawing on Hausa wit and humor, the novel, structured around a series of episodic stories, depicts how Alhaji Imam tricks an ignorant, non-Islamized Hausa community to dismiss the authority of Malam Zurke, a learned Islamic scholar, and to take advantage of a series of other characters. All this trickery and mischief takes place in the course of a journey in search of the *Ruwan Bagaja* needed to heal the son of the leader of the town. This adventurous journey takes Alhaji Imam from the world of realism to that of spirits, *jinns* of all sorts. Befriending the king of *jinns* in a world of magic and fantasy earns him the secret to the main object of his quest, the curative water that he brings back to the real world.

Idon Matambayi (The Eye of the Questioner), written by Muhammadu Gwarzo in 1934, is another novel that focuses on the theme of crime and punishment pertaining to the handling of the undesirable members of society. The story is about four thieves skillfully competing to outsmart police

vigilance and steal from a well-guarded house by cheating its wealthy owner. However, because of selfishness and greed they all end up losing the fruits of their robbery and eventually go their different ways.

Magana Jari Ce (The Art of Storytelling is an Asset) represents Abubakar Imam's second major contribution to the early writings of modern Hausa literature initiated by Rupert East's literary venture in Hausaland. It is also one of the writings that set the stylistic and literary standard for the evolving trend in modern Hausa literature. *Magana Jari Ce* is a novel that demonstrates Abubakar Imam's genius in inventing an authentic Hausa style built upon the convergence of various cultures. As Albert Gérard observes, "[The stories in *Magana Jari Ce*] draw from a wide variety of sources, African, European, Arabic, and Oriental" (1981a: 66). Inspired by *The Thousand and One Nights'* esthetic and stylistic structure adapted to Hausa idiom, *Magana Jari Ce* presents a series of interwoven stories focused on an intriguing and comic dependency-relationship between a king and his pet parrot. This parrot manages to render himself indispensable to his owner through his cleverness in relaying crucial information and providing advice useful for the preservation of his master's power and authority. As a result, the parrot usurps the human vizier of his privileged position in the palace and becomes the king's main confidant and adviser to his heirs.

The period between the Second World War and the late 1960s produced a few novellas, most of them fewer than forty pages. The majority are published by the Gaskiya Corporation or the Northern Nigerian Publishing Company (NNPC). These include Amadu Ingawa's *Iliya Dan Maikarfi* (Iliya, Son of a Strong Man), a story centered around the theme of the heroism of a sickly and paralyzed child, Waldima, born to parents who suffered years of childlessness and the pain resulting from this condition in a society where reproduction is highly valued. Using the miraculous powers conferred on him by the angels who are convinced of his strong faith, Ilya leads a crusade for justice and saves Waldima, the ruler of a town named Kib, from many troubles, and finally begs God to transform him into a stone. Like *Magana jari Ce, Iliya Dan Maikarfi* is another Hausa novel that may have been heavily inspired by European literary works. As Pilaszewicz observes:

> [*Iliya Dan Maikarfi*] is unusual not only because of its ending, so contrary to the Islamic spirit, but also because it drew certain themes from the Russian epic poem about Elias Muromcik. This was pointed out to me by Yu. K. Sceglov, who identified Waldima with Prince Vladimir and the mysterious town of Kib with Kiev. (1985: 224)

The other works written in the early 1950s are *Gogan Naka* (Your Hero) by Garba Funtunwa, *Shirtacen Gari* (The Enchanted Town) by Amadu Katsina, *Da'u Fataken Dare* (Da'u, the Night Raider) by Tanko Zango, the longest novel ever in the Hausa language, and *Bayan Wuya Sai Dadi* (After Pain Comes Pleasure) by Abdulmalik Mani, all produced in 1954.

The late fifties and post-independence period saw the rise of a new kind of novella writing influenced by the convergence of Islamic religious beliefs, western science fiction and Indian cinema. *Tauraruwa Hamada* (1965) (The Sahara Star) by Sa'idu Ahmed relays the story of the kidnapping of a princess by a thief, Danye, and his accomplice named Dabo. The two thieves are gifted with magical powers embodied in a talking snake that enables them to avoid their entrapments. *Tauraru Mai Wutsiya* (1969) (The Comet) by Umaru Dembo tells of the extraterrestrial journey of a boy named Kilba who is befriended by a creature from outer space, Kolin Koliyo. *Dare Daya* (One Night) is a novella written in 1973 which draws on the rift within a royal family.

Jabiru Abdullahi wrote *Gari Na Kowa* (1968) (Good to Everyone), which recounts the plight of an orphan, Salihi, who was wrongly accused of and imprisoned for the loss of his patron's money. However, because of his devotion to God, his kindness, and honesty, Salihi, like Tafawa Balewa's Shaihu Umar, rises to become a leader whose miraculous powers and integrity assist him in restoring stability and justice to the people who have been taken advantage of.

Common to virtually all these Hausa novellas is the interplay between the "real" and the fantastic, the human and the divine. There is a recurrence of the quest theme as well as that of the struggle between good and evil in relation to the moral concept of crime and punishment. Moreover, they are structurally framed in episodic journeys of a hero or trickster whose deeds lead naturally to a reward or retribution and punishment.

In addition to the novellas, Pilaszewicz reports the existence of a few essays that could be classified as travel diaries written in Hausa (and some in English) by some of the first western-trained northern intellectuals who played a significant role in the struggle for Nigerian independence from British rule. Most of these essays present a comparative and contrasting analysis between the Islamic background of the authors and the culture of their European colonizers. For example, on Aminu Kano's *Motsi Ya Fi Zama* (Moving is Better than Sitting), which provides an account of his European tour, Pilaszewicz comments that

> Aminu Kano was struck by the individualism, bordering on egoism, of the people of the big European societies. Straightforwardness, openness and a

> desire to get to know other societies are the Hausa characteristics as presented by Aminu Kano, and these traits make it easier for him to establish contact with foreign civilizations. (Pilaszewicz 1985: 226)

On the other hand Malam Haruna, a Hausa of Christian background, provided in his *Yawo a Turai* (A Journey to Europe) important information regarding the political atmosphere of northern Nigeria during the pre-independence period.

Here again, it is important to draw attention to the dearth of Hausa women's contribution to the emerging modern Hausa literature in the Roman script, from the arrival of the Europeans in Hausaland to the late 1960s. This is in sharp contrast with what Hausa–Fulani Muslim women intellectuals had achieved in the Hausa *ajami* writing during the precolonial era. Part of the explanation lies in colonial British attitudes: while the British might not have opposed women's education, neither did they actively promote their recruitment into colonial schools. To this extent, they acquiesced with the sentiments of northern leaders who, though opposed to the spreading of the European form of schooling in the north in general, were more especially fearful of women's assimilation to European values.

Hausa literature during Nigeria's post-independent era

The late 1970s and 1980s, which mark Nigeria's era of economic abundance brought about by the oil boom, inspired the production of the type of prose fiction that Furniss (1996) identifies as the "Boomtown Novels." A 1979 competition organized by the Northern Nigeria Publishing Company resulted in the publication of three novels in 1980: Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina's novel *Mallakin Zuciya* (Power over my Heart), which won the first prize, is a didactic love story about the struggle of young western-educated people against arranged marriages and the confrontation between a supporting father of the girl and her opposing conservative mother. The second prize won by Hafsatu Abdulwahid's novel *So Aljannar Duniya* (Love is Heaven on Earth) marks the emergence of female writers of modern Hausa prose fiction. It is the story of love between a young Fulani couple shaken by the intervention of a female *jinn*. The novel is framed within magical realism. The third novel, Magaji Dambatta's *Amadi Na Malam Amah* (Malam Amah's Amadi), also constructed within magical realism, depicts a hero's successful struggles against evil spirits.

These three prize-winning novels from a competition of twenty-two registered stories show a departure from the early novels in that they draw on

fantasy and realism to present themes involving the trials and tribulations of individuals whose lives are interwoven in the complexities and contradictions of modern life. The quest theme is extended to the question of love in monogamous and polygamous marriages and to women's struggles for freedom from the confines of both traditional and modern values. And it is no longer the corruption of traditional *malams* that is in focus, but that of the new comprador bourgeoisie born out of the oil boom and their exploitation of commoners. The stories also have a didactic ending centered on contemporary sociopolitical and religious issues (Furniss 1996: 38).

Kitsen Rogo (literally "The Fatness of Cassava," but better translated as "Illusion") by Abdulkadir Dangambo, published two years before the aforementioned three novels by the NNPC, is a didactic story about the negative consequences of rural–urban migration. The story focuses on the life of its main character, Ibrahim, who left his village in search of fortune in the city, only to be caught up in the life of banditry and thievery, which sends him to prison. Upon release, however, he is rehabilitated with the help of his father by returning to their rural roots.

Another prose-fiction competition organized in 1980 by the Nigerian Federal Department of Culture in collaboration with the Gaskiya Corporation produced four new novels that appeared in 1982. The overt political tone in these novels is in sharp contrast to all the previously published novels. These include *Turmin Danya* (The Strong Man) by Sulaiman I. Katsina, *Tsumangiyar Kan Hanya* (The Driving Whip) by Musa Mohammed Bello, *Karshen Alewa Kasa* (The Discarded Left-Over) by Bature Gagare, and *Zabi Naka* (Choose Yours) by Munir Muhammed Katsina. The last two novels more clearly portray life in the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war where the proliferation of weapons in the society and their control by demobilized, but non-rehabilitated ex-soldiers leads to all sorts of banditry (from drug trafficking to armed robbery). This creates a new reign of terror that is counteracted, finally, by the restoration of a strong leadership and new social order. In *Karshen Alewa Kasa*, peace and order are restored in the society as the result of the death of the main characters, who represent the villains, one the victim of a snake bite, and the other of a fatal bullet shot.

Turmin Danya is a more politically committed novel than *Mallakin Zuciya* to which it is thematically similar. It graphically treats the theme of corruption, but in a more complex way and exposes all the sociopolitical ills that erupted in Nigeria as a result of the oil boom from the late 1970s to mid-1980s. It exposes the conspiracy between the administrative leaders of government and the new incompetent entrepreneurial class of corrupt *Alhajis*, who appropriate all

federal construction contracts, but fail to deliver or end up with cheap and substandard constructions.

Tura Ta Kai Bango, Sulaiman I. Katsina's third novel, published in 1983, is perhaps the most radical of all the modern Hausa novels for its critical depiction of how the corrupt machinery of party politics takes advantage of the impoverished and manipulable marginalized masses in northern Nigeria. It also effectively exposes the repression of oppositional voices by conservative forces in power. The novel ends with a note of optimism by showing that with perseverance, and mass cooperation, progressive politics can mobilize the grassroots to overthrow corrupt dictatorial regimes. The portrayal of women characters as active agents in this process is another positive departure from most Hausa novels, which often offer a stereotypical characterization of modern Muslim women as passive agents in society.

For most of the novels produced during the oil-boom era, the modern setting symbolized by products of western material culture – the structure of the houses, cars, and modern roads, etc. – reflects the impact of European culture on Hausa society. The interaction of Hausa–Fulani Muslim characters with non-Muslim Hausa characters in these novels, as in Bello's *Karshen Alewa Kasa*, seems to indicate how Hausaness is being reinterpreted within a larger heterogeneous postcolonial political entity called Nigeria, which is different from the identity constructed and depicted in the *jihad* literature.

The overwhelming emergence of love stories in the Hausa language is another trend in the development of imaginative prose fiction in modern Hausa popular culture resulting from the growth of literacy and formal education in northern Nigeria in the 1980s. This genre represents an important outlet for a number of young Muslim Hausa–Fulani-women writers whose works, in theme and language, often deal with the interplay between womanhood, culture, religion, and national identity.[2]

"Stepping outside gender" in Muslim Hausa–Fulani culture

The attraction of contemporary western-educated Hausa–Fulani women to the writing of love novellas and their predominance as authors in the production of such a genre merits special attention. This phenomenon is due, in part, to the interconnectedness of gendered space, language, religion, and literacy / literature. The mainstream patriarchal Islamic sociopolitical praxis in most Islamic cultures, among which are the Hausa–Fulani, produces a set of dichotomies along gender lines which accounts, to a large extent, for the variant

forms of literature produced by male and female literati. For example, masculinity is linked to public space, to access to classical religious training, and to authorized public voices for representing and interpreting cultural identity. This contrasts with the expected mute feminine voices confined in domesticity and the denial of the authority to define themselves and beyond. While men accede to religion through the written word, women accede to religion through a patriarchal interpretation that is mediated in most cases through orality. And it is through this process that males and females develop different literacies. Consequently, for most women, the language of literary expression becomes the oral and its form is nonclassical, except for a minority of women from the privileged class who have access to classical literacy. The works of women writers from the latter category are often formulated within a discursive framework that reflects their entrapment within patriarchy. Moreover, since they write in classical modes and in conformity with cultural expectations, their works are given greater prominence, as opposed to the novellas written in colloquial language, a register that subversively challenges the status quo.

Hausa–Fulani women's access to the western form of education has altered the cultural understanding of the relationship between gender, space, and expressive voice. By writing about their lives, making public women's struggles in the private space of domesticity, these women writers in Hausa language have broken the cultural taboo. This female act of challenging the status quo by making public the private, that is, domesticity, offers a feminine perspective on the issue of Hausa–Fulani-Islamic identity and suggests also an "act of stepping outside" the cultural construct of gender, gendered space, and voice.

The art of love-story writing by contemporary Hausa–Fulani women in the Hausa language fulfills the same purpose as that of the writing of autobiographies by contemporary Muslim-Arab women writers (see Faqir 1999). Thus, by painting their lives through biographies or through fiction, Muslim women are crossculturally interrogating patriarchal Islam, the broader sociopolitical realities, at the same time as they provide a response to the voices of outsiders speaking for or about them.

Considering the above, then, the lack of serious study of Hausa–Fulani women's love novellas by both native and western scholars implies a lack of appreciation of the revolutionary potential embodied in these works. In using a form and language usually regarded as unworthy of serious study, these Hausa–Fulani women writers are, in fact, calling for a social transformation of gender relations and a re-examination of both implicit and explicit power relations at different levels of the social hierarchy.

To continue classifying such writings in the realm of popular culture therefore – as is often done by literary critics – is at once to undermine Muslim women's contribution to, and to reinforce the marginalization of, the female voice in literature. The attraction of literary critics to Hausa literature produced in classical form suggests a class bias whose consequence is a dismissal of the largest proportion of the literature in colloquial Hausa that falls predominantly within the domain of women's writing and orality. The categories employed in literary criticism – of what is "popular" and "excellent" and what is not, for example – are themselves products of cultural construction that betray a patriarchal framing. This is an ideological context that continues to both undermine and marginalize women's contribution in literature virtually throughout the world (see Showalter 1985).

Playwriting in Hausa

Although dramatic performances were part of Hausa traditional culture, the writing of drama into play scripts was a product of European influence. Just as they reacted to the introduction of the novel, the Hausa *ajami* literati resisted this new genre as well. Its reliance on humor, and its playfulness, and the dramatic representation of a false reality were regarded as incompatible with the theme of religious morality and seriousness promoted by *ajami* Islamic writing.

The first Hausa play, *Wasannin Kwaikwayo Shida* (Six Hausa Plays) published in Lagos, was written by Rupert East in 1930. By the late 1930s, the politically militant Aminu Kano produced several plays that were never published because of their radical tone. *Kai Wane a Kasuwa Kano Da Ba Za a Cuce Ka Ba* (Whoever You Might Be, You Will Be Cheated at Kano Market), *Karya Fure Ta Ke Ba Ta'Ya'Ya* (A Lie Blossoms but Yields No Fruit), and *Gundumar Dukan Y'en Kano* (A Hammer with Which to Beat the Kano Native Administration) are among his best-known plays performed on stage. The three plays treat the theme of exploitation of the masses by either the crooked merchants (as seen in the first play) or colonial administrators who collected heavy taxes from the impoverished masses with the help of the local authority (as shown in the second play). The third play focuses on the relationship between an abusive native authority backed by a colonial power and the reaction of an exploited local population.

From 1954 to 1979, there were thirteen more play scripts published mainly in Zaria by the North Regional Literature Agency (NORLA) and the Northern Nigeria Publishing Company. These publications include *Wasan Marafa* (1954)

(Marafa's Play) by Abubakar Tunau; *Malam Inkuntum* (1954) (Mr. Inkuntum) by Dogondaji; and Shaibu Makarfi's two famous plays, *Zamanin nan Namu* (1959) (These Times of Ours) and *Jatau Na Kyallu* (1960) (Kyallu's Jatau), which deal with the theme of conflict between tradition and modernity arising from the impact of European education and how this conflict affects other important aspects of Hausa life (marriage and divorce, alcoholism, prostitution, materialism). These plays set the foundation for modern drama in the Hausa language.

The decade 1970 to 1980 seems to have been the most prolific for the publication of play scripts with the production of ten plays by NNPC alone. Among these one can cite Umar Dembo's famous play *Wasannin Yara* (1971) (Children's Games); *Uwar Gulma* (1971) (Mother of Mischievous Tale-Telling) by A. Moh Sada Malam; *Malam Muhamman*, by Bello Muhamed (1974), and *Zaman Duniya* (1980) (The Way of Life) by Yusuf Ladan. Of note also is Umaru Ladan and Dexter Lyndersy's *Shaihu Umar* (1975), which is a dramatic adaptation of Tafawa Balewa's novel by the same title.

In addition to original works in Hausa, there were also attempts to produce translations and adaptations of foreign plays. Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* as *Daren Sha Biyu* (1971) is one such example. Ten years later, another work by Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, was produced by Dahiru Idris under the title *Matsolon Attajiri* (1981). Translated works that figure among the thirteen plays produced in the decade of the 1970s include *Mutanen Kogo* (1976) translated by Ahmed Sabir, which is a dramatized Hausa rendering of the famous Arabic *Tawfiq al-Hakim* (The People of the Cave).

Although the traditional Hausa clerics opposed the promotion of imaginative prose writing of any sort in the Hausa language, modern teachers in Islamic schools have begun to produce plays in *ajami* pamphlet forms intended for religious celebrations such as *Maulidi*. These pamphlets are mainly handwritten and circulate in mosques and the market place and, like radio and TV drama, remain unpublished (see Yahaya 1978: 253; Gérard 1981a; Pilaszewicz 1985; and Furniss 1996).

Developments in poetry

Modern Hausa poetry is characteristically distinguishable from its classical counterpart by its strong inclination to secular thematic content. Abdulahia Dan Fodio's war poetry dedicated to his warriors in celebration of victory against the growing tyranny of the *jihad* leadership marks the beginning of the secularization of Hausa *ajami* poetry.

British invasion of Hausaland also had a major impact on *ajami* poetry produced during the early twentieth century. Two poets provide some insight into the state of Hausa society in the wake of European colonization. The first is Malam Shi'itu, known as the founder of the *Tijaniyya* brotherhood of Zaria whose poetry gained fame in the 1930s. The other is Imam Umaru Salaga (1858–1934), the great Hausa poet whose poetry offers an excellent picture of various aspects of Hausa culture while also including religious, political, and moral themes. In *Zuwan Nasara* (The Coming of the Christians), for example, a poem of 197 verses, Imam Umaru Salaga presents his ambivalence about British colonization in Hausaland as shown in the following excerpt:

Anna Attahiru, jikan Atik'u
Wliyyu-l-Lahi? Sun tasai Nasara.
Dad'a kuma ya shiri, ya bar k'asarsa:
Shina tafiya, shina tsoron Nasara.
K'asar kuma tai ciri – birnin da k'auye,
Ana ci: Ba mu son malakan Nasara
Dad'a Sarkin Musulmi ya yin tawaga:
Abin ga da firgita – ku, an – Nasara!
Suna bi shi awa ya d'auki bashi
Fa ko ya zagi sarkin an-Nasara

Where is Attahiru, grandson of Atik'u
And the Saint of God? They drove him away, the Christians
So he made preparations to leave his country:
He was travelling fearful of the Christians.
And the country became deserted – town and village,
They were saying: "we do not want the Christians' rule"
Then the Head of the Muslims removed his folk and property:
All this is terrible – oh you, Christians!

Fa babu sina bugin shrai'an Nasara.
Ka bar komi – da kurd'I, ko sarauta.
Da malantarka babu ruwan Nasara.
Fa halin Ingilishi shina da tafshi:
Suna tausai mutum – manyan Nasara.
Fa ni dai ko Allah zamininsu,
Zama dai sun rik'e ni da kew, Nasara!
Fa domina zamansu tutur shi dure,
Zama na mori mulkin Nasara.

It is not wise to fight the Christians' law.
Leave everything – the money and the chieftancy.
As for your learning, it is no concern of Christians.

> The character of the English people is soft:
> They have mercy on people, the big Christians.
> As for me, I thank God for their times because
> They have treated me kindly, the Christians.
> For me their rule may last for ever
> Because I feel enjoyment under the rule of the Christians.
> (in Furniss 1996: 206–07)

Aliyu Na Mangi (born 1895) is one of the poets who reinvented Hausa *ajami* poetry by combining religious writing with a more secular style of social commentary and satire. He is best known for his famous poem *Wak'ar Imfiraji*, a poetic composition of 1,000 verses built on both patterns inherent in Hausa classical poetic didacticism and popular song structure. *Wak'ar Keke* (The Song of the Bicycle) was written in *ajami* under Aliyu Na Mangi's dictation. It is a satire of *malams* who embrace modernity without knowing its ways. More importantly, Aliyu Na Mangi posed new questions about the boundaries between *wak'ar baka* (song) and *rubuciyar wak'a* (written song or poem). Hitherto, oral verse was categorized as song while written verse was classified as poetry. Himself a blind person, Aliyu Na Mangi could only compose orally, and what appeared in writing was only a transcription of his oral transmissions. But his poetic brilliance defied this modal classification of song and poetry.

In addition, the romanization of Hausa script influenced the emergence of Hausa modern poetry in Roman script, existing side by side with its *ajami* modern counterpart. The Second World War inspired the thematic production of new poetry in Hausaland that continued to be structurally informed by Hausa-Islamic poetic versification. As Pilaszewicz (1985) observes, the emergent Hausa poets of the Second World War period combine members of the traditional *ajami* literati, the westernized elite, as well as members of other social categories who subscribed as readers and writers to the only newspaper of the time, *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*.

Unlike the Hausa novel or the plays of the 1930s, which stayed away from any political radicalism (except those written by Aminu Kano which were never published), Hausa modern poetry in *ajami* or *boko* was very political and more reflective of the political dynamism of the historical events shaping the new identity of Hausaland as European colonialism drew it into the politics of Nigerian nationhood. For example, *Wak'ar Maraba da Soja* (Song of Welcome to the Soldiers) is a praise poem written by the militant Sa'adu Zungur (1915–58) in celebration of the return of African soldiers who fought during the Second World War.

The struggle for independence inspired a different kind of concern. Sa'adu Zungur, for example, composed *Arewa Jumhuriya ko Mulkiya* (Is the North to be a Republic or a Constitutional Oligarchy?), a poem that overtly debates the place of the north in Nigerian nationhood. In *Mulukiya*, he calls for the retention of the northern oligarchy in order for the north to preserve its Islamic identity. A reply to Sa'adu's political position was offered by Mudi Sipikin, a supporter of the Republic, in his poem *Arewa Jumhuriya Kawai* (The North, a Republic Pure and Simple).

In the postcolonial period, Hausa poetry has continued to express the dynamics and counter-dynamics of contemporary issues – from corruption to spousal abuse, from personal love to military coups. The conflicts between the urban and rural, and the foreign (usually western) and the indigenous have been particularly prevalent. There has also been a poetry of sensitization about agriculture, public health, and formal education. Here again, women have been keen contributors to this new poetic trend.

Conclusion

In conclusion: this chapter does not claim to be a comprehensive study of Hausa literary traditions. However, it offers a critical appraisal of the crucial aspects of the historical development of Hausa written literature. We began with a discussion on the complexity of Hausaness as an identity construct that refers to people that are ethnically Hausa as well as other ethnic groups such as the Fulani who have been culturally and linguistically assimilated to Hausaness. Secondly, we showed through an analysis of the historical development of the Hausa literary tradition, that what is currently identified as Hausa written literature evolved as a derivative of Hausa-Arabic literature with a religious thrust. Furthermore, with the advent of European colonization in Hausaland, Hausa-Islamic literature began to show a split into various trajectories that reflect the language and cultural policies adopted by the given colonial administrations as well as a gradual shift into secularist formulation. Within both the religious and secular frameworks, Hausa-Islamic women have made and continue to make a contribution in spite of the marginalization of their works by literary critics. Because most of the mainstream scholarship on Hausa literature largely focuses on northern Nigeria's experience, there is a big gap that needs to be filled with regard to the Hausa literary traditions in other parts of Hausaland within the African continent as well as in the diaspora, in the Middle East and the western hemisphere,

where the Hausa-speaking people migrated and forged new subcultural identities.

Notes

1. Alamin Mazrui, personal communication.
2. In an attempt to address the exclusion of the contribution of Muslim northern Nigerian women in the study of African literature and popular culture, Margaret Hauwa Kassam presents a bibliography of the works of nineteen contemporary female writers in northern Nigeria, among which fifteen are in Hausa (Newell 1997: 125). These include the works in three volumes of Wada Talatu Ahmed's *Rabin Raina I* (1986, 1987, 1988) (Half of My Life, or My Half Life); Gwaram Hauwa and Hajiya 'Yar Shehu's *Alkalami a Hannun Mata* (1983) (A Pen in Women's Hands); Hadiza Sidi Aliyu's *Salatar Tsiya* (1994); Ramat Balaraba Yakubu's *Budurwar Zuciya* (1989), and more recently Isa Zuwaira's *Labarin So* (1995) (The Story of Love).

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19

Literature in Yorùbá: poetry and prose; traveling theater and modern drama*

KARIN BARBER

Yorùbá verbal art is one of Africa's most remarkable fields of creativity, both in its variety and its extent. Oral traditions, some of them of great antiquity, continue to flourish and evolve; written literature constitutes one of the largest, longest-established, and liveliest traditions in Africa; there are also numerous new popular genres on the interface between written and oral modes. Supported by a public of about 30 million Yoruba-speakers, mostly in southwestern Nigeria, Yoruba literature plays a central role in many dimensions of ordinary life, ranging from lessons in school to life cycle ceremonies such as naming, marriage, and burial; from contact with ancestors to commentary on the contemporary national situation. Yoruba literary culture is also one of the few in Africa to be supported by an extensive, long-standing, and sophisticated local critical scholarship in the same language as the literature itself.

Oral genres

Oral genres constitute a vast field of expression with much intertextuality and cross-genre borrowing. Terminology for genres varies. Some genres are widely recognized, their key features agreed upon. But there is also much local specificity and much contextual variation in the use of terms even within a single locality. Some of the principal categories widely used in Yorubaland (though with variations) are the following:

(i) *Oríkì* ("praise poetry"), the appellations or attributive epithets saluting the intrinsic qualities of individual human beings, kin groups, towns, *òrìṣà* ("gods"), animals, material objects, and immaterial forces. They are vocative in address and name-like in form; disjunctive; and often condensed and allusive in reference. A performance of *oriki* is a fluid assemblage of textual units held together by their common application to a subject, with whose social and moral being

*Except in quoted texts, Yorùbá words will be tone-marked on first use only.

they are held to have a deep connection. The most treasured *oriki* are *oríkì orílẹ̀*, the "*oriki* of origin," which link individuals to an extended kin group through common origin in a named town or region. These *oriki* often contain long, coherent, patterned passages, making much use of structural parallelism and tonal play. Distinctive features of the place and community of origin are singled out and turned into emblems of identity. Thus people claiming common origin in ancient Ìrè-Èkìtì, reputedly the home of Ògún the god of war and iron, are saluted for their skills as blacksmiths: "Without Ire people, we would not be able to hoe the farm; without Ire people, we would not be able to clear the path." Common origin in Ìjẹ̀ṣà is celebrated in terms of the land's natural produce: "I am an Ijẹṣa, of the land of kola." The people called Òpómúléró, originating in Ìwàtá, have *oriki orilẹ* that refer to a funeral ceremony distinctive of this kin group: "The post wears a wrapper, the post ties a baby-sash" – a ceremony that in turn commemorates a historical incident when an ancestor of the kin-group was commissioned by the Aláàfin to carve two hundred house-posts in the image of his dead mother. These emblematic appellations can be greatly elaborated, though their meaning is not always self-evident from the text alone. They form the bedrock of social identity and can arouse profound emotions of pride and gratification when performed.

Individuals also acquire personal *oriki* in the course of their lives, in recognition of their actions and personalities as these take shape. Some may be drawn from a common stock – for example, any dark-complexioned person could be saluted with the attribution "The forest's darkness brings it honour, The hill's roundness gives it joy" – while others are highly idiosyncratic, and may commemorate obscure and even shameful or embarrassing incidents in the person's life, like the epithet "One who marries his wife with a ladder," commemorating a certain reckless lover's nocturnal abduction of another man's bride. *Oriki* remark on what is distinctive in a person rather than simply flattering him or her. Men tend to acquire more *oriki* than women, and prominent people in the community acquire more than obscure ones. Profusion and variety are of great importance in a performance, for the more prolonged and intense the salutation, the more the aura of the subject is enhanced.

One of the most important bodies of *oriki* in the past was the praises of the deities, for it was through *oriki*-salutations that devotees established the typically intense dyadic communication with their own *oriṣa*. The reciprocity and mutual identification of devotee and deity was often enacted through the merging of *oriki*, so that the *oriṣa* could be saluted through the *oriki* of a prominent devotee while the devotee's collection of *oriki* could absorb some

lines from his or her deity's praises. *Orișa* with exceptionally impressive bodies of *oriki* include Ṣàngó, Ògún, and Ṣọ̀pọ̀nnọ́n, where the poetry attains a remarkable intensity and grandeur.

Oriki are recognizable from the high degree of nominalization (e.g., Òbùmubùmuṣàgbálóńgbólóńgbó, "One-who-dips-and-drinks-dips-and-drinks-making-the-liquor-barrel-slosh"); the frequent use of phrases such as "Child of . . ." "Father of . . ." "Native of . . ."; and the frequent incidence of cryptic, condensed, and deliberately obscure phrases, such that a single word may turn out to be a repository of extensive fields of meaning. For example, the epithet *Àbú*, found in the *oriki* of ancient Ifẹ̀, is said to encapsulate the entire narrative of the episode in the reign of Ọ̀rànmíyàn in which this Ọba went on a journey leaving the kingdom in the care of a slave (*àbú* = "one who is abused," i.e., because of his servile status), who in due course founded the next dynasty in Ifẹ. In many cases, even the kin group that "owns" the *oriki* may entertain divergent interpretations of certain phrases or may have no explanation for them, beyond the statement that "It's *oriki*."

(ii) *Ẹsẹ Ifá* (Ifá divination verses) are the vast corpus of sacred verses associated with Ifá, the most prestigious form of divination in Yoruba culture. The divination system operates through 256 *odù* or "signatures," to each of which is attached an indefinitely large corpus of verses, learnt over many years of rigorous training before an apprentice diviner is deemed competent to practice professionally. The verses are all modeled on a single format, involving a narrative of a previous divination carried out by a legendary or primordial diviner. In a consultation session, the diviner operates the divining instruments (either sixteen palm-nuts or a divining chain strung with eight identical two-sided symbols) in order to produce an *odu*. He then selects a verse from this *odu* and expounds it to the client, often chanting all or part of it in the process. The verse thus functions as a precedent for the present situation and a model for action that will shape the future. Most verses include an account of a sacrifice made (or foolishly not made) by the protagonist in the narrative; the diviner adapts this to prescribe a sacrifice for the current client. The parts into which each verse can be divided have been variously analyzed but almost always follow the same order. The opening sections, which state the name of the legendary diviner(s) and the client, and the reason for the consultation, are memorized by a meticulous system of rote-learning and held to be incapable of change. They are often gnomic and evocative phrases of great poetic beauty, for example: "When fire dies, it covers itself with ashes; When the moon dies, it leaves the stars behind; Few are the stars who shine with the moon" (Abimbola

1977: 72–73). In some cases, this textual slot conventionally understood as the "names" of the diviners may balloon out and encompass elaborate proverbial sequences many lines long. Thus one verse opens:

> "Excess of wisdom turns a person mad
> Medicine, if it is over-abundant
> Turns a person insane
> If a woman is excessively clever
> Her husband's clothes will always remain skimpy"
> Did divination for the rich man of Ifẹ
> On the day that he was bewailing his lack of children.

Here the first five lines stand for the names of legendary or primordial diviners, but also constitute a poetic proverbial statement that is the main content of the verse.

The central narrative portions of each verse, telling the story of what happened to the client after the divination had been performed and the sacrifice prescribed, tend to be more fluid and may be greatly elaborated. The verse usually closes with a summary statement and a recapitulation of the opening lines. Although these distinctive formal features make the genre easily recognizable, they do not limit its scope. Historically, it would seem that the corpus was built up through the absorption of numerous already existing narrative and poetic materials, which were captured into the Ifa format without being fully reduced to it. The Ifa corpus thus plays host to a great diversity of genres. The verse structure can be enormously extended to encompass a sequence of linked mythological narratives, in verses known as "Ifá ńlá" or "great Ifa"; it can be truncated to display a single, condensed idea; it can accommodate "quotations" of proverbs, *oriki*, and historical narrative. Because of its sacred status and its all-encompassing inclusiveness, the Ifa corpus of verses is widely considered to be the authoritative repository of all Yoruba wisdom, and is highly regarded by most Yoruba people whatever their religious affiliation.

(iii) *Àlọ́* are subdivided into *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* (*àlọ́* that are told to be known, i.e., riddles) and *àlọ́ àpagbè* (*àlọ́* that are told to be supported with a chorus, i.e., folktales defined by the fact that they contain integral songs with choruses). Folktales and riddles, traditionally recounted on moonlit nights in the compounds of large extended-family groups, are no longer widely performed in this manner. However, they are still transmitted through school readers and radio programs, and through incorporation into other genres such as the Yorùbá novel and popular drama (see below). Among the best-known and most popular types of folktale were those that dealt with Ìjàpá, the tortoise trickster famous for

his greed, deceitfulness, and wit. Styles and names of narrative types varied according to locality. One popular narrative form was *àrọ̀*, a chain-type story in which one thing inexorably leads to another so that huge consequences follow from a small initial trigger; *arọ* were often formulated as a chant or recitation and performed by children as a feat of memory.

(iv) *Ìtàn*: narratives held to be true, which include myths of gods and heroes, as well as historical narratives pertaining to towns, lineages, and individuals. Part of every town's identity is its *itan* of origin, the story of how it came to be founded – often by a named hero, a hunter or prince who left his home and traveled into an uninhabited territory before receiving a supernatural sign that he should settle there. The history of every town is subsumed into the history of its *ọba* (kings) and the events in their reigns. Each *ilé* (compound / lineage) in a town likewise has its own *itan* recounting the reasons its founding ancestor left his town of origin and journeyed to settle down in a new place, and recalling the deeds of the most prominent of the lineage's "big men" of the past. Numerous *itan* revolve around the activities of prominent figures in the nineteenth-century wars, and indeed much of Samuel Johnson's great work, *The History of the Yorubas*, is based upon oral narratives of this kind. *Itan* may be elicited in disputes, for instance over inheritance, land boundaries, or claims to chieftaincy titles, and in the colonial period enormous numbers of lineage and town *itan* were collected by the courts in the course of litigation following the colonial authorities' attempts to fix political relations within and between towns; these provide a source that has been noted by historians but has yet to be fully investigated by textual scholars. *Itan* exist in a symbiotic relationship with *oriki*: *itan* are told to explain obscure lines of *oriki*, while *oriki* in turn provide the mnemonic pegs onto which extended narratives are hung.

(v) *Òwe*: proverbs or sayings, ranging from brief memorable expressions, often involving punning or tonal play, such as "Iṣẹ́ loògùn ìṣẹ́" (Work is the medicine for poverty), to sayings that expand into extensive parables. *Owe* are regarded as the jewels of the language; command of them is indispensable to eloquence, and knowledge of them is widely disseminated. Often, an artful speaker will quote only the first half of a proverb, or drop the merest allusion to it; since "ààbọ ọ̀rọ̀ làá sọ fọ́mọlúwàbí" (half a word is enough for the wise), the listener can be relied on to complete the meaning and apply it appropriately. Many *owe* are associated with explanatory narratives that locate the proverb's origin in a concrete historical incident: for example, S. O. Bada in his *Òwe Yorùbá àti ìṣẹ̀dálẹ̀ wọn* (1979, Yoruba Proverbs and their Origins) explains even apparently quite general proverbs like "Ènìyàn-án ṣòro" (People are difficult) by relating

them to a detailed narrative, in this case the story of a man who settled in a village called Ayé-lála near Ìsẹ́yìn and prospered there until the day that the townspeople needed a stranger as human sacrifice, when they seized him and buried him alive. His last words were "Ènìyàn-án ṣòro, ayé mà lála o!" (People are difficult, the world is tough), and thus the saying allegedly originated. Although *owe* gain their authority from the fact that they are distillations of past experience, tested by repeated reapplication over time, they still belong to a growing tradition and new *owe* can be seen coming into being. The saying "Ó le kú – ìjà Ọ̀rẹ̀ (It's terribly hard – like the battle of Ọ̀rẹ̀) refers to an episode in the Nigerian civil war of 1967–70, but by now is well on its way to being accepted as an established proverb. In changing economic and political circumstances, old sayings may be inverted and new variants may be generated precisely to convey a sense of how things have changed. In "Olówó ń sọ̀rọ̀: tálíkà lóun ní *idea*" (The rich man speaks; the poor man says he has an *idea*), the use of the English loan word serves to underscore the hollowness of the dreams of the poor.

Narratives – encompassing historical *itan*, *alọ apagbe*, extended *owe*, and *arọ* – may all in certain circumstances be referred to generically as "itan," i.e., as narrated sequences of action. And other modalities, crosscutting the named categories, can be identified. Deirdre LaPin, in a 1977 study that traverses a range of Yoruba local culture-areas including Èkìtì, Ìbàdàn, Ẹ̀gbá, Oǹdó, Ọ̀yọ́, Ìjẹ̀ṣà, and Ìgbómìnà, has proposed six "modes" of narrative, defined according to form, theme, and use, crosscutting the common genre-categories: charters (narratives of past events held to be true and used as a basis for claims in real life); romances (extended narratives of human heroism and quest, in imaginary but plausible circumstances); parables (abstract and hypothetical stories demonstrating a truth, often through parallel sequences of events); formulaic tales (fantasy sequences of highly schematic and regular exchanges, leading from small beginnings to great outcomes); fables (humorous and dramatic exemplification of a general truth); and song-stories (postulating an extreme imaginary scenario in which the consequences of the worst imaginable human behavior are acted out). This proposal has the advantage of focusing attention on certain kinds of narrative that could easily be missed because they lack distinguishing names in local typologies – such as the romance type, which could well have fed into the work of the great pioneer of Yorùbá written fiction, D. O. Fágúnwà.

(vi) *Ọfọ̀* or *ògèdè*: incantations. An extremely powerful poetic genre, regarded as intensely efficacious and downright dangerous, used by knowledgeable people

(especially medicine-men) to realign the balance of spiritual forces. *Ọfọ* work through a system of verbal correspondences. For example, "Ohun tí a wí fọ́gbọ́ lọgbọ́ gbọ́/Ohun tí a wí fọ́gbà lọgbàá gbà" (What we say to the *ọgbọ́* leaf the *ọgbọ́* leaf hears/What we say to the garden enclosure, the garden enclosure accepts) works through similarity of sound: the second syllable of the name of a type of leaf, *ọgbọ́*, is identical to the sound of the verb "to hear," *gbọ́*. This correspondence is felt to activate an inner relationship of necessity, and by analogy to bring about a necessary consequence – in this case, the addressee's hearing and obeying the speaker's commands. There are a number of related types of incantations, including a type associated with Ifa verses, called *àyájọ́*, and a type used only for bringing about blessings and good fortune, called *àwúre*.

(vii) *Orin*: songs, most often processional and recreational, associated with major festivals and life cycle ceremonies. Although generally the least prestigious and least studied of Yoruba oral genres, these are probably also the most ubiquitous. Every funeral features great parties of lineage co-wives, dressed in the same patterned cloth (aṣọ ẹbí or "Aǹkóò," from the English "and Co." – company), singing well-known processional songs, often in competition with *oriki* of lamentation performed by the bereaved or by professional praise singers. Every *oriṣa* has songs that are performed at its shrine by devotees on its sacred day in the four-day week. People sing as they work; mothers sing lullabies to their babies; young girls have whole repertoires of pre-wedding songs, many of them salacious; while the devotees of the *egúngún* masquerade cult may go from house to house, singing defamatory songs about those householders who fail to acknowledge them with gifts of money.

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These textual types – *oriki*, *ẹsẹ Ifa*, *alọ apamọ*, *alọ apagbe*, *owe*, *itan*, *arọ*, *ọfọ* and *orin* – can be differentiated on formal grounds. But one genre may constitute the material out of which another is composed. Thus proverbs are very frequently incorporated both into *oriki* and into Ifa verses, while Ifa verses may be incorporated into *oriki* and vice versa, and numerous *alọ apagbe* are to be found in Ifa verses, minus their characteristic songs. In addition, and crosscutting these distinctions, numerous named performance modes can be identified that mobilize genres such as *oriki* and *ẹsẹ Ifa* for specific purposes. *Ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ Ifá*, for example, are a specialized mode of chanting *ẹsẹ Ifa* as a public display of skill, reserved for particular occasions, notably the all-night vigil that opens the annual Ifa festival. This has led Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí to adopt a

two-pronged classification of oral poetry, in which genres identified on formal grounds ("feature types") intersect with genres identified according to style of performance ("chanting modes") (Ọlatunji 1984). There are numerous chanting modes based on *oriki*, some very localized and others widely found in the Yoruba-speaking area. Among the most widespread and best known are *ìjálá* (hunters' chants), *iwì egúngún* (ancestral masquerade chants), *Ṣàngó pípè* (literally "the calling of Ṣàngó"), and *ẹkún ìyàwó* (bridal chants). Localized modes include *àṣamọ̀* (Èkìtì), *alámọ̀* (Èkìtì), *àdàmọ̀* (Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀ṣà, and Èkìtì each have their own versions), *olele* (Ìjẹ̀ṣà), *ọ̀wẹ̀wẹ̀* (Oǹdó), *ẹ̀fẹ̀* (Ẹ̀gbádò), and *àjàgbó* (Àkókó). Chanting modes are distinguished by intonation and voice-quality; by the focus of the address (thus in *ijala*, the subjects are often animals, while in *iwi egungun* there are usually long passages addressing the legendary founder of the ancestral masquerade cult, and in *ẹkun iyawo* the focus is on the performer herself, who is the bride); by the nature of the additional textual materials that supplement the *oriki* (thus in *ijala*, philosophical reflections and witty topical commentary may be added, while in *ẹkun iyawo* there are extensive passages of reflection upon the bride's impending change of status); and by the people who perform the chant and the contexts in which they do so (see Babalọlá 1966; Olatunji 1984; and Olúkòjú 1978).

Oral genres typically attract a range of performers of different levels of competence, and with the exception of *ẹsẹ Ifa* are usually learnt informally, by habituation and participation. Some performances are predominantly the preserve of men (e.g., *ijala* and *ẹsẹ Ifa*, since hunters and most diviners are male) or of women (*ẹkun iyawo*, publicly performed only by brides). Some are predominantly performed by the young (*alọ*, *ẹkun iyawo*), some by the old (proverbs, *itan*). In general, however, performance in Yorubaland is characterized by a practical and existential belief that competence determines entitlement. In many genres there are specialists who may make their living or supplement their income from public performances, but also ordinary household members who perform only in family ceremonies but whose expertise may nonetheless in some respects surpass that of the professionals.

Oral genres in Yorubaland are held to be empowering and effectual. Proverbs are rules of thumb, only fully meaningful when brought to bear on an actual situation. *Itan* are the means by which the past is reactivated in the present. Ifa verses come into play in the course of divination consultations where models from the past are used to shape the future. The performance of *oriki* heightens a human subject's social well-being, spurs a masquerade into action, and inspires the *oriṣa* to make their presence felt among the human community.

Many traditional oral genres in Yoruba are constituted in such a way that their meaning is not self-evident, but requires active exegesis or "deriddling" by knowledgeable audiences. Any audience is likely to contain rings or layers of listeners differentiated by their degree of prior knowledge. This suggests that the interpretation of Yoruba oral texts is not something that can simply be assured on the basis of common, publicly available linguistic competence, but is rather a genre or a series of genres in itself with its own techniques and styles of verbal linkage and unpacking. This is an aspect of Yoruba orature that still remains to be systematically studied.

In the present day, these oral traditions continue to serve old functions such as the establishment of communication with the spiritual world, the celebration of individual and group identity, the inculcation of shared values, or the affirmation of individual uniqueness. But they have also been collected, broadcast, discussed, and staged as "Yoruba heritage" by colonial and postcolonial cultural nationalists. They have entered into the constitution of numerous new genres, both written and semi-oral. They are the linguistic basis of neotraditional chanted poetry; they are frequently incorporated into written literary texts; they are the focus of continual commentary and redeployment in the Yoruba-language press; and they are staged within the format of contemporary popular theater, film, and video drama (see below).

Written literature

Though some Yoruba texts may have been written in Arabic script as early as the eighteenth century, surviving literature written in Yoruba dates from the mid-nineteenth century with the establishment of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) mission in Abẹ́òkúta and its program of translation and publication of religious texts for the edification of converts. The involvement of the bicultural "Saro" group – Yoruba repatriated slaves who had initially been deposited in Sierra Leone before making their way back to their homeland – facilitated the early and extensive production of Yoruba-language texts, including original compositions as well as translations. The principal effort went into Bible translation, and the Saro clergyman (later Bishop) Samuel Ajayi Crowther's pioneering efforts in this regard have influenced Yoruba literary language to this day. But there was also room for the publication of original compositions, in the shape of hymns and "native airs," and for renditions of local oral traditions. The *Ìwé Ìròhìn* ("Newspaper") of the Abẹokuta mission – which antedated by three years the first English-language newspaper, published in Lagos in 1862 – contained local and international

news items, but also made room for verbal art forms such as renditions of folktales.

Yoruba-language writing was given a boost in the 1880s and 1890s by an upsurge of cultural nationalism among the Lagos elite, when numerous histories and collections of Yoruba proverbs and other oral texts were produced. Notable among these works were E. M. Líjàdù's pioneering collection of poems by the popular early nineteenth-century Ẹgba oral poet Aríbilóṣòó (1886), and his two scholarly works on the Ifa divination corpus, *Ifa* (1898) and *Orunmila* (1908). The series of school readers entitled *Ìwé Kíkà*, produced for the CMS between 1871 and 1915, also contained notable collections of folklore, proverbs, and historical narrative drawn from oral tradition. *Ìlọsíwájú Èrò Mímọ́*, a translation of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* by the CMS missionary David Hinderer, first printed in the 1860s, was reissued in 1911 and thereafter widely distributed; it had a lasting influence on Yorùbá-language fiction, as will be seen below. In the early years of the twentieth century, numerous local histories were published, including *Ìwé Ìtàn Ìbàdàn àti díẹ̀ nínú àwọn ìlú agbègbè rẹ̀ bí Ìwó, Òṣogbo àti Ìkìrun* (History of Ibadan and Some of Her Neighboring Towns Such as Iwo, Oṣogbo, and Ikirun) by I. B. Akínyẹlé (1911), *Ìwé Ìtàn Ekó* (History of Lagos) by J. B. O. Lòsì (1913), and *Ìwé Ìtàn Àjàsẹ́* (History of Ajasẹ) by A. Akínsọ̀wọ́n (1914). Akinyẹle's history of Ibadan was particularly influential and was subsequently published in an English version by Akinyẹle (*The Outlines of Ibadan History*, 1946) and in a three-volume revised version undertaken by Akínyẹlé's niece Kẹ́mi Morgan. The original Yoruba-language version is remarkable for the large number of personal *oriki* of Ibadan notables included in the text: *oriki* that were later extracted and republished with commentaries by other Yorùbá scholars.

These pioneering efforts in historiography were followed in the 1920s by a proliferation of Yoruba-language newspapers, at least six being founded between 1922 and 1929. It was through the press, rather than directly through the churches or the schools, that the first well-known and extensive work of fiction in Yoruba was published: I. B. Thomas's *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Aiyé Èmi Ṣẹ̀gilọlá* (The Life Story of Me, Ṣẹ̀gilọlá), which was serialized in Thomas's own newspaper, *Akéde Èkó*, and immediately afterwards published as a book (1930).[1] This narrative is the confessions, in epistolary form, of a Lagos prostitute who, stricken with disease in middle age, looks back over her life with a mixture of glee and repentance, and regales the readership with an arrestingly lifelike account of her past exploits and her present sufferings. This initiative was paralleled by that of a rival Lagos newspaper editor, E. A. Akintan, who began the serialization of *Ìgbẹ̀hìn-á-dùn tàbí Ìtàn Ọmọ Orukan* (All's Well That Ends Well, or The Story of an Orphan) in his paper *Elétí ọ̀fẹ́* before I. B. Thomas, but did not complete it

or publish the episodes as a volume until the success of *Ṣẹgilọla* had shown the way. The Yoruba-language or bilingual newspapers also published recensions of oral poetry. In 1924, for example, *The Yoruba News* published the *oriki* of Oyèéwọlé, the new Baálẹ̀ of Ibadan, on his installation. Other publications of the period included A. K. Ajíṣafẹ́'s two short prose works, *Ènìà ṣòro* (People Are Hard), and *Tan' t' Ọ́lọ́run* (Who Is Equal to God?), both of which consist of a succession of brief narratives designed to exemplify a proverb or illustrate a moral lesson.

The most important early writer of Yoruba fiction was D. O. Fágúnwà, whose first novel, *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Ìrúnmalẹ̀* (The Intrepid Hunter in the Forest of Spirits) was published in 1938 and immediately became a popular classic, adopted into school curricula and widely read by adults as well. This story is written in majestic and memorable prose, reminiscent of the cadences of the Yoruba Bible, and deals with the adventures of a hunter who encounters a succession of spirits, some benign, some malign, some functioning as allegorical figures echoing Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, others drawn from Yoruba folklore, Greek and Roman mythology, and English fiction. Fagunwa followed this novel with four others in a similar vein: *Igbó Olódùmarè* (1949a); *Ìrèké Oníbùdó* (1949b); *Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje* (1954); *Àdììtú Olódùmarè* (1961). All retained the episodic plot structure, organized round a journey or succession of journeys, and the theme of a human encountering a sequence of supernatural challenges. But the last of these novels moved into new ground, dealing with the experience of modernity (educated characters, motor cars, an epistolary romance), which might have heralded a new move toward realism in his work had Fagunwa not tragically drowned in 1963, at the age of sixty, while still working on his sixth novel.

The success of Fagunwa's novels led to a whole "school of Fagunwa," allegorical and adventure stories of spirits and ghosts in folkloric settings (see Ògúnṣínà 1992). This strand of Yoruba writing continued into the 1970s and took on many variant forms in the work of such writers as A. Oyèédélé (*Aiyé Rèé*, 1947; *Ìwọ ni*, 1970), J. O. Ògúndélé (*Ẹ̀jìgbèdè l'ọ́nà Ìsálú Ọ̀run*, 1956; *Ibú Olókun*, 1956), J. F. Ọdúnjọ (*Kúyẹ̀*, 1964), and Ọdúnjọ and A. B. Ọladipúpọ̀ (*Kàdárà àti Ẹ̀gbọ́n rẹ̀*, 1967). However, the dynamic center of fictional creativity had shifted even before Fagunwa's death. The realistic style pioneered by I. B. Thomas came to flower in the 1950s and early 1960s. In *Aiyé d'Aiyé Òyìnbó* (1955), Isaac Délànọ̀ depicted the experience of colonization from a local, uneducated woman's perspective. The story is remarkable for its detailed evocation of village life and attitudes, and for its ambivalence about the changes introduced by the colonial regime. His second novel, *L'ọ́jọ́ Ọjọ́ Un* (1963), is a historical

narrative set in Abẹokuta, which, though presented as fiction, has extensive documentary components and toward the end turns into a teetotalers' tract. Fẹ́mi Jẹ́bọdà's prize-winning tale of the seamy side of life seen from the point of view of a rogue and vagabond, *Olówólaiyémọ̀*, published in 1964 but written for an Independence celebration competition in 1960, brings the "realist" strand in Yoruba writing to wonderfully ebullient realization.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s there was an explosion of literary creativity, with many new authors emerging and pioneering new styles and themes. Among the most prominent were Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí, whose *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin* (1969) is a historical novel dealing with a revolt against the overlordship of Ọyọ, and Ọládẹ̀jọ Òkédìjí, author of two brilliantly innovative crime thrillers (*Àjà ló lẹrù*, 1969, and *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*, 1971), as well as a more somber tragic novel of the destruction of a young boy who is relentlessly drawn into a life of crime in the underworld of Ifẹ (*Atótó Arére*, 1981). Notable also are Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, whose university campus novel *Ó le kú* (1974) broke new ground in social setting and ambience; Afọlábí Ọlábímtán, author of several novels, including *Kékeré Ẹkùn* (1967), which deals with the conflicts arising from early Christian conversion in a small village, and *Baba Rere!* (1978), a contemporary satire on a corrupt big man; and Kọ́lá Akínlàdé, prolific author of well-crafted detective stories such as *Ta ló pa Ọmọ Ọba?* (Who Killed the Prince's Child?). These authors were all verbal stylists of a high order; they transformed the literary language, moving away from Fagunwa's rolling cadences to a more demotic, supple prose that successfully caught the accents of everyday life (Okediji in particular excelled at this) while retaining the capacity of traditional orature to import other genres and to allude intertextually to the whole field of Yoruba verbal art. Thus Ládélé's *Ìgbì Ayéńyí* has a whole chapter made up of an Ifa verse narrating the story of Àlàbá who saw a living skeleton and made the mistake of boasting about it; Iṣọla's *O le ku* resorts to *oriki*-like poetry to convey the beauty of one of his heroines; Láwùyì Ògúnníran's *Eégún Aláré* (1972) moves continually between prose and poetry to develop a fascinating narrative about a traveling masquerade group. All these writers, furthermore, draw confidently on proverbs, sayings, anecdotes, and allusions shared by their knowledgeable public; as with the oral genres, the addressee is drawn into a collaborative role and is credited with the cultural resources to act as co-constitutor of the text's meaning.

In the 1980s and 90s a third generation of Yoruba authors emerged, and the themes and styles diversified further. Olú Owólabí, already published in the 1970s, became established in the 1980s as one of the most prolific writers in Yoruba, producing novels and plays on topics ranging from the experience of

soldiers in the civil war (*Ẹni Ọlọ́run ò pa*, 1980; *Ìjà Ọ̀rẹ̀*, 1983) to bank robbery (*Ìsújú Ọ̀sanyìn*, 1983) and elections (*Ọ̀tẹ̀ n'ibò*, 1988). Humorous, topical, and realistic portrayals of everyday life extended into areas such as the experiences of a middle-class couple returning to Nigeria after fifteen years in Britain (Adébísí Thompson, *Bọsún Ọmọ Ọ̀dọ̀fin*, 1987 – a low-key but shrewdly observant novel by one of the few Yoruba women writers). The economic catastrophe of the 1980s and 90s delayed the publication of many manuscripts but did not entirely block the appearance of new work. By now there must be around two hundred Yoruba novels in print.

Written poetry and drama have also been very successful genres. Poetry is perhaps the earliest written literary genre to make its appearance in Western Nigeria, *oriki* and hymns both featuring in the earliest publications of the missionary and secular press. Ṣóbọ̀ Aróbíodù (J. S. Ṣówándé) was an Ẹgba poet whose long topical and didactic poems written in the style of traditional poetic chants – but dealing with contemporary issues, personal experiences, and reflections from a Christian perspective – were highly successful, even though they did not directly give rise to a tradition of imitators. In 1904 E. M. Lijadu published *Ìwé Kini ti Ṣóbọ̀ Aró-bí-odù* (Ṣobo Aro-bi-odu's First Book), soon to be followed by a second compilation, both of which were widely acclaimed. A. K. Ajiṣafẹ of Abẹokuta was best known for his long philosophical and topical poem *Aiyé Akámarà* (1921) (The Vicissitudes of the World). His model was adopted by other writers, including Gabriel Ibítóyè Òjó, whose narrative poem *Ọlọ́run Ẹ̀san* (1952) (Vengeance Is God's) became particularly well known after it was included in the primary-school curriculum. D. A. Ọbásá, founder of the Ibadan bilingual newspaper *Yorùbá News* in 1924, published several anthologies of poetry. *Ìwé Kinní ti Àwọn Akéwì* (1927) (First Book of Poets' Utterances) was followed by two sequels – the Second and Third Books of Poets' Utterances, in 1934 and 1945. The most successful early poetry derived its inspiration from oral genres and managed to overcome the limitations of the printed page. Other styles were painfully faithful copies of English poetic meter and structure, and never really made much headway since Yoruba is a tonal language whose indigenous poetry is neither metrical nor rhymed. Many writers, including J. F. Ọdunjọ, Akinwumi Iṣọla, and Afọlabi Ọlabimtan, have produced volumes of poetry as well as novels, though on the whole they are better known for the latter. New work is emerging – mostly in the form of long discursive and philosophical poems, probably influenced by popular media poetry (see below) – recent publications being *Ìjì Ayé*, by Ọlánipẹ̀kun Olúránkinṣẹ́ (1987) and *Orin Ewúro* (1998), by a poet using the name "Àtàrí Àjànàkú" (Elephant Head or Skull).

Written drama exists mainly as a literary form intended to be read, rather than as a script to be produced on a stage. Some plays, however, have successfully been performed – sometimes after adaptation – by university and popular theater companies, either on stage or on television. Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí was one of the first writers to produce distinguished literary dramas, among them *Nwọn rò pé wèrè ni* (1965) (They Thought She Was Mad), a contemporary moral tale revolving around forged/fake money; *Ìdààmú Pááḍì Minkáílù* (1974) (Father Michael's Trouble), set in a church community; and his best play, *Baṣọ̀run Gáà* (1972) (Gáà the Kingmaker), set in eighteenth-century Ọyọ and showing the downfall of a notorious tyrant. Akinwumi Iṣọla has achieved an exceptional combination of popular and erudite success with his written dramas. His *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà* (1970), a verse drama about the nineteenth-century Ibadan woman chief of that name, was successfully performed by the popular theater group "I Show Pepper" (Ìṣọ̀lá Ògúnṣọlá), using a combination of scripted and improvised performance. When this play was subsequently made into a film, its premiere – in the Liberty Stadium, Ibadan – attracted an audience of over 14,000. He also oversaw the adaptation of his play *Kò Ṣe é Gbé*, about one man's struggle against corruption in the Customs Office, into a popular video drama: whereas the published play ends in despair after the hero is defeated, the video has him cleverly routing the evil-doers and surviving, injured but triumphant in his hospital bed.

Another written Yoruba-language play that has enjoyed great and repeated success as stage production is Okediji's *Rẹ́rẹ́ Rún* (1973), about a trade union strike that fails because of the fallibility of its leader. Okediji has also published *Ṣàngó*, a play about the legendary Ọyọ king of that name (1987), and *Aájò Ajé*, which follows the fortunes of three young men as they pursue, with increasing obsessiveness, their goal of winning the pools. Olú Dáramọ́lá's *Ilé tí a fi itọ́ mọ* (1970) (The House Built of Spit) is a literary drama about a middle-class couple whose marriage is threatened when the husband has an affair with his secretary. This play was taken up by a popular theater group, the Oyin Adéjọbí Theatre, and adapted to their own worldview and dramaturgical style, with great success; their version was also published in the popular "photoplay" magazine *Atọ́ka*, which presents stage dramas in strip-cartoon format using photographs and bubble captions. A rare woman playwright is Jọláadé Fáwálé, whose *Tẹni n'tẹni* (1982) is a conjugal melodrama about a man who, having fallen in love with a foreign woman while on business in Europe, deliberately wrecks his marriage to the faithful, pious Ẹkúndayọ̀ in order to be with his new love. Eventually, however, the homebreaker turns missionary and she is instrumental in reuniting the couple and promoting forgiveness all round.

Popular poetry and drama

Popular poetry and drama have received much less recognition by scholars than either the older oral traditions or the newer, print literature in Yoruba. Contemporary popular genres are products of the colonial period and after; they are produced by members of the intermediate classes, midway between the illiterate farming population and the salaried elites; they are innovative, rapidly changing, often ephemeral; they are not supported by educational or cultural establishments; and they tend to promulgate practical moral messages that are often conservative but are highly valued by their audiences.

In the sphere of neotraditional chanted and printed popular poetry (known generically as *ewì*), the work of Ọlátúnbọ̀sún Ọládàpọ̀ and Ọláńrewájú Adépọ̀jù is the best known. Both have published volumes of their poetry, which they also perform live and on radio, television, records, and cassettes. This poetry draws heavily on the idiom of older oral genres such as *oriki* and *ẹsẹ Ifa*, but also has a distinctive tone and form of address: it tends to be discursive and coherent rather than segmentary or fragmented; often reflective and philosophical, personal, and sometimes introspective in tone; but – like all other popular genres – ultimately the servant of a "moral lesson," which may be tinged with Christian (Ọladapọ) or Muslim (Adepọju) vocabularies, but which appeals to a broader, ecumenical popular common sense. Ọladapo's *Àròyé Akéwì*, volumes I (1973) and II (1975), and Adepọju's *Ìrònú Akéwì* (1972) are taught in schools as well as being widely read outside the educational context; in the 1980s, Ọladapọ also used to publish his poems in his own cultural magazine, *Ọ̀kín Ọlọ́jà*. This type of half-chanted, half-recited poetry has become extremely popular and there are now numerous "*ewi* exponents" developing their own styles.

The lyrics of popular *jùjú* music by stars such as Sunny Adé and Ebenezer Obey are also widely known and highly regarded for the "deep Yoruba" on which they draw, as they combine proverbs, old poetic idioms, neologisms, and slang to produce a richly varied texture. In the atmosphere of heightened religious competition characteristic of the late 1980s and the 1990s, Muslim and Christian singers have relayed rival didactic messages through the medium of gospel songs and Islamic *waka*. These often borrow eclectically from a range of textual genres: thus Wasiu Káyọ̀dé Sadeeq, a *waka* singer, in his audio cassette *Ẹni Ayé ń Yẹ*, combines quotations from the Qur'an, Yoruba proverbs, fragments of English-language songs ("If you are happy and you know it"), references to astronomy ("In all the solar systems that exist in the world, Jupiter is the biggest and it takes a little more than two hundred years, you Muslims, for

Jupiter to turn round the earth") interspersed with extended prose parables narrated in a speaking voice against a musical background.

The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre is impressive for the sheer scale of its textual creativity. Its origins lay in 1940s Lagos, though it drew on earlier antecedent performance styles that had been pioneered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the Lagos elites and also by the more populist breakaway Independent churches. A crucial figure in this theater's development was Hubert Ògúndé, a policeman and primary-school teacher who in 1944 convened a group of amateur performers to stage "Native Air operas," a theatrical form that had been in existence for some time and involved the enactment of Bible stories through an entirely sung text – largely choral – accompanied by stylized gestures. Ogunde, however, revolutionized this form, enlivening it with styles of music that owed as much to highlife as to hymn tunes, and within two years of his first Native Air opera he was recruiting a professional paid cast to stage topical, folkloric, and satirical dramas. Other groups later took the same path of development: the theaters of Oyin Adejọbi, Kọ́lá Ògúnmọ́lá, and Dúró Ládiípọ all at first performed for the church and then gradually secularized, commercialized, and professionalized. As they did this they also developed styles of their own. Duro Ladiipọ, for example, became famous for his mythological plays that harnessed the talents of traditional oral performers of praise poetry and incantations. The most famous of these, *Ọba Kò So* (The King Did Not Hang), dealt with the apotheosis of the legendary Ọyọ king Ṣango. Kọla Ogunmọla specialized in social and moral satire, one of his most popular plays being *Ifẹ́ Owó* (Love of Money). At the same time most theater companies diversified, so that a single company could easily have within its repertoire a mythological play, a modern satire on sexual *mores* or corruption, a thriller set in the criminal underworld, a tale of occult practices revolving around money magic and human sacrifice, a folkloric play, and a play based on a written novel or drama – and they were likely also to explore other media such as television, print, the photoplay magazine *Atọ́ka*, records, and cassettes.

The popular theater found a vast audience, and expanded greatly during the oil-boom years. Whereas in the 1960s there had been not more than a dozen fully professional and commercial theater companies, by 1980 more than a hundred were in existence (see Jeyifo 1984). These theaters traveled the length and breadth of Yorubaland and into the north to play to Yoruba enclaves there. Each had a membership of fifteen or more permanent paid actors and actresses and its own exclusive repertoire of plays, which was continually adapted and expanded. Their plays were unscripted and improvised by the actors, under the guidance of the company's boss or manager. They varied greatly in style,

but they almost all shared the following features. First, they represented an extended, worked-out narrative entirely through the actions of free-standing dramatic characters, without the intervention of a storyteller. This was a form unknown in Yoruba culture before the missionary and colonial interventions of the nineteenth century. Second, they shared an esthetic of intense impact, achieved by incorporating and juxtaposing dense, concentrated chunks or sequences of dramatic action and display. Third, they shared a love affair with the Yoruba language – its idioms, archaisms, innovations, slang, dialectal peculiarities, and its sacred and secret registers. Many plays boasted extensive and complex verbal texts which drew in a lifelike manner on the idioms of everyday life – but also condensed and heightened these verbal resources to generate memorable, sometimes polished, dialogue. And finally, they were all dedicated to the demonstration of a moral – and were met halfway by popular audiences who took upon themselves the task of self-edification by actively seeking out a moral lesson they could apply to their own lives. Most popular theater groups have steered clear of overt political commentary, though the theater's "founding father," Ogunde, was exceptional in giving voice to anti-colonial feeling (in *Worse Than Crime*, 1945; *Strike and Hunger* 1945; and *Bread and Bullet*, 1950) and the controversies of party politics in the period immediately after independence (in *Yorùbá Ronú*, 1964). Other theaters, though less explicit, nonetheless did articulate popular responses to the economic, political, and social situation of ordinary people, and were often sharply satirical of overbearing authority figures and social pretension.

Since the late 1980s the popular theater has been in decline. The actors have migrated into film and video production, where they mingle with another category of performer, the slightly higher-status English-language television-trained actor. Film is the most prestigious dramatic form at present; its production usually involves the creaming off of stars from a number of the old live theater companies to produce a composite super-company convened only for the duration of the shoot. Hubert Ogunde was again the key figure in the efflorescence of Yoruba-language film-making, which gathered momentum following the success of his *Aiyé* (1979) and *Jáiyésinmi* (1981), both of which used the technical possibilities of film to mount vivid and blood-curdling representations of witchcraft. Another notable popular star who became a film tycoon was "Bàbá Sàlá," the nickname of Moses Ọláìyá, a television and stage comedian very popular with audiences for his subversive and ambiguous lampoons of authority and respectability. Video dramas tend to be made as a substitute when funds cannot be raised to make a film. Video drama is now a booming concern, with more than twenty video-production houses in Lagos

alone and more than 2,000 actors making a living from it. The plays deal very much with witchcraft, the occult, and extraordinary family coincidences. They are often of poor technical and artistic quality. Nonetheless the sheer profusion and variety means that a new arena for experimentation has been opened up, and some video dramas have been interesting and well put together – among them Tunde Kelani's *Ti Olúwa nilẹ̀* (The Land is God's).

The electronic media have played a significant role in the constitution and dissemination of new cultural forms in Yorubaland since their inception, and in the creation of a pan-Yoruba public arena. The Western State Television Service was inaugurated in Ibadan in 1959 – the first in sub-Saharan Africa – and from its inception the station sought out performance arts of all kinds for inclusion in its programming. It was partly through the influence of television that the popular theaters developed a naturalistic, speech-based drama out of the earlier choral style of the Biblical "native air opera." Weekly TV comedy serials by popular theater groups were among the favorite programs, and in turn stimulated increased public interest in these groups' live performances. TV fostered the rise of new genres such as neotraditional poetry (see above), and by screening documentary footage of "cultural events" such as traditional festivals, television also encouraged the process, which had already begun through the medium of print, of converting localized religious activities into "traditional heritage," part of "Yoruba culture" conceived as a generalized, diverse but ultimately unified field.

The Yoruba public that took shape in the colonial and postcolonial periods has been a key factor in the vitality of traditional genres and the efflorescence of new popular forms. Since the huge expansion of access to primary education in the late 1950s and 60s, a large potential readership has come into being, able to enjoy Yoruba-language texts, though not necessarily English-language ones, and with simultaneous access to radio, television, and live performance. The interaction among these different channels – whereby oral poetry is collected in booklets, neotraditional poets perform on television, radio, and records, but simultaneously publish their texts in books and magazines, *Atọka* publishes renditions of live improvised drama, popular theater companies dramatize novels and adapt published literary dramas – means that within the sphere of Yoruba-language creativity, the audience is being continually replenished and its cultural competence reinforced. This seamless interaction between oral performance and the prestigious world of print was one of the factors that helped to foster the great vitality and confidence of Yoruba verbal culture throughout the twentieth century. Unlike in many African contexts, there was no sharp divide between a domain of orality, indigenous language and

the traditional past on the one hand, and literacy, English, and modernity on the other. Rather, there was a continuous circulation and appropriation of materials and modes of transmission, fostering an extraordinarily innovative, diverse, and satisfying verbal culture.

Both oral and written Yoruba literature form the subject matter of an extensive and thriving literary scholarship. Several degree programs in Yoruba language, literature, and culture are offered in the universities of western Nigeria, and numerous dissertations, including PhDs, have been written in Yoruba about oral and written Yoruba literature. A metalanguage suitable for critical discussion has been established. Yoruba scholarship is now at least four generations old, and boasts many luminaries. Among the university-based "founding fathers" are Adeboye Babalọla, whose work on oral praise poetry has set standards of scrupulous investigation yet to be surpassed; 'Wande Abimbọla, doyen of Ifa scholarship; Afọlabi Ọlabimtan, who combines critical scholarship with creative writing, and who has done much to establish a vocabulary for future literary scholars; Ọlabiyii Babalọla Yai, whose work on oral genres has provoked radical reconceptualization of the notion of "orality"; Akinwumi Iṣọla, who has brought not only a creative writer's experience, but also that of a practical producer of highly successful live and video drama, to his interpretation of Yoruba literary texts; and Ọlatunde Ọlatunji, a pioneer in the attempt to grasp and conceptualize the field of Yoruba oral literature as a whole, who has also contributed to the study of written poetry and other genres. Their work has been supported by steady advances in the field of Yoruba linguistics, by such scholars as Ayọ Bamgboṣe, O. Awobuluyi, and Ọlasope Oyelaran. The solid foundations laid down by these scholars, and the general levels of Yoruba literacy among the younger generation, suggest that the move towards Yoruba-language scholarship will not easily be reversed.

The formal scholarly literature coming from the universities is underpinned by a more widely diffused, local, and "unofficial" scholarship taking the form of booklets explaining the meaning of proverbs, collections of *oriki*, pamphlets on the interpretation of dreams and on herbal medicines and spells, local town histories, and religious tracts and handbooks of both Islamic and Christian orientation, as well as more substantial works on "Yoruba customs and traditions." The fact that there are a number of small printing presses specializing in the publication of Yoruba texts means that the unofficial sphere of Yoruba-language writing has the means to flourish without the intervention of official cultural or educational institutions. Activity in the sphere of Yoruba writing is also stimulated by the lively and flourishing Yoruba-language press; several newspapers regularly include features on Yoruba oral and written literature.

Aláròyé, for example, has a column dedicated to expounding proverbs and another on popular actors, singers, and media poets.

Although the Yoruba-language sphere of cultural production has by and large existed in parallel to English-language literature, there has also been some activity across the borders. Popular Yoruba genres such as the traveling theater show themselves to be highly conscious of the infiltration of the English language into local life, and they use it strategically for satirical and moral effect. Many Yoruba novelists drew ideas from English-language writers ranging from James Hadley Chase to Conan Doyle. In the sphere of literary drama, some writers have used both languages: notably Wálé Ògúnyẹmí, whose English-language and Yoruba-language plays have enjoyed equal success with university audiences. Yorubas writing in English draw much of their linguistic richness from a substratum of Yoruba. Actual translation, in both directions, has also been important. Ọlánipẹ̀kun Ẹ̀san, a classical scholar, translated into Yoruba, and substantially recast, a number of Latin and Greek works including Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, transformed into *Tẹlẹ́dalàṣẹ* (1965) (The Creator's Will must Prevail). More recently, Bọ̀dé Ṣówándé has published an adaptation of Molière's *L'avare*, under the title *Arédè Owó* (1990). Wọlé Ṣóyínká translated Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ọdẹ Ninu Igbo Irunmalẹ* into English, under the title *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*; Akinwumi Iṣọla in turn has translated one of Ṣoyinka's greatest plays, *Death and the King's Horseman*, into Yoruba. Two years after the publication of his play *Aajo Aje*, Ọladejọ Okediji published his own English translation, *Running After Riches* (1999); and Wálé Ògúnyẹmí has translated Chinua Achebe's classic novel *Things Fall Apart* into Yoruba. Thus, though an intense enjoyment of the Yoruba language is what has sustained all aspects of Yoruba textual production for the last 150 years at least, Yoruba textuality is not a closed domain cut off from other cultural traditions, but an open field that continually grows and diversifies by interacting with others (see Irele 1981, especially "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer").

Present dire economic circumstances are inevitably affecting the output of all branches of Yoruba literary production. However, the signs are that the huge capacity of this culture for creative innovation is surviving and that new works are still being produced.

Note

1. However, this work was preceded at least thirty years earlier by an "obscene romantic fiction" published anonymously under the title *Dolápọ̀ Aṣẹ́wó Ọmọ Aṣẹ́wó* (Dolápọ̀ the Prostitute, Child of a Prostitute): see Fálọlá 1988: 26.

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20

African literature and the colonial factor

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Modern African literature was produced in the crucible of colonialism. What this means, among other things, is that the men and women who founded the tradition of what we now call modern African writing, both in European and indigenous languages, were, without exception, products of the institutions that colonialism had introduced and developed in the continent, especially in the period beginning with the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 and decolonization in the late 1950s and early 1960s. African literature had, of course, been produced outside the institutions of colonialism: the existence of oral literature in all African languages and precolonial writing in Arabic, Amharic, Swahili, and other African languages is ample evidence of a thriving literary tradition in precolonial Africa. But what is now considered to be the heart of literary scholarship on the continent could not have acquired its current identity or function if the traumatic encounter between Africa and Europe had not taken place. Not only were the founders of modern African literature colonial subjects, but colonialism was also to be the most important and enduring theme in their works. From the eighteenth century onwards, the colonial situation shaped what it meant to be an African writer, shaped the language of African writing, and overdetermined the culture of letters in Africa.

In 1955, Georges Balandier began his influential theoretical study of the colonial situation by observing that despite the changes that had occurred in the era of decolonization, "the colonial problem remains one of the main issues with which specialists in the social sciences have to deal. Indeed, the pressures of a new nationalism and the reactions resulting from decolonization give this problem an immediacy and a topicality that cannot be treated with indifference" (1970: 21). The point Balandier made about the relationship between colonialism and the social sciences can be said about the conjunction between African literature and the colonial situation. Colonialism, especially in its radical transformation of African societies, remains one of the central problems with which writers and intellectuals in Africa have to deal; the tradition

of African writing that has produced Nobel Prize laureates was built and consolidated when African writers began to take stock of the colonial situation and its impact on the African psyche. Even the African writing that emerged in the postcolonial era, a literature shaped by the pressures of "arrested decolonization" and the "pitfalls of national consciousness," can be said to have been driven by the same imperative as writing under colonialism – the desire to understand the consequences of the colonial moment (see Jeyifo 1990: 33–46; and Fanon 1968: 148–205). The purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore the paradigmatic and practical value of the colonial moment in the history of African literature. Our starting point is that the key to the development of modern African literature can be found in a number of institutions – the Christian mission, the colonial school, and the university – that were crucial to the emergence, nature, and function of African literature.

Colonial culture and African literature: an overview

A discussion of the relationship between colonialism and African literature should perhaps begin with a simple question: why has colonialism been the main subject of African literature and why do colonial institutions seem to be such a central component of a literature which was expressively produced as a critique of European domination? The most obvious answer, as we shall see in our discussion of several colonial institutions, is that the political and cultural force of colonialism in Africa was so enduring that writers concerned with the nature of African society could not avoid the trauma and drama that accompanied the imposition of European rule on the continent. As early as the end of the eighteenth century, Africans writing in European languages, most notably Olaudah Equiano, had appropriated dominant literary conventions to oppose slavery and to validate an African identity; but others, such as Johannes Capitein, had produced treatises arguing that slavery was not necessarily an affront to morality and Christianity. While the political interests of these early writers might now appear radically divergent, it is important to keep in mind that their writing was generated by a common desire to deploy writing both as the mark of the African's humanity and as a point of entry into the culture of modernity (see Gates 1985: 9–10).

If the late colonial period (1880–1935) seems to preoccupy the imagination even of writers who were born in the age of decolonization and after, it is because it is considered to be a period unlike any other in African history. Adu Boahen has remarked: "Never in the history of Africa did so many changes occur and with such speed as they did between 1880 and 1935 . . . The pace of

this drama was truly astonishing, for as late as 1880 only very limited areas of Africa had come under the direct rule of Europeans" (1985a: 1). For almost four centuries Africans had endured traumas induced by the foreign encounter, most notably the transatlantic slave trade, but the European element had remained localized at the coast and no significant political entities had lost their sovereignty until the late colonial period. After the Conference of Berlin, however, the whole continent was divided among the major European powers and the nature of African society was rapidly transformed under the tutelage of foreign powers. And while the process of colonial rule might have appeared to the European powers to be a matter of military strategy and commercial interests, for many African societies it was tantamount to what F. Abbas has called "a veritable revolution, overthrowing a whole ancient world of beliefs and ideas and an immemorial way of life"; European conquest confronted local societies with the difficult choice "to adapt or perish" (quoted in Boahen 1985a: 3). Either way, what was at issue in the colonial encounter was the question of African autonomy, a major subject in early writing from the continent.

It is easy to underestimate the centrality of the ideology of sovereignty and the idea of autonomy to African debates on colonialism and decolonization and the literary texts they inspired. And yet, as Chinua Achebe was to note in an influential essay published in the early 1960s, one of the key motivations for producing an African literature was to restore the moral integrity and cultural autonomy of the African in the age of decolonization. The fundamental theme of African writing, noted Achebe, was that "African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this they must regain now" (1973: 8). For many African writers in the age of decolonization, then, the loss of sovereignty was not simply the process by which older cultures and institutions were deprived of their authority under colonialism; it was also conceived, especially by members of the African elite, as the ultimate loss of agency and free will. Thus the narrative of colonialism came to be conceived as the unwilled evacuation of African subjects from the movement of time; for many African intellectuals in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, to be colonized, as Walter Rodney noted aptly, was "to be removed from history" (1972: 245–56).

But the process of colonial rule was to appeal to African writers for something more than its drama and impact: for writers born between the cusp of European rule and decolonization, especially in the period between 1900 and

1945, colonialism was more than a period of loss and temporal dislocation; it also represented the challenges and opportunities of modernity. It is these opportunities that the authors of the Pan-African Conference held in London in 1900 had in mind when they reminded "the modern world" that colonized people, "by reason of sheer numbers and physical contact," were bound to have an immense effect upon the world: "If now the world of culture bends itself towards giving Negroes and other dark men the largest and broadest opportunity for education and self-development, then this contact and influence is bound to have a beneficial effect upon the world and hasten human progress" (see Langley 1979: 738). For the colonized African elite, colonialism was a challenge because its impact was evident throughout Africa and it had bound the destiny of the continent with other worlds.

At the same time, however, the colonial process presented an interpretative enigma: colonial culture had transformed many African societies through voluntary and enforced modernization, but as many observers of the African scene were quick to note, this process did not seem to penetrate too deeply into the fabric of local communities. Ostensibly, colonialism touched every aspect of social and political life on the continent, but its impact also seemed to be superficial because, in spite of the predominance and preponderance of colonial modernity, so-called traditional society seemed to function as if the colonial event was a mere interruption in the *longue durée* of African history. For the men and women who came to produce modern African literature, the subjects who were most affected by the colonial process, the simultaneous existence of a modern and traditional world could only be negotiated through works of the imagination. It is not accidental that the foundational texts of modern African literature in the European languages were concerned with the dialectic of modernity and tradition as it was played out on the continent under colonialism.

Nevertheless, this turn to writing as a way of accounting for the existence of the modern within what appeared to be traditional societies was the source of an important paradox: in order to oppose colonialism, and thus to assert indigenous interests and rights, African leaders and intellectuals had to turn to a recently discovered European language of tradition, nation, and race. This new language, which sought a synthesis between modernization and African autonomy, is evident in declarations by leaders such as Makombe Hanga, chief of the Barue, as he confronted the Portuguese in Central Mozambique in 1895: "I see how you white men advance more and more in Africa . . . My country will also have to take up these reforms and I am quite prepared to open it up . . . I should also like to have good roads and railways . . . But I will

remain the Makombe my fathers have been" (quoted in Ranger 1985: 49). In his confrontation with the Germans in Namibia, the great Nama leader Hendrik Wittboi easily resorted to the language of the *Volksgeist* popularized by his European adversaries: "The Lord has established various kingdoms in the world. Therefore I know and believe that it is no sin or crime that I should wish to remain the independent chief of my land and people" (quoted in Ranger 1985: 49).

The emergence of African literatures in European language needs to be located within the crucial claim that colonized subjects had set out to use the instruments and grammar given to them by the colonizer to oppose foreign domination and assert their sovereignty. It should not hence come as a surprise that the pioneers of African literature and African cultural nationalism, writers like Sol Plaatje in South Africa or Caseley Hayford in West Africa, identified very closely with colonial culture and its institutions, even as they opposed the destructive practices of imperial rule and fought for African political rights. Indeed, a key axiom of African literary history is that the founders of African literature were the most Europeanized. What this meant was that African literature was not initially intended to provide a radical critique of European rule; rather, it was a discursive mode through which Africans could try to represent and mediate their location both inside and outside colonial culture.

But why did literature become one of the most important weapons of cultural resistance against European intervention in Africa in the late nineteenth century? Literature came to occupy a central place in colonial culture for three closely related reasons. First, one of the most attractive aspects of colonial culture, from the perspective of the colonized, was what came to be universally conceived as the gift of literacy. Even though many African subjects may have been ambivalent about many aspects of colonial modernity, they seemed unanimous about the power and enchantment of literacy and the culture of print that enabled it: "Literacy was for many African peoples a new magic, and was sought after as such and at all costs since it appeared to open the treasure house of the modern world. To know the amount of power, authority and influence which the first generation of African clerks, interpreters and teachers exercised is to have some idea of the spell which literacy cast over many African peoples" (Afigbo 1985: 496).

The literary history of Africa has often been written from the perspective of university-educated writers and intellectuals (see Wauthier 1979 and July 1968), but we need to foreground the significance of the first generation of literate Africans, many of them clerks, interpreters, and teachers with only a few years of education, in the establishment of an African tradition of letters.

Out of this class came not only the writers who produced the earlier works in European languages (Plaatje and Tutuola, for example), but even more influential writers working in African languages, including Thomas Mofolo (Sotho), H. I. E. Dlomo (Zulu), D. O. Fagunwa (Yoruba), and Shabaan Robert (Swahili). These writers were the great mediators between colonial culture and the newly literate African masses. Indeed, the subject, language, and form used in the most influential works of these writers was intended to simultaneously represent the bourgeois public sphere that colonialism had instituted and satisfy the reading desires of the newly literate African.

But there was a second reason why literature came to occupy such an important role in the mediation of the colonial relationship: in both the popular imagination and the annals of Africanism or Orientalism (see Miller 1985 and Said 1979), the process of colonization existed as both an unprecedented historical episode and a monumental literary event. While it is true that colonial conquest and rule were effected through violent military methods, aggressive diplomacy, and blatant economic exploitation, these processes ultimately came to acquire their authority and totality when they were represented in powerful narratives of conquest. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1789), to cite one of the most prominent examples, came to have a presence, a voice, and rationale when it was represented in *Description de l'Egypte*, the massive twenty-four volume account of the expedition. In this account, as Edward Said has noted, a diachronic and contested event was transformed into a synchronic narrative of European conquest and rule; Orientalism acquired its intellectual power through textualization, which brought together "a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective" (1979: 41–42). Nevertheless, against the texts of European power produced during the process of conquest, there emerged powerful African texts produced in response; works written as a counterpoint to the Napoleonic narrative (the most famous example is 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's *'Ajaib al-Athar*) contested the terrain of culture as vigorously as the literature of conquest. Indeed, most of the African writing produced in the nineteenth century by writers as diverse as al-Jarbati and Edward Blyden simultaneously sought to take stock of the colonial situation and to challenge its philosophical and cultural assumptions on the nature of the colonized, their culture, and community.

The third reason why colonialism and literary culture came to be so closely associated in the history of African literature is one that has become central in postcolonial studies: this is the recognition that the idea of culture itself lay at the heart of the colonial project of conquest and rule. Colonial writers understood not only the obvious fact that culture and knowledge were used

as instruments of control, but that the process of colonization produced new cultural formations and configurations, what Nicholas Dirks has described as "the allied network of processes" that spawned new subjects and nations (1992: 3). As Dirks has noted, the idea of culture, as an object and mode of knowledge, was formed out of colonial histories and spawned specific cultural forms; these cultural forms, he concludes, "became fundamental to the development of resistance against colonialism, most notably in the nationalist movements that used Western notions of national integrity and self-determination to justify claims for independence" (1992: 4). It was at this point – the point where western notions about nation, culture, and self were turned against the project of colonialism – that the largest body of work by African writers was produced.

African literature and the institutions of colonial modernity

The history of African literature has been so closely associated with the defense of an African tradition that it is not unusual for students and scholars of this literature to negate the colonial institutions that enabled this literature. These institutions – the Christian missions, the colonial school, and the university – were the places in which Africans were transformed into modern subjects and this process of transformation was in turn to become the condition of possibility of African writing itself. But before we examine the character of these institutions and the means by which they enabled African literature, we need to call attention to another factor that disappears only too easily in African literary history – the central role accorded literary texts in the project of colonial modernity by both the colonizer and the colonized. Let us remember, for a start, that colonialism was consolidated in Africa at a time when literature in Europe, especially in Britain, had acquired unprecedented cultural capital, both because of its association with the idea of the nation and because of the perceived opposition to the materialism generated by industrialization. The setting up of colonial missions and schools in Africa was concurrent with the expansion of public education in the major European countries, and with it the spread of literary culture.

The liberal ideas that had led to the expansion and reform of education in Britain thus found their way to Africa fairly quickly. Headmasters of colonial schools often fashioned themselves after Thomas Arnold of Rugby; many of their ideas about culture were influenced by his son Matthew Arnold, the chief inspector of schools in mid-Victorian England. One of the central ideas

in the new thinking about education, which these men brought from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the newly founded one at London, was the centrality of culture – especially literary culture – in the work of civilization. Their philosophies were often echoes of Matthew Arnold's famous claim that culture, conceived as the corrective to materialism, represented a "spiritual standard of perfection" for modern culture ("Sweetness and Light," found in Buckler 1958: 464). Material progress and civilization were certainly central to the colonial mission, but to the men and women who ran the colonial schools, these were inconsequential in the absence of the higher spiritual standard promised by the mastery of culture. This position was to be eloquently expressed by E. Carey Francis, headmaster of Alliance High School in Kenya:

> The school is run on the lines of a grammar school in this country [i.e., England] but with everything simpler, no matrons and no frills. The boys wash their own clothes and keep the place clean. We engage in much the same activities: games, dramatics (we have produced a full Shakespeare play each year for the last three years), singing, Scouting and innumerable societies. Boys have a background poor in the things of European civilization: they know nothing of wireless and motor bicycles and little of money, and few of them come from homes where there is intelligent conversation or where books or even newspapers are regularly read. Yet they are essentially the same as English boys. They would bear comparison with those of the European schools in Kenya, or with a good school in this country, in intelligence, in athletic prowess, in industry, courtesy, courage and trustworthiness, and as gentlemen. (quoted in Sicherman 1990: 392)[1]

The invocation of Shakespeare in Francis's address was not incidental: increasingly, in the late colonial period, literature was seen as the depository of the values that defined civilization. Indeed, the canonical figure of Shakespeare was to have a lasting influence in anglophone African literary and political circles (see Johnson 1997) in the same way as Victor Hugo and the Cartesian system came to influence francophone literary culture and philosophy.

What is crucial to remember is that this influence was most marked in the work of writers with impeccable anticolonial credentials. By the 1930s, for example, Sol Plaatje had emerged as the voice of black nationalism in South Africa, but one of his most important cultural projects during this period was the translation of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* into Tswana. The translation, aptly titled *Diphosho-phosho* (Mistake After Mistake), was welcomed by Tswana intellectuals, such as David Ramoshoana, as evidence that contrary to colonial beliefs, Shakespeare's "language and ideals" were not "an impenetrable

mystery" to the African mind (see Willan 1984: 331). In his autobiography, the great Nigerian nationalist Chief Obafemi Awolowo had no doubt who his favorite author was – "Shakespeare is my favorite. Some of the mighty lines of Shakespeare must have influenced my outlook on life" (quoted in Mazrui 1993: 559). When Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was first performed at Makerere University College in 1949, the lead role was played by none other than A. Milton Obote, the future prime minister of Uganda. And as is well known, Julius Nyerere, one of Africa's leading and most respected nationalists, began his literary career translating Shakespeare into Swahili.

Why Shakespeare? Why literature? As we have already seen, Shakespeare was considered important in anglophone Africa because, like Hugo in the French colonies, he was associated with the language and ideals of the civilization the colonizers were trying to promote on the continent. In this case, the language of the colonizer had become the stand-in for more than a culture of letters; it was a code word for the modern life and moral consciousness that colonialism presented as a mark of its modernity. In the colonies, perhaps even more than the metropolitan centers, literary culture was privileged as the insignia of Englishness or Frenchness. And to the extent that African nationalism justified its political claims through the invocation of the essential humanity of the colonized, the production of a literary culture was conceived as an important step in sanctioning the case for African rights and freedom. Surprisingly though, while literary culture seemed to be valued by authors such as Matthew Arnold because of its ability to proffer a spiritual standard outside the tutelage of religion, in the colonial situation, education and culture were bound up with Christianity: "More than anything else," noted Carey Francis in regard to his African students at Alliance, "we long for them to get a genuine Christian faith" (quoted in Sicherman 1990: 392).

In retrospect, it should not surprise us that religion was one of the most important themes in African literature in the colonial period. There are several reasons for the close connection between Christianity, colonial culture, and literary production: the most obvious one is that the establishment of Christian missions was so closely associated with colonial conquest and rule that it was often difficult to differentiate the two processes. Quite often, especially in Central and Eastern Africa, Christian missions acted as a vanguard for colonial expansion; missions provided imperial powers with the alibi and justification for the imposition of colonial control; or, as happened in Buganda in the 1880s, religious conflicts functioned as effective masks for imperial rivalries. In addition, the journeys undertaken by missionaries into the heart of Africa in the mid-nineteenth century were often represented in the British press as the

heroic adventures of heroic figures willing to give their lives for the cause of empire. There was thus tremendous pressure on European governments to sanction and protect the works of the missions.

Thus, the romantic myth surrounding David Livingstone's death in Central Africa in 1873 was enough to move British public opinion toward a more aggressive imperial policy: "The work of England for Africa," noted an 1873 *Daily Telegraph* editorial, "must henceforth begin in earnest where Livingstone left it off" (quoted in Oliver 1952: 35). Missionaries were frequently the first to designate certain areas as specific zones of influence for their respective European powers. This designation of regions and countries as belonging to certain imperial powers was important because missionaries had a moral force and authority that could never be matched by colonial administrators. They were, in the words of John and Jean Comaroff, both the most active ideological agents of empire, the conscience of colonialism, and "its moral commentator" (1992: 186). It was in their role as the ideological agents of empire, note the Comaroffs, that missionaries rehearsed "all the arguments of images and ideology, of dreams and schemes, voiced among the colonizers as they debated the manner in which natives should be ruled, their works reconstructed" (1992: 184).

In December 1857, Livingstone gave an impassioned appeal for greater commitment for evangelization to a gathering at Cambridge University. The immediate response to the appeal was the formation of the Foundation of English High Churchmen of the Universities Mission to Central Africa by evangelical and Christian groups; the committee's mission, it was stated, was to establish "centres of Christianity and civilisation for the promotion of true religion, agriculture and lawful commerce" (quoted in Oliver 1952: 13). Christianity went hand in hand with civilization, agriculture, and commerce, and wherever one went in colonial Africa the most successful missions were the ones that were able to function – and present themselves – as outposts of modernity.

But if European powers valued the Christian missions for their capacity to mark out territorial zones of influence, Africans increasingly came to see their association with missionaries as their conduit into the new global economy engendered by colonialism. The transformative moment in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), one of the classic novels of colonialism in Africa, is when many men and women in Umuofia begin to rethink their attitude toward "the new dispensation": "The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed in Umuofia"

(1958: 126). In *Une vie de boy* (*Boy!*), Ferdinand Oyono's novel of colonial brutality, Young Toundi abandons his family and community on the eve of his initiation intoxicated by the bright new things displayed by missionaries (1956a: 12–13). And if one of the most dominant themes in African literature concerns the rise of colonial modernity, the transformation of African societies from traditional to national or global cultures, then it is not difficult to see why missions came to occupy a central role in the making of the cultures and communities of modernity: Christianity was "regarded as containing the secret source of power of the white man" (Opoku 1985: 525).

More than as representatives of Christianity's assumed cabalistic powers, however, missionaries were often seen as the agents of modernity in its most secular sense. Indeed, within the ideologies of missionaries and evangelists working in Africa in the colonial period, the notion of conversion was barely distinguished from modernization and the idea of progress. When Livingstone spoke about the evils of African society, his concerns were more secular than ecclesiastical: African society was evil because it had not yet awakened to the virtues of European civilization that were, in his mind, the values associated with the bourgeois *Weltanschauung*, namely, utilitarian individualism, private property, and enlightened self-interest (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 187). It was this modernity, rather than the ideologies of Christian conversion, that attracted Africans to the missionary enterprise. And one of the most powerful symbols of this modernity was the printing press, the instrument that enabled literacy and hence literature.

The coming of the printing press to many mission schools was to be surrounded by legends. When John Ross conveyed a printing press to the Lovedale Mission in South Africa in 1823, he saw it as an extension of the commission of the Christian Church to "the world of readers, who become the men of action, for evil as much as for good" (Shepherd 1941: 400). By 1910, the printing press at King's College, Budo, in Uganda was already surrounded by a venerable tradition: it had been brought to the school from Kampala, a distance of over ten miles, on the head of a porter, cheered by admiring crowds along the way (McGregor 1967: 22). The books printed by these presses were, in turn, to become legendary. The first Xhosa grammar and translation of the Bible was printed at Lovedale early in the nineteenth century; it was at this historic press that Tiyo Soga's famous translation of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in the 1860s; it was also here that Tengo Jabavu, the great South African nationalist, printed *Imvo*, a Xhosa weekly newspaper. The long-term effect of the arrival of the printing press was, however, in the emergence of African newspapers and literary texts. The story of Lovedale is exemplary in

this regard: in addition to the production of Xhosa grammars and readers, the Lovedale Press was also to publish the works of the first generation of African writers in southern Africa, including H. I. E. Dhlomo, D. D. T. Jabavu, A. C. Jordan, and Sol Plaatje. This situation was repeated throughout the continent: the Christian missions provided the means of production of early African literature.

The Africans' attraction to the material things of European culture did not exclude the impact of Christianity on their lives and practices. On the contrary, the new Christian system challenged the *doxa* of many African societies, including the institutions of marriage and the definition of the family, and, in the process, provoked a series of social crises. Clearly, if the recovery and celebration of an African traditional culture has become a defining characteristic of African literature in the colonial period, it is because missionaries generally tended to abhor native customs and traditions, which they saw as a threat to the new morality. As A. J. Temu has noted, missionaries "saw nothing good in African dances, music or in such important African traditions as circumcisions and initiation ceremonies. They lumped them together as heathen and immoral without trying to understand them, what they were for and what significance they had in the life of the people to whom they had come to teach Christianity" (1972: 155). As exemplified in works such as Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965), and Mongo Beti's *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) (*The Poor Christ of Bomba*), missionaries and their new African protégés sought to uproot such customs and traditions ruthlessly and relentlessly.

In the end, however, it was the colonial schools set up by missionaries that were to have the most profound effect on the shaping of African society and literary culture. From the very beginning, there was a very close relationship between Christian conversion, literacy, and a modern identity. Missionaries considered the school to be the key to the recruitment of new members and for the social reproduction of the values of colonial modernity; indeed, many of the Protestant churches insisted on literacy as a prerequisite for conversion, and early African Christians were generally referred to as readers. The desire for education and literacy was propelled, as we have already seen, by the social and economic opportunities they offered African Christians: "Literacy gave the elite access to the scientific and social thought of the western world, equipped them to enter into dialogue with the colonial powers over the destiny of Africa, and familiarized them with the social fashions of Europe which made their life style an example to be emulated by their less fortunate countrymen" (Afigbo 1985: 496).

Education and literacy were, however, as much about epistemologies as they were about fashions and manners. In fact, we can explore the way education and literacy overdetermined literary production in Africa by reflecting on how the introduction of literacy affected the cultural life of colonial society and their transformation of key epistemological assumptions. The first point to note here is one that scholars of literacy, most notably Brian Stock, have made in regard to medieval European society: that the rapprochement between the oral and the written came to play "a decisive role in the organization of experience"; that it brought about a change in the means "by which one established personal identity, both with respect to the inner self and to external forces"; and that textuality shaped the nature and meaning of experience itself because "as texts informed experience, so men and women began to live texts" (1983: 3–4). The interface of the oral and the written has, of course, been a major area of research in African literature and major writers have narrated the process by which literacy came to invent modern identities (see Ricard and Swanepoel 1997). What has perhaps not been explored in great detail is the process by which literacy and textuality represented both cultural discontinuity and new epistemic possibilities. In this regard, Stock's conclusion on the effects of textuality on European medieval culture applies as well to colonial Africa: "When texts were introduced into communities hitherto unfamiliar with writing, they often gave rise to unprecedented perceptual and cognitive possibilities; they promised, if they did not always deliver, a new technology of the mind" (1983: 10).

Still, what were the values promoted by a new economy of discourse based on reading and writing? And how did the resulting practices lead to the development of a culture of letters in Africa? In regard to the first question, it is important to note the indispensability of writing to what has come to be known as the invention of tradition in colonial Africa (see Ranger 1983). For the products of the mission schools, people such as Plaatje and Mofolo in South Africa, or Samuel Johnson in Nigeria, the meaning and authority of an event depended on its textual representation. It was through writing that the histories of important events such as the *mfecane* in southern Africa, or the history of the Yorubas in Nigeria, were made central to discussions about the African past. Similarly, for the university men who founded some of the most famous colonial schools in Africa, schools such as King's College, Budo, in Uganda, the Lovedale Institute in South Africa, and the Lycée William Ponty in Senegal, the written text contained the most visible symbols of the bourgeois society they were asking their students to imagine and contemplate. Since there were few living examples of modernity in the colonial zone, models could only be found

in books. At Alliance High School in Kenya, the headmaster, E. Carey Francis, determined that his charges should live up to the "inexorable moral rectitude" of the Victorian gentleman and a code of cleanliness to match, and wrote a book called *Hygiene for Africans* in which "he included caricature sketches of characters whose style of dress and personal appearance . . . he considered disgraceful" (Kipkorir 1980:120).

Literature and decolonization

If the period since the 1930s is now seen as "the era which witnessed the most extensive flowering of written literature in Africa" (Mazrui 1993: 553; see also Soyinka 1985), it was not simply because of the expansion in literary and educational opportunities that took place during this time period (although the emergence of the African university was crucial to the production of a literary culture), but also because it was during this period that colonial culture and its notions about the African were vigorously challenged and the idea of an autonomous African polis became a real alternative to imperial rule. This was the time when intellectuals and creative writers were called upon to imagine something that had never existed before – a modern African nation. The critique of colonialism in the literary works produced in the high nationalist period went hand in hand with the imagination of a national community (see Anderson 1991). And thus modern African literature, which began as an attempt to understand the shock of colonial conquest, came of age as an assertion of the illegitimacy of the colonial enterprise and the necessity of an autonomous African culture. Indeed, there is a way in which the most influential texts of the high nationalist period, works by Jomo Kenyatta, Peter Abrahams, Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono, and Chinua Achebe can be read as deliberate interventions in the "colonial situation debate" that opened this discussion.

At the heart of this debate were two questions that were to concern African intellectuals well into the 1970s: what had been the African response to colonialism? What were the real theoretical implications of imperialism for the nature of African societies and cultures and hence modes of literary expression? After several decades of African independence, the answers to these questions may appear simple, but in the period between the end of colonialism and decolonization, before the emergence of an African historiography and literary tradition, these issues were so much bound up with the politics of colonial rule that it was difficult to think of an autonomous African narrative on colonialism itself. Writers trying to imagine alternative stories to

colonialism were caught between two inscrutable discourses. On one hand, there was the official colonial discourse, which insisted (in a familiar paternal language) that colonialism was good for Africa and that many Africans welcomed the colonial project. As Albert Sarraut, the French Minister for the Colonies put it in *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises*, the colonizer had the "sole right to protect the weak and to guarantee their economic and human development" (cited in Bretts 1985: 314). On the other hand, there was an influential liberal historiography that recognized many of the destructive aspects of colonialism, but insisted that, on balance, colonialism had uplifted the African's condition (see Boahen 1985b: 782–83).

It was not difficult for African writers and intellectuals to respond to the official view: colonial paternalism became the subject of irony and satire in novels such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God,* Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (1957), and Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille* (1956) and *Une vie de boy* (1956). Responding to liberal historiography, however, was to prove more difficult for two reasons. First, while they seemed eager to defend the imperial tradition at its moment of atrophy, liberal officials and historians were generally sympathetic to African nationalist aspirations; indeed, many of them had educated and patronized nationalist intellectuals and writers and provided the institutional spaces in which the African voice could be heard. White liberals could not simply be dismissed as apologists for colonialism. Secondly, the liberal defense of imperialism was premised on an assumption that many African nationalists shared: that colonialism had introduced modern structures to Africa and that these institutions – the church, the state, the school, and the market economy – were central to the project of decolonization itself.

In regard to the question of colonial modernity, then, African discourses in the nationalist period were compelled to draw a fine line between imperialism and modernity. Pan-Africanist manifestos in the early twentieth century were as unanimous in their critique of imperialism as they were enthusiastic in their endorsement of modernization. In his *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire summed up the spirit of these manifestos by claiming that colonialism had hindered the proper Europeanization or modernization of Africa:

> The proof is that at present it is the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, and colonialist Europe which refuses them; that it is the African who is asking for ports and roads, and colonialist Europe which is niggardly on this score; that it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back. (1972: 25)

This double perspective – the critique of colonialism and the sanctioning of European modernity – was expressed succinctly by Jomo Kenyatta at the end of *Facing Mount Kenya*:

> If Africans were left in peace on their own lands, Europeans would have to offer them the benefits of white civilisation in real earnest before they could obtain the African labour which they want so much. They would have to offer the African a way of life which was really superior to the one his father lived before him, and a share in the prosperity given them by their command of science. (1965: 305–06)

Emerging out of a nationalist discourse that wanted the African to be both free and modern, African literature came to champion what were seen as traditional values within the structures and institutions of colonial modernity. Not unexpectedly, then, works of literature committed to the recovery of the traditional African past were often written in European languages, as if to exhibit the African writer's mastery of the language and forms of the colonizer.

It is, of course, taken for granted that when the products of the mission schools went to university, they turned to writing as a self-conscious revolt against the culture of colonialism. This is true up to a point: major African writers began their careers when they went to university. But in order to show how imaginative literature came to function as a powerful critique of colonial culture and its institutions, it is important to note the hold this ideology had on even the most anti-colonial writers in the African literary tradition. When Ngugi wa Thiong'o arrived at Makerere University College from Alliance High School, he was a true devotee of the missionary ideology, working against African backwardness with evangelical zeal (see Sicherman 1990: 390). At University College, Ibadan, as Robert Wren's research has shown, many students were devout Christians who rejected their native cultures and traditions (see Wren 1991). African undergraduates in the few African universities established in the last days of colonial rule had become, by virtue of their education, some of the most privileged African subjects in the imperial realm, and they tended to be ignorant of, or skeptical toward, African cultures; they were more comfortable with European things. These students were steeped in all the major traditions of European literature and culture, but as Abiola Irele was to recall, "in terms of concrete knowledge of the African background [they] knew next to nothing" (quoted in Wren 1991: 119). But herein lies the great irony of the colonial moment in Africa: it was these students, the most privileged colonial subjects, the masters of European culture, who were to lead the literary revolt against the institutions of colonialism; and it was through

the awareness of their alienation within the institutions of European literature and culture that they sought to produce a literature of their own.

Note

1. Note parallel with Lord Macauley in India. "Minute on Indian Education." In *Selected Writings: Thomas Babington Macauley*. Ed. John Clive and Thomas Pinney. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972: 237–51.

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21

The formative journals and institutions

MILTON KRIEGER

A long prehistory brings the story of journals voicing and connecting the expressive cultures of Africa and the Caribbean from the early nineteenth century through the twentieth, to *Présence Africaine*, a distinctive model and influential force by mid-century, and beyond. This chapter surveys their sources, examines some major texts, links these periodicals to the black world's urgent public issues, and assesses the genre's condition as the twenty-first century begins.

The early African precursors came from European mission churches that published oral narratives and some secular poetry and prose as adjuncts to religious texts. These were most notable from the Xhosa when a press opened at Lovedale in 1823 and the Yoruba as Samuel Crowther's similar evangelism emerged in the 1840s and generated a print culture of some diversity. The next phase, more secular, included newspapers created by publishing writers like Edward Wilmot Blyden and John Tengo Jabavu. Then came twentieth-century works like *Nigeria Magazine*, regularly funded and produced by colonial authorities with a scholarly style, "finished" look, and commercial appeal; there were 40,000 copies of its 1960 independence issue.

"Independents," however, dominated twentieth-century periodical literature. Secular and nonofficial reviews with creative and critical writing in diverse formats from small presses, these were started by individual or collaborating writers themselves, drawing on local practices and interests. Site by site, genre by genre, adding nonprint idioms, they privileged indigenous voices. Their composite role after the First World War (whether or not by conscious policy) was of great historic magnitude, spreading multiethnic, multinational, Negritude, and pan-African works, feeding and sometimes leading the politics of self-determination that emerged on the continent and in the diaspora by mid-century. Most pioneers would concur with the British Guyana poet and *Kyk-Over-Al*'s founder, A. J. Seymour, citing the desire for a "little review" to provide the new writers from his emerging

literary community a forum for challenges to orthodox forms and content (Seymour 1986: 3).

Trinidad (1929–30) and *The Beacon* (1931–33, 1939), for instance, with Albert Gomes, C. L. R. James, and Alfred Mendes at the helm, printed the island's writers from every background, including militant works on its identity and tensions, and on the nationalist and labor politics that produced the oilfield strike of 1937. In lusophone Africa, following earlier journals in Angola, Baltasar Lopes made *Claridade*'s nine issues (1936–60) Cape Verde's distinctive voice of cultural (if not yet political) affirmation, with a poem in Crioulo rather than Portuguese on its first cover. Peter Abrahams registered in *Tell Freedom* the impact of such sources when writing about Johannesburg's *The Bantu World* and its circle in the late 1930s; though funded by whites, its content and reach were pan-African, and it published his own early poems (Abrahams 1981: 188–202, 227). These were exemplary pioneers, in significant local as well as European languages.

Francophone circumstances extended the genre, in a way that straddled two categories that Michael Echeruo later identified, the "journal for Africans" with an operational base, patrons, and brokers "abroad," and the "African journal" more exclusively the product of indigenous creativity (1993: 724). Colonial policy brought soldiers, workers, and students to France, in numbers unmatched elsewhere. They framed debates on empire and liberation, culture, race and class, national and social struggle, in periodicals with distinctive literary and political cultures, expressed theoretically, critically, and creatively. Guyana's René Maran, a colonial administrator in Africa and a Prix Goncourt novelist (*Batouala*, 1921), made *Les Continents* (twelve numbers, 1924) a short-lived prototype. Its successors voiced issues of culture and politics raised in France and abroad, as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, W. E. B. Du Bois, the French Communist Party, and others contested the black world's immediate allegiances and visions of the future. La Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre from 1926 rallied those who perceived race and culture more than class as the salient bonds between Old and New World Africans, reflected in *La Dépêche Africaine* (1928–32) and *La Revue du Monde Noir* (1931–32). Those more critical of empire and committed to class analysis formed La Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre in 1927 to channel this wing of migrant opinion, variously attached to and distanced from, first, the Communist International, then France's United and Common Front movements. The Senegalese war veteran Lamine Senghor made *La Voix des Nègres* (1927) its voice, picked up despite schisms after his death into the 1930s in *La Race Nègre* and *Le Cri des Nègres*, with 3,000 copies per issue, produced by Sudanese and Senegalese successors.

Many forces in France during the 1930s divided the black worker, middle-class, and intelligentsia elements, including Old and New World Africans with their different territorial bases, skin colors, and degrees of assimilation, and disparate views about the French cultural avant-garde, political left, and imperial politics. But *Légitime Défense* (one issue, 1932) proclaimed commonalities among France's black peoples, recognizing alienation and the need to resist further assimilation. Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Léon Damas (Guyana), and Léopold Senghor (Senegal) used its successor, *L'Etudiant Noir* (1935), to advocate Negritude, a civilizational view with African roots, diasporic branches, and universal possibilities. This quest for indigenous cultural patrimonies and black world linkages engaged periodicals in the homelands as well. Haiti's turn of the century, belletristic *Le Jeune Haïti* and *La Ronde* gave way under the pressures of poverty, violence, and American occupation (1915–34) to the more politically conscious *La Nouvelle Ronde* (1925) and its successors into the 1930s, *La Trouée*, *La Revue Indigène*, and *Le Petit Impartial*, then *La Ruche* after the war, all influenced by Jacques Roumain's contacts and career in France and at home. It was much the same in Martinique, where Césaire made *Tropiques* (1941–45) a modernist, anti-Vichy landmark in literary and political culture.

Such were the seminal sources for *Présence Africaine*, founded in 1947 by Senegal's Alioune Diop. Its first decade fitted Echeruo's later "journal for Africans" rubric, for the Cold War and a heavily metropolitan patronage (André Gide wrote the first issue's foreword; Jean-Paul Sartre's and French anthropologists' circles helped create its niche) muted some of its precursors' global Left influences. Thereafter, moving away from Negritude's (by then) ambiguous "self-other" texture, shifting the orientation from ecumenical humanism to nonalignment and Third World initiatives in the spirit of the 1955 Bandoeng Conference, key writers of color made the journal more confrontational. Previously featured as creative writers, black authors' criticism and commentary also flourished in *Présence Africaine*'s second series, begun in 1955. They developed Echeruo's "African journal" role and influence through writer and artist congresses still held in Paris (1956) and Rome (1959), but with a more assertive agenda, and after 1960 used the journal's apprenticeship ground, publishing imprint, and other auspices to expand this repertoire.

"Spin-off" impacts spread to Africa when *Présence Africaine* collaborators, now familiar with publishing conventions and production techniques, returned to independent homelands, started journals, and organized festivals of culture in Dakar (1966), Algiers (1969), and Lagos (1977).[1] They expanded local print opportunities and fostered experimental cultures and resistance politics. *Présence*

Africaine, francophone at its roots but also influential on other terrain where colonization was challenged, moved writers and artists across boundaries of ethnicity, language, and culture, and of age and class (if less so gender) in late colonial and early independence years. Not so vigorous as in 1950, or 1975, the journal has remained a literary and cultural influence in 2000.

Among its prominent heirs in Africa were Nigeria's *Black Orpheus: A Journal of African and Afro-American Literature* (1957–82, but sporadic after 1970) and *Abbia: Cameroon Cultural Review* (1963–82, likewise less frequent in its later years). *Black Orpheus*'s title came from Sartre's vision of the search for identity and freedom while traversing (colonial) hell. Its founder-broker-patron was Ulli Beier, a German transplanted to Ibadan in 1950, present at the Paris congress in 1956, inspired to transmit that experience to Nigeria and the larger anglophone African community. A tireless promoter, linking entrepreneurial, academic, and creative venues based in Lagos, Ibadan, and Oshogbo respectively, using his experience and contacts on campus and in extramural clinics and workshops, Beier made *Black Orpheus* far more active and influential than its circulation of 3,500 suggests. Its contributing scholars and writers were formidable: expatriates like Martin Esslin, both Janheinz Jahn and Gerald Moore as early co-editors, and Paul Theroux; Nigerians like John Pepper Clark, Duro Ladipo, Christopher Okigbo, and Wole Soyinka; continental and diasporic Africans like Ama Ata Aidoo, Nicolás Guillén, Langston Hughes, Vincent Kofi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Agostinho Neto, Grace Ogot, Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo, and Tchicaya U Tam'si.

The journal offered critical debate and both verbal and visual creativity, contributed to every facet of global discourse on the African condition, and built a domestic readership. Funded primarily by Nigeria's Western Region government and the Rockefeller Foundation, Beier published *Black Orpheus* at least twice a year in its first decade, created links with similar ventures like South Africa's *Drum* and Uganda's *Transition*, and issued through Mbari Publications some twenty books of creative writing that the journal had printed in preliminary stages. After 1966, with Beier gone and civil war raging, with John Pepper Clark and Abiola Irele as editors until 1975 in conditions lacking Beier's foreign and domestic support, *Black Orpheus* sustained its high critical content and standard but lost some of its creative writing force, partly because deaths and exiles mounted. Still, *Black Orpheus* published Okigbo's "Path of Thunder." It lapsed until two issues in 1982, but it was no longer edited by John Pepper Clark and Abiola Irele and it came out of the University of Lagos. Those two last issues were parochial and academic when compared to its best and better days, and it went dormant.

Abbia was more domestically focused than *Black Orpheus*. Its readers were student advocates for African culture and nationalism during the 1950s who came home after independence in 1960–61 as ministers, civil servants, and independent professionals. Including the anglophone Bernard Fonlon, editor for its entire history, they started *Abbia* with patronage and funds from President Ahidjo and UNESCO among other sources, reaching a press run of 20,000. In many genres, using French, English, and indigenous languages, *Abbia* engaged Cameroon's intelligentsia, its regional and local cultures, and issues like language policy and educational models that were debated in all new nations. *Abbia* served Cameroon's culture as a vigorous journal of record and commentary through twenty years, forty volumes, and 5,500 pages. It faltered as its founders aged and their successors lost interest in *Abbia* as both a nation-building project celebrating Cameroon's unity and a voice for its diverse critics. Like *Black Orpheus*, its early success and subsequent limits reflected generic problems for late twentieth-century African periodicals, as political tension and fiscal duress made most countries uneasy homes for writers and artists.

Black Orpheus and *Abbia* typified larger-scale periodicals, with public as well as private subsidies, sustained for many years. Attention is also due smaller ventures that published young writers emerging in their homelands after the Second World War. Two student journals at university colleges in anglophone Africa were exemplary, *The Horn* (Ibadan, Nigeria, 1958–64) and *Penpoint* (Makerere, Uganda, 1958- , replaced in about 1970 by *Dhana*, *Busara*, *Joliso*, etc., from new East African campuses and publishers). *The Horn* drew on both the formal British literature syllabus and on modernist, international tastes within Ibadan's English department faculty. The staple fare of poems with some reviews, from Zaria and Nsukka campuses as well as Ibadan, helped shape the use of English and Nigeria's literary sensibility at independence and beyond. It gave the poet John Pepper Clark and the critics Abiola Irele and Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie their first productive settings, and added to Christopher Okigbo's and Wole Soyinka's earlier voicings abroad. *Penpoint* lasted longer, as an English department product each school term. More varied than *The Horn*, it included puzzles, prizes, and sturdier fare like essays on Luganda language and literature, reports from Makerere students at conferences abroad, and debates on African issues of the day. Peter Nazareth, James Ngugi, and David Rubadiri in its early issues, then by 1963 (following a writers' conference in Kampala) Dennis Brutus, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and Richard Rive from southern Africa, attested *Penpoint*'s apprenticeship and interlocutor roles. As *The Horn* nurtured talent for *Black Orpheus* at Ibadan, so *Penpoint* prepared writers

who made Rajat Neogy's *Transition*, founded in 1961, one of the continent's literary and cultural arbiters from Kampala, which Wole Soyinka turned into *Ch'indaba* (1975–76) and then resumed as *Transition* (1991–).

Simultaneously in the anglophone Caribbean, as federation politics and universities with branch campuses emerged, periodicals shaped literary and public culture. The argument can be made, even if they drew on expatriates and their resources, like those we have seen in late colonial and early independent Africa, that British Caribbean journals were more autonomous in Echeruo's sense than Africa's. Europeans locally active in schools and in social and sport clubs started *Bim* (1942– ; the word signified "inhabitant of Barbados" in colonial times), but the earlier, very diverse Trinidad journals were more the longtime editor Frank Collymore's model. He published writers of color from Barbados and the anglophone Caribbean (including Derek Walcott in his teens), arranged British Council and British Broadcasting Corporation access that spread their work in print and nonprint channels between the colonies and abroad, and used teachers posted among branches of the University College of the West Indies to discover talent and circulate *Bim* – all on a shoestring, soliciting advertisements as well as manuscripts. A. J. Seymour's *Kyk-Over-Al* (founded in 1945) similarly tapped scarce resources to bring writers into prominence in a British Guyana much changed by radical Second World War and postwar political aspirations. It fostered a national literature from the varied local roots of popular, experimental, less-established writing, then widened its geographic network and added visual to verbal arts. Edna Manley's talent and patronage made *Focus* (1946–60) a similar force in Jamaica. *Bim* and *Kyk-Over-Al*, despite times in abeyance, survived their founders into the 1990s, publishing authors from most of the major Caribbean cultures and languages and exerting influence far beyond their sites of origin.

Cuba and Haiti were important but different, more island- or country-specific Caribbean settings, because the region's Spanish- and French-speaking lands lacked the regionwide connections of British territory before 1960, and because of their distinctive experiences thereafter. The culture and arts "revista" thrived in republican Cuba (1902–58); *Bohemia* (founded in 1910) circulated 200,000 copies by the 1950s, and a vigorous provincial culture produced 205 of that era's 558 journals outside Havana. These periodicals produced both a modernist esthetic in *Revista de Avance* (1927–30) and *Orígenes* (1944–56), and the more directly political engagement of *Ciclón* (1955–58). Fidel Castro's victory and Nicolás Guillén's return from exile in 1959 then allied insurgent politics and culture. A weekly newspaper supplement *Lunes de Revolución* (1959–61) published the revolution's early, free experiments, with a print run of 250,000,

until security concerns after the Bay of Pigs invasion led to official control of and orthodoxy in *Casas de las Américas* (founded in 1960), the Spanish world's most widely circulated journal and a global model of state-sponsored culture, literature, ideology, and scholarship (see Ellis 1983). In the Duvaliers' Haiti, where the populist *La Ruche*'s editor, Jacques Stephen Alexis, took up arms in 1961 but was captured and executed, periodicals struggled for expressive and critical space. Journals like *Nouvelle Optique* (1971–74) from Canadian exile and *Le Petit Samedi Soir* (intermittent since 1972) at home challenged the harsh conditions the regime imposed on writers, artists, and the population at large.

There was an anti-regime lusophone African counterpart in *Mensagem* (1951–52), started by students like Agostinho Neto in Lisbon, shifted to Luanda, short-lived, but the model for other journals as Portugal's African subjects took new cultural and political bearings, revolted, and seized independence. But South Africans created the continent's most ambitious and militant periodicals. Jim Bailey, a mining magnate's son, started *African Drum* against apartheid's grain in 1950, moved it from Cape Town to Johannesburg, brought Anthony Sampson from London as the first of several professional expatriate editors, and hired a young African staff. A journal remarkable for its content and mass audience emerged by mid-1951, renamed *Drum*. Investigative photographic exposés under a "Mr. Drum" byline (most notably by Henry Nxumalo, before his murder while working for the journal) about convict farm labor, prisons, and township life gave its journalism a unique political edge and popular appeal. It covered resistance politics through Sharpeville and the Rivonia trials at home, and nationalist movements abroad. Its literary pages were equally notable. Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Casey Motsisi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, and Can Themba were *Drum* editors and writers. Peter Abrahams's and Alan Paton's novels in serial form, Peter Magubane's photographs, and major writers from Africa at large were part of the mix. So were popular elements like opinion polls, an African heroes series, cooking and farming tips, comics and cartoons, sports, show business, and "soft" sex texts and photographs (observing racial bars). *Drum* was international for anglophones, with distribution in Africa, the Caribbean and the USA, and editions published by 1960 in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria. *Drum*'s impact can be gauged in Peter Nazareth's account of its "slangy" influence on English spoken in East Africa.[2] Formal bans and informal pressures in the 1960s scaled down its coverage and frequency; *Drum* lost militancy, quality, and finally autonomy when Bailey sold it in 1979. With populist, insurgent township cultures like Sophiatown's suppressed, and most of the 1950s' vanguard dead or publishing abroad while banned at home, *Drum* became a "pulp" magazine.

From this vacuum emerged a number of small new South African journals, short on funds and dodging apartheid bans, most notably for black writers *The Classic* and *The New African* in the 1960s and *New Classic* and *S'ketsh'* in the 1970s, involving Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, Mongane Serote, and Sipho Sepamla. Then Soweto in 1976 called forth *Drum*'s major successor and a new generation of talents, in *Staffrider* (founded in 1978), published by anti-apartheid whites at Ravan Press. The title was apt, referring to a risky, illegal, creative performance art by young blacks riding trains open-air between townships and Johannesburg. Skirting censors, with a 7,000 press run by 1980 and probably more hand-to-hand circulation than Africa's norm, much of its text came from readings and art displays mounted, then chosen for *Staffrider*, by local collectives. Women and youths in factories, bars, gangs, and the streets were substantial sources; accounts of funerals as political actions, Miriam Tlali's "Soweto Speaking" column, and workers' testimonies were staple fare. From 1979, a "Staffrider Series" expanded *Staffrider* texts into low-priced book-length prose, poetry, drama, and anthologies. This comprehensive post-1976 project, tapping popular rage and its cultural product, circulated resistance works calling for and leading to the end of apartheid. Township editorial direction lapsed as banning orders mounted in the 1980s, but *Staffrider* conducted vital debates between black consciousness and "one nation, one culture" viewpoints, and on Albie Sachs's call in "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom" for the African National Congress to give artistic autonomy precedence over a politicized esthetic. The Congress of South African Writers took over *Staffrider* in 1991 and its force diminished, but *Current Writing* (1989), *Rixaka* (1990), and others picked up the slack and maintained these exchanges. Parallels with the tensions of revolutionary politics and culture in Castro's Cuba, faced by so many vigorous twentieth-century journals, were clear. And recalling Echeruo, whoever paid the bills and published it, *Staffrider* was, like *Drum*, decisively an "African journal."

This, then, at the threshold of the twenty-first century, was the foundation periodical literature for Africa and the Caribbean. More specialized or scholarly journals continued to appear, sharing or competing for the acclaimed writers and artists, seeking their successors, engaging debates in local, transnational, and transcontinental circles, sustaining critical and creative networks as politics and funds allowed. Nigeria illustrated the range, risks, and hopes: *Odu* was characteristic, with its starts, stops, "New Series" revivals, and (at times tenuous) survival since 1955, moving from an early Yoruba to West African and then all-African coverage, combining scholars and nonscholars, Nigerians and foreigners, as editors and contributors, shifting venues between Ibadan

and Ife campuses. Many newer Nigerian universities started similar journals of humane letters, but few survived. By contrast, *Okike* (published at Nsukka since 1972) retained Chinua Achebe's tight original focus as "An African Journal of New Writing" and appeared close to schedule.

In 1995, the year Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed, a new Nigerian periodical appeared. *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts* renewed *Black Orpheus*'s quest for identity and freedom, with fresh cultural and commercial bearings. Beyond previously established themes, idioms, and debates, it covered music, films, videos, photography, the publishing industry, and censorship. The design and colors were bold, and it used e-mail and distributors in Europe and North America. Editor Dapo Adeniyi's first column recalled Nigeria's once "luxuriant hub of assorted art and literary activities," recounted their decline, departure abroad, or death, then stated his hope and purpose: "to amplify the voices of those creative people of Nigeria and of Africa wanting to speak to the rest of the world" (1995: 4). Echoing here the pioneers of African and Caribbean periodical literature, he faced conditions in the domestic economy and polity and new technologies more fully developed and controlled abroad that made the entire genre's maintenance, and *Glendora Review*'s, a formidable task. But the indigenous sources traced here are deeply and tenaciously creative. Ways to graft and endure will surely emerge and persist, and carry African and Caribbean voices further into the new century, at their local roots and in the global culture.

Notes

1. The Paris and Rome congresses, and African journals including *Black Orpheus*, received funds from the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which also financed periodicals published in Cuba. This was found to be a USA Central Intelligence Agency conduit in the mid-1960s, a subtext to Echeruo's concern for autonomy.
2. Kenya in fact had a version of *Drum* in *Joe* (1973–79), founded by Hilary Ng'weno and Terry Hirst, keyed to city life, full of cartoons and comics, satiric, didactic, mildly political, with a peak press run of 30,000.

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22

Literature in Afrikaans

AMPIE COETZEE

This chapter will not be strictly chronological and teleological. It is not an attempt to begin at a "beginning" and indicate a "development" to an ever-shifting present. It utilizes the concept of the "discursive formation," where these formations were created within the political, social, and material conditions in South Africa. These broadly historical formations, identified by the distribution of "statements" within discourses, from approximately the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, can be identified as follows: Europe meets Africa; the indigenization of language; colonization; literature as discourse; the phenomenon of a "minor literature"; modernism and postmodernism.

Europe meets Africa

The creation of a written literature in South Africa – literature as a nineteenth-century European construct – does not begin with the canonical "literary" text. It will take its representations from the navigation texts and travel journals of those who documented the first meetings and confrontations in the contact zone between the indigene, the Portuguese and Dutch seamen and explorers. The travel discourses of the first Portuguese and Dutch navigators who sailed around the southernmost point of Africa, Bartolomeu Dias (1487–88), Vasco da Gama (1497–99), and Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1579–92) (see Axelson 1988: 1–8; *Itinerario Voyage* 1934), which record what seems to be the first significant impressions of the people and landscape of southern Africa, have to be read not only for their content as texts describing what they saw and experienced. They are also representations in language, limited as instruments of representation; but also powerful as textual creations constructing images of the other people as wild, barbaric, dirty, stupid, and untrustworthy. These perceptions persisted into the nineteenth century in Europe, for instance in Friedrich Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history. His divisions of Africa are similar to those of the navigator Van Linschoten, and his typification of the indigenes have the

elements common to all early travel journals: they are wild, childlike, without god, ruled by passion, full of witchcraft (Hegel 1975: 173–90).

These texts not only established the preconceptions of the settlers and colonists even before they arrived, they also intruded into the new worlds by appropriation: the naming of places, the setting up of signposts and beacons were all indicative of conquest. Places became signifiers – such as Dias's name for the Cape of Good Hope (Cabo de Boa Esperança), because it promised the discovery of India. Or it stood for the end of Africa, according to Pacheco Pereira (Axelson 1988: 3, 11). Because this cape was on a route somewhere the Dutch built a fort here, a post of refreshment for the navigators to India, a halfway station where the instruments of the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) would plant fresh vegetables and obtain cattle from the Khoi living there and inland.

This transitory station did, however, alter. Bartering and unequal exchanges led to conflict with the Khoi, but also to the enrichment of the company's servants, and ultimately to the desire for their own land to produce supplies for the company.[1] In 1657 it was decided to settle "free people" here, who with their freedom from the company's service would qualify for plots of land of their own choice. There are records of contracts made with two Khoi captains for the purchase of land; but they did not understand the contracts, as they were written in legal Dutch. What was exchanged for the land is unknown, and the Khoi had no concept of the written text, even though these texts had been the agents depriving them of their land and, ultimately, bringing to them an awareness of ownership, from whence most of the conflicts of the future would arise. From being a signifier of the sea route to India, the cape had now become a signified; and historians speculate that when the settlers began cultivating what they perceived as their own land the seeds were sown for the beginnings of a nation, the "Afrikaner nation" (February 1991).

Literary genres that have become part of what is now called Afrikaans literature, and which are essentially a continuation of certain discourses originating in the contact zone, are the travel journal, anthropological fiction, and the farm novel. Travel discourse with descriptions of landscapes and people can be traced from François Valentyn's descriptions of the Cape of Good Hope, the travel journals of Olaf Bergh, Isaq Schrijfer, Hendrik Wikar, Jacobus Coetsé, and Willem van Reenen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to Breyten Breytenbach's *Paradise* books at the end of the twentieth century, with their descriptions of this land and its landscape. But they are also virulent in their protest against the political ideology of the Afrikaner. Writing about the "natives," their customs and character, which had definite scientific

pretensions in the work of Peter Kolb and Olfertus Dapper, was part of the colonial reconnaissance since the seventeenth century. This became a tradition in early Afrikaans literature, categorized in the major literary histories as "Animal, Native and Folklore in the Narrative," represented in the work of the writers Sangiro (A. A. Pienaar), G. C. and S. B. Hobson, P. J. Schoeman, G. H. Franz, Mikro (C. H. Kühn), and to a certain extent the "first" recognized poet, Eugène Marais (see Kannemeyer 1984). This "anthropological" writing has never really ceased – see, for example, the recent novels of Piet van Rooyen. It remains an integral part of the Afrikaans writer's awareness of his / her physical environment. The farm novel (the "plaasroman" in Afrikaans), another genre growing from the representations at the beginnings of colonization, became canonized since the novels of D. F. Malherbe. The first of this genre, according to J. C. Kannemeyer, was his *Die Meulenaar* (1926) (The Miller). This genre – growing out of the need for finding the meaning of the farm and of land – has created various statements within the discourse. In it there have been celebrations of labor, the idealization of nature, and significant creations of relationships between master and worker in the works of Malherbe and C. M. van den Heever (*Somer*, 1935, Summer; *Laat Vrugte*, 1939, Late Fruits). The farm novel is still being written, but modern farm writing is often satirical, as in the work of Etienne Leroux, where the farm has become the site of a Bacchanalia and a decaying Foundation (*Sewe dae by die Silbersteins*, 1962, Seven Days at the Silbersteins; *Een vir Azazel*, 1964, One for the Devil), and postmodern, with an apocalyptic burning of the farm, such as in a novel by Eben Venter, *Foxtrot van die Vleiseters* (1993) (Foxtrot of the Meat Eaters). The dark past is narrated by a dying survivor in a book by Karel Schoeman, *Hierdie Lewe* (1993) (This Life). Then it also becomes a holiday resort: the farm merely a memory in a work by Etienne van Heerden *Kikoejoe* (1996) (Kikuyu). With the Restitution of Lands Act 1994, land rights that people lost because of racially discriminatory laws passed by previous governments since 1913 can now be restored or compensated for. Changes in the ownership of land could bring about changes in the meaning of the farm. The discourse may remain, although the statements may differ.

The indigenization of language

When Jan van Riebeeck, the first Dutch East India Company official who became commander at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, began his settlement, the language of the indigene had been Khoi for many centuries (Van Rensburg 1997: 2). Soon a heterogeneous community developed here, consisting of the

indigenous Khoi, the liberated new Dutch settlers (known as "freeburghers"), sailors of various nationalities, and slaves who had been arriving since 1658 from India, Madagascar, Indonesia, and various parts of Africa. In learning Dutch these slaves started speaking a language differing from Dutch, eventually becoming established, and named Cape Afrikaans. This variety of early Afrikaans is recorded in the Arabic script of the successors of the Muslim slaves, specifically the *Bayaan-ud-dijn*, the "Explanation of the Faith" written by Abu Bakr in 1869 (Van Rensburg 1997: 13).

The freeburghers of necessity had to become acquainted with the Khoi cattle suppliers. They, however, as was the case with colonizers throughout the world, did not learn the Khoi language; but the Khoi began learning theirs, and examples of Khoi Afrikaans have been recorded since 1671 (Van Rensburg 1997: 25). The pasture-seeking freeburghers moved inland and made more contact with the Khoi. Their language also changed until they no longer spoke Dutch, and the Khoi no longer spoke their own language. Several linguistic groupings – the Dutch-speaking freeburghers, Malay slaves from the east, the indigenous Khoi, and various Portuguese, French, and German soldiers of fortune and sailors – mingled the language of the colonizer. All these learners of Dutch spoke an "acquisition language," a form of language normally not learnt to perfection, and not in this case learnt from the Dutch East India Company officials, but from the ordinary people. A kind of "acquisition Dutch" developed, which became the lingua franca, and eventually it supplanted Dutch and Khoi (Van Rensburg 1997: 23).[2]

The written language, such as the language of the Bible, remained Dutch, however. For persons involved with the conversion of the indigene to Christianity, it was a matter of grave concern that these people could not read the word of God. This led to the creation of an organization for the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans. They called themselves the "Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners" (GRA: Fellowship of Real Afrikaners). Although their attempts were not successful at convincing the British Bible Society to undertake a translation (the language according to the society was still too dialectic) they inaugurated a written language by starting a newspaper in Afrikaans and translating well-known passages from the Bible. In spite of opposition from Dutch and English speakers (there were various official attempts to discourage the use of this "kitchen-dialect" and "patois") they succeeded; but the language, because of this opposition and because of a developing "Africanized" white identity, became a vehicle for a national identity – a white national identity. The language created by slaves and the Khoi was ultimately being appropriated for white nationalism, i.e., Afrikaner, in opposition to the English.

At the same time persons with poetic inclination began writing creatively in Afrikaans. The land, the landscape, historical events such as the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902 entered into the poetic expression of the work of Eugène Marais, C. Louis Leipoldt, Totius, and Jan Celliers. The writings of these first poets were significant statements within the discourse on language.

The coupling of language and white nationalism would ultimately bring about an ideological burden for Afrikaans. The landmarks of disaster were: 1925, when it was given official status, and standardization of the language became a project; 1948, when an Afrikaans-speaking political party ruled the country and institutionalized apartheid; 1976, the Soweto uprising and nationwide protest against the government, incited by the enforcement of Afrikaans at schools; 1994, when the political power was taken away from the Afrikaner. Now Afrikaans is, democratically, only one of eleven official languages. It has lost its privileged status, and English has become the language of the ruler, although Afrikaans, Zulu, and Xhosa have the most speakers (Van Rensburg 1997: 78).

On the other hand, a liberation of the language has taken place. During the era of apartheid it had developed as a medium of struggle. Although it was the language of institutional power, it was also the language of the oppressed, especially in provinces such as the Western Cape. Protest poetry and protest theater prevailed and an "alternative Afrikaans" became prominent. Since democratization, the writing and canonization of literature is becoming less and less confined to standardized, white, Afrikaans; the previously marginalized "coloured" writers have since the beginning of the 1990s produced significant poetry and prose from the world of the historically oppressed and the poor. The following writers have recently been published: Abraham Phillips, A. H. M. Scholtz, S. P. Benjamin, Patrick Petersen, André Boezak, Eugene Beukes, Isak Theunissen, and an anthology of poetry, *Nuwe Stemme* (New Voices), has been launched. The interest of creative writers (such as Thomas Deacon and Hans du Plessis) is revived by historic variations of Afrikaans in the oral tradition (such as Orange River and Khoi Afrikaans).

Colonization

Because South Africa only really became decolonized in 1994, with the first democratic election, colonization is a necessary discourse in South African literature. There is much of Afrikaans literature of the past that can be considered colonial, and there is much that has developed from an unconscious but definite anticolonial attitude by writers.[3] An example is the novel

'n Ander Land by Karel Schoeman (1984) (Another Country), where a visitor from Europe comes to South Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century and experiences Africa while at the same time journeying inward into his own life and thoughts.

The well-known kind of colonization, the control by a far-away power over an "uncivilized" part of the world for mostly mercantile reasons, has been inflicted four times on South Africa: first by the Dutch, almost imperceptibly since 1652, then by the British from 1795, by the Dutch again, 1803–06, and finally by the British from 1806 (Davenport 1987: 40–43). From the colonial powers came the concept "literature." When the Fellowship of Real Afrikaners began encouraging and creating its own "literature," they knew what they were up to: beginning to create a culture of reading.

Britain's imperialist onslaught at the end of the nineteenth century on the gold of South Africa (which ended in the Anglo-Boer War) was the momentum for some of the most memorable war poetry in Afrikaans. The "triumvirate" of Celliers, Totius, and Leipoldt, publishing their first poems from 1908 to 1911, expressed the suffering and grief of people in tender and bitter verses – Celliers's *Die Vlakte en ander Gedigte* (The Plain and Other Poems) appeared in 1908. Leipoldt's poem "Oom Gert Vertel" (Uncle Gert's Tale, in his *Versamelde Gedigte* 1980, Collected Poems) is the remarkable poetic narrative of an old man's sorrow and guilt after the war. Totius will remain known for his "Forgive and Forget" (in his *Versamelde Werke*, 1977, Collected Works).

The most vicious form of colonialism, and the kind of control that was perpetuated until 1993, was, however, "colonialism of a special type" (Bundy 1989: 3), or "internal colonialism," which "corresponds to a structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogeneous, distinct groups. South Africa combined the worst of imperialism and colonialism, so that 'Non-white South Africa' was the colony of 'White South Africa'" (Casanova 1975: 231). This lineage of power had developed from the seventeenth century, and the Afrikaner nationalists, when they came into power in 1948, institutionalized internal colonialism. The farmer and Afrikaner proletariat of the 1930s strove toward capitalist accumulation, and in the economic boom of the 1960s "capital found that apartheid worked" (Saul and Gelb 1981: 16).

Almost simultaneously with the strengthening of Afrikaner hegemony resistance grew among a younger group of writers, called the "Sestigers" (writers of the sixties). Although an awareness of injustice and alienation was beginning to be reflected in the thus far largely realistic Afrikaans prose, symbolic solutions for the growing contradictions in the country were not yet perceived. Writers such as Mikro, F. A. Venter, and later Chris Barnard engaged the

"question of race," but they were unable to break away from the false consciousness into which they had grown. Certain (white) poets, before the advent of the "Sestigers," had already in their poetry addressed race and class: Barend Toerien, but particularly Peter Blum, who satirized white bourgeois values, in the language ("coloured Afrikaans") and from the perspective of a black oppressed proletariat; and Ingrid Jonker, whose fame was established by a poem (published in 1963) on the protest of the black child. Toerien's poem "Orlando Landskap" (Orlando Landscape) voices the oppression of the workers of the township Orlando (see the selection published later, entitled *Aanvange*, 1984). The satirical sonnets of Blum are collected in *Steenbok tot Poolsee* (1956) (Capricorn to Polar Sea) and *Enklaves van die Lig* (1958) (Enclaves of Light). "Die kind" (The Little Child) by Jonker was published in her first book of poetry, *Rook en Oker* (1963) (Smoke and Ochre).

The most productive "Sestigers" were André P. Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Etienne Leroux, Jan Rabie, Bartho Smit, and later, but writing within the same discourses, Elsa Joubert. Most of them left the mother country at some stage and traveled or lived in France (Breytenbach became a French citizen). From this decolonized space their writing became liberated from the essentially realist and esthetic tradition that had developed in Afrikaans literature. They came into contact with Surrealism, the absurd, protest literature, and a completely different literary landscape.[4] Not only did they introduce different techniques, styles, and metaphors in prose and poetry, but they contested the hegemony into which they had been born. The protest was of such a serious nature that it led to imprisonment (of seven years for Breytenbach on charges of terrorism against the state), and the banning of their books. Brink's novel *Kennis van die aand* (1973) (*Looking on Darkness*, 1974), a novel about a sexual and political relationship between a coloured man and a white woman, was the first Afrikaans novel to be banned by the Publications Control Board. This censorship board was instituted in 1963 and became a powerful instrument toward the colonization of thought and creativity. Breytenbach's volume of poetry, *Skryt* (1972), was also banned, ostensibly for a poem about the atrocities committed under the regime of Prime Minister Balthazar John Vorster (the head of state at the time of Soweto 1976, and the death in police detention of Black Consciousness activist Steve Biko in 1977).[5]

Breytenbach and Brink are still the most prolific writers in Afrikaans (for wider consumption both are now writing in English as well), and it is difficult to assess in a few words their value to the literature and culture in the country. In general, however, Brink's prose has varied from realistic commitment to stream of consciousness, to magical realism, to postmodern deconstructions.

He is an innovator and an excellent storyteller: a literary specialist. Breytenbach is a master of metaphor (probably the greatest in Afrikaans) and of the poeticization of reality, but also a deconstructor of his own creations, postmodern, a nonlinear thinker – and politically and socially an unreconstructed anarchist.

Short-story writers who have written within the critical and contesting mode of the "Sestigers," transforming the Afrikaans short story are Abraham H. de Vries and Hennie Aucamp. The poet Antjie Krog, beginning her career as poet with adolescent and romantic verses in 1970, developed her original themes into powerful gender and political verses in such works as *Dogter van Jefta* (1970) (Daughter of Jephta) and *Gedigte 1989–1995* (1995) (Poems). Elsa Joubert began writing traditional travel novels, then exploited moments in the liberation of Africa. But her most significant work has been the documentary novel of the life of a black housemaid, Poppie Nongena, whose suffering under the bureaucracy of apartheid is painstakingly recorded in *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1962) (The Wandering Years of Poppie Nongena).

The awareness of the cultural and esthetic power of literature, of its contribution to knowledge, of the writer as prophet and intellectual, which the "Sestigers" exploited, came not only from their exposure to the outside world. It was a consciousness constructed since the "beginning" of Afrikaans by the GRA in 1875: of the meaning of "literature," "writing," and "culture."

Literature as discourse

In 1905, the journalist and historian Gustav Preller utilized the nature poem "Winternag" (Winter's Night) by Eugène Marais to prove how suitable "our mother tongue" is for the expression of our most intimate experiences (Opperman 1961: 100). Preller also argued for the professionalization of Afrikaans in journalism and literature. The conscious manufacturing of Afrikaans literature had seriously begun (see Hofmeyr 1987).

The production of poetry increased in quantity and in quality, and by the 1930s there was a new generation of poets, critical of their predecessors, striving towards greater maturity – away from the national and patriotic and from the panegyrics of nature. The leading figure was the poet, critic, and philosopher N. P. van Wyk Louw, who in his *Berigte te Velde* (1941) (Dispatches) formulated the ideals of a new generation, the idea of an Afrikaans national literature, where every human experience could be reflected in literature, without inhibition. Poetry would not be in service of the local and the typical, but of all humanity; poetic creation is therefore a high and compelling task, and the

poet consistently has to strive toward perfection. At the beginning of these essays he states: "I wanted to show you how great the task is to create a new civilization in this country – the destiny of our nation" (Louw 1941: 16).

Van Wyk Louw expresses a constant concern with the esthetic, the aristocratic, and the attainment of knowledge (the poet as intellectual, the poet as the guardian of the beautiful). His long poem *Raka* (1951) is a Beowulf-like heroic epic where an evil force (Raka) disrupts the idyllic existence of a tribe in Africa. He threatens their culture, their knowledge, and their art. The beautiful and pure protagonist, Koki, dies in the conflict to save his people from Raka. In powerful rhythms and impressive metaphors this poem is a symbolic representation of the persistent threat of the base, the barbaric, and the evil to the ethical and the esthetic.

Van Wyk Louw's poetry, up to his last volume *Tristia* (1962), with its echo of Ovid, strives to confirm poetry as the practice of the beautiful and the expressive word. This does not necessarily mean the elevated and the individualistic, as he also transforms the language and expressions of farm workers into folk poetry in the series "klipwerk" ("Stone work") in his *Nuwe Verse* (1954) (New Verse). The significance of Van Wyk Louw is that he saw poetry as a specific discourse – and it is still venerated as such, as a separate field of creative culture in the Afrikaans letters of today. These poetic adaptations of the language of working-class rural people would later reach perfection in the work of the poet who called himself "Boerneef" (I. W. van der Merwe), literally, "farm cousin."

Elisabeth Eybers, of the same generation, is seen as the "poetic voice of the woman." She began by expressing the world of the young woman, then the mother, then the cynicism of middle age and the ironic distance of old age. Hers is a poetry that changed from romanticism to irony. Uys Krige remained the romantic and the nomad of his generation, the traveler who brought the Mediterranean world into Afrikaans poetry: a renaissance person. The poets of the decade after the 1930s, specifically D. J. Opperman and Ernst van Heerden, consolidated poetry as a craft, to the extent that Opperman started creative classes in poetry at the University of Stellenbosch, where he taught literature. Many of the younger poets were taught much of their craft by him, often inheriting his type of metaphor and the meticulously constructed poetry he practiced. His epic *Joernaal van Jorik* (1949) is a richly metaphorical, poetically dense history of the Afrikaners: of their achievement and of their guilt.

As literature became a serious matter in the 1930s, literary criticism sought its theoretical foundation in the work of the Russian Formalists, in the autonomy

of the "woordkunswerk" ("verbal art") and in close reading as means of analysis. The relationship of literature to society, and its effect on society was seen as of peripheral importance. Various literary theoretical conflicts arose in apartheid South Africa between those who wished to construct a *littèrature engagée*, and those who perceived literature as an autonomous discourse.

The phenomenon of a "minor literature"

Although Afrikaans writers since the 1960s have undoubtedly been instrumental in awakening the consciousness of their readers to the political and social system they had inherited – and have often been at the forefront in protesting – the role of the so-called "brown" (coloured, *métise*) poets and novelists in Afrikaans cannot be underestimated. The predecessor of the younger black writers mentioned earlier was the poet and thinker Adam Small. Often using Cape Afrikaans – the unstandardized version of Afrikaans spoken by city workers, rural people, and fisher folk – his poetry is lyrical, straightforward, and addresses political suppression directly. This can be called people's poetry. His versatile, popular play, alternating dialogue, song, music, with an achronological, modernist construction of scenes, *Kanna hy ko hystoe* (1965) (Kanna, He's Coming Home), tells of the coming to town of an impoverished family, and of the disasters they experience. They are awaiting the return of their "savior," the talented son (Kanna) studying overseas; but he returns too late. This play is to a certain extent reminiscent of earlier Afrikaans plays by J. F. W. Grosskopf, recreating similar situations when Afrikaners were poor. Examples of social realist plays by Grosskopf are *As die tuig skawe* (1926a) (When the Harness Chafes) and *In die wagkamer* (1926b) (In the Waiting Room).

There was writing by black/coloured writers in Afrikaans before Small, specifically poetry, by S. V. Petersen (from 1940) and P. J. Philander (from 1955). In the work of Petersen the subaltern position of the black person is also expressed. They did not, however, deterritorialize Afrikaans from its standard, white, form and create a new literary language, a new venue for writers who came from an oppressed minority: a minor literature within an established, canonical one – such as Franz Kafka had created in German in Prague according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1993).

Small's creation of an alternative means of expression, identifiable by the language of the oppressed, has given impetus to a discourse by "Black Afrikaans writers," who have now clearly identified themselves as such.[6] The advent of prose writing by those who had previously been marginalized, especially since the 1980s – Abraham Phillips, A. H. M. Scholtz, S. P. Benjamin, Patrick Petersen,

Boezak, Beukes, and Theunissen – has strengthened the production of the literature of the Other, particularly in terms of a new narrative voice. Probably the most significant of these voices, also because of the oral nature of his narrative and its loose structure, is that of A. H. M. Scholtz, who introduced his first book, *Vatmaar. 'n Lewendagge verhaal van 'n tyd wat nie meer is nie* (1995) (Take it. An Alive Story of a Time that is no More), as the "story of the brown people of South Africa. They didn't come from the North, neither from over the sea. They originated here, true South Africans . . ."

Those writers who are still "marginalized" are rapidly becoming part of canonical, "major," Afrikaans literature. But in this process they are widening the fields of experience created and expressed in this literature. Although the prose writers are using standardized Afrikaans, and although the memory of the evils of apartheid will fade, poverty and class discrimination still remain. New poetry is still being produced in the street language of Adam Small, in the tradition of the "minor literature," for instance, *My Straat* (1998) (My Street), by Loit Sols: "Die ghetto's wiemel van creativity, mense wat moet praat: / as ekkie gan praatie, gan my bek stink" / "The ghettoes are swarming with creativity, with people who have to talk: / if I don't talk my mouth is going to smell."

Modernism and postmodernism

Whereas "modernism" should be seen as a more or less natural development in specifically Afrikaans prose since the 1960s, from the meaningful contact of the "Sestigers" with Europe, "postmodernism" will here mean, in the first place, writing trends after modernism. Although it may have been in reaction to modernism, or part of a cosmopolitan mindset, it does not in Afrikaans literature refer to any kind of organized movement.

While poetry was being instituted as a specific kind of discourse in the thirties, Breyten Breytenbach, in self-exile in Paris, had already since 1964 been writing a disjunctive, deconstructive, surrealist kind of verse – for example, in *Die Ysterkoei moet Sweet* (1964) (The Iron Cow Has to Sweat). The self-consciousness of his texts and their inherent deconstruction, even in erotic poetry and political protest, remain the only constant throughout a prolific career as poet. His *ars poetica* is spelt out, even in his prose writing: a rejection of the idea that language can represent reality, and an insistence on the mere signifying (sign-ness) nature of representation. As a painter of international standing, Breytenbach also manifested this poetic conviction in his drawings and paintings.

One can probably pinpoint the beginning of an awareness of the benefits of intertextual writing from the short stories of Koos Prinsloo, specifically his volume *Jonkmanskas* (1982).[7] His writing is also anarchistic in the sense that it subverts the father figure, is openly homosexual (whereas the earlier short-story writer, Hennie Aucamp, had treated this matter with care), and denigrates the political leaders of the time. Writing within the time of the militarization of South Africa, he creates the border, young men who have to fight battles in which they do not believe, and have to adapt to civil life afterwards. The "Grensverhaal" (Border Narrative), written from the traumatic experiences of young, protesting, soldiers became a brief genre in the early eighties, especially among short-story writers – for example, Etienne van Heerden's *My Kubaan* (1983) (My Cuban) and Alexander Strachan's *'n Wêreld Sonder Grense* (1984) (World without Borders). The novel of John Miles, *Blaaskans* (1983) (Half-Time), a novel with militarization as background, is postmodern in its conscious misreading of Afrikaner history, anarchistic in its belief that history is no more than faulty memory.

The involvement of the writer with his text, and with the writing process, is significant in Abraham H. de Vries's volume of short stories, *Nag van die Clown* (1989) (Night of the Clown), of which a postmodern analysis has been made by Van Heerden in his study entitled *Postmodernisme en Prosa* (1993 and 1995). The writer as memory, recreating memory, is the main character in Van Heerden's previously mentioned farm novel *Kikoejoe.* John Miles problematizes the task of the writer as chronicler in *Kroniek uit die Doofpot* (1991) (trans. as *Deafening Silence*, 1997), his history of the black policeman whose quest for justice led to his and his family's death by a hit squad in 1987. How does the writer – the white writer – use documents to create a life and a history? How can he do so, being part of a morally unacceptable hegemony?

Present-day Afrikaans novelists who do not quite fit into a "postmodernist" label, but who work from a preoccupation with history, of South Africa and of the Afrikaner, are Marlene van Niekerk and particularly Karel Schoeman. Van Niekerk's novel *Triomf* (1994) (trans. in English with same title) takes the reader back to the proletariat Afrikaner, the "poor white" of the 1920s, although in this novel they have now become "white trash." The suburb where they live was built on the ruins of the old black township Sophiatown. The current political situation stemming from the first democratic election of April 1994, their racism and their incestuous relations recreate a cynical present from an imagined past. Karel Schoeman's farm novels *Hierdie Lewe* (1993) (This Life) and *Die Uur van die Engel* (1995) (The Hour of the Angel) are subtitled "Voices," and in both novels his search is for the voices of the past, the voices

of the marginalized – to tell their story of this country. This calling-up of the unheard voices from the past is substituted for – and probably inspired by – his factual historical work, of which a recent example is the history of the (land) exploitation of the Griqua people by the British and the Boers (*Griqua Records*, 1996).

Conclusion

In Afrikaans, which had indigenized itself in Africa, a literature was constructed by black and white writers. In the process of affirming a language, this literature has become part of the creation of a hegemony, but ultimately and ethically also part of its necessary destruction, still retaining its esthetic status as literature. The tendencies of the most recent Afrikaans texts – to attempt memorizing and writing the past, and to open up the language dialogically to many voices – will give it the strength to create another, broader, future for what remains of the construct "the Afrikaner."

Notes

1. The importance of exchange, also as the means of representation of the westerner to the Other, has to be emphasized. See the attention given to it by Greenblatt 1992: 197.
2. According to linguists it was already difficult to find a fluent speaker of the Khoi language in the nineteenth century (Van Rensburg 1997: 23).
3. Only recently Afrikaans literary theorists have taken note of the discourse of postcolonialism. See Viljoen 1996.
4. Brink's collection of essays, *Mapmakers* (1983), is a particularly significant indicator of a growing consciousness. See the beginning of the introduction, "A Background to Dissidence": "I was born on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, in the early spring of 1960 . . ." (1983: 29).
5. The title of the volume is untranslatable, probably a combination of the Afrikaans word "skryf" (to write) and "skyt" (shit). The title of the specific poem is "Letter to butcher from abroad."
6. In 1985, they had their first symposium, published as *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers* (Black Afrikaans Writers) (ed. Smith, Gensen and Willemse); in 1995, a second symposium was held, leading to the publication in 1997 of *Die Reis na Paternoster* (The Journey to Paternoster) (ed. Willemse, Hattingh, Wyk and Conradie).
7. "Jonkmanskas" is an untranslatable word for an antique clothes' cupboard, specifically designed for a young man.

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23

East African literature in English

SIMON GIKANDI

In 1962, an important conference on African writing "Of English Expression" took place in Kampala, Uganda. As the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o was to recall almost thirty years later, the list of participants at the conference "contained most of the names which have now become the subject of scholarly dissertations in universities all over the world" (1981b: 5). But among the many luminaries attending the conference at Makerere Hill – among whom Chinua Achebe and Peter Abrahams were prominent – none were from East Africa. And since writers in African languages had not been invited to the conference, the most important East African writers, such as the Swahili poet Sir Shabaan Robert, were excluded by default. Among the assembled makers of African literature, the East African region was represented by student writers and apprentices (Ngugi, Rebecca Njau, and Grace Ogot) whose only claim to literary reputation was a few short stories in college journals such as *Penpoint*.

The Kampala conference was, nevertheless, a remarkable event in the history of African writing in English: it raised many significant questions about the historical and cultural conditions in which African literature was produced, its relation to literatures in the African diaspora, and the epistemological and theoretical questions that were central to the identity of an emergent literature, including what came to be known as the language question. The conference had brought together a distinctive group of writers from Africa and its diaspora, and in doing so it had come to embody what Ngugi was later to characterize as "the energy and the hope and the dreams and the confidence . . . of a continent emerging from a colonial era" (1981b: 142). But for the young East African writers at Makerere, the conference was also a source of doubt and anxiety, an occasion to reflect on what appeared to be the literary impoverishment of the very region that was hosting the conference. For compared to West and South Africa, East African writing in English appeared recent and belated: it was not until the middle of the 1960s that it began to acquire a distinctive identity and to capture the attention of literary critics

and historians. For this reason, it could not escape the anxiety of influence generated by the presence of an impressive gallery of writers from the rest of the continent and its diaspora.

At its very beginnings, East African literature in English was overshadowed by the manifest successes of African writing elsewhere and haunted by what was perceived as a cultural inferiority complex. Though not expressed openly, this inferiority complex was widely shared by writers from the region and was to provide one of the most obvious motivations for the production of a distinctly East African literature in English. Among a group of aspiring African writers and critics studying at Howard University in the United States, the Sudanese / Ugandan writer Taban Lo Liyong, felt his "national pride" hurt by the display of West African and South African literature and disgusted by his inability to conjure up East African literary figures to add to the emerging African esthetic pantheon. In 1965, out of his own sense of helplessness as a would-be East African writer, Taban wrote his seminal essay: "Can We Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa?" (Taban 1969). In the essay, Taban lamented the absence of a solid culture of letters in East Africa, the failure of writers from the region to exploit their innumerable oral traditions and historical sources, and their inability to produce works that would demand the attention of an international audience. But if Taban's essay was to become the starting point for many accounts of the development of English-language literature in East Africa, it was not simply because it incited writers in the region to meet the challenge of the new African renaissance in culture and letters, but because, beneath its overt polemical language, it had set the terms in which literary production and criticism would be carried out for most of the 1960s and early 1970s. Beyond identifying what he considered to be the lack of a literary culture in East Africa, Taban was very much interested in the practical matters of literary production; he was eager to discover the reasons for "literary barrenness" in East Africa, the role of writers and artists in decolonized societies, and the measures needed "to spark interest in literary production" (1969: 31).

It is hard to say what direct influence the Kampala writers' conference and Taban's essay had on the emergence of East African literature in English; what is manifest, however, was the sudden bloom in creative writing in the 1960s, a period that saw the publication of Ngugi's major novels and the early works of Okot p'Bitek, which were to change the nature of African writing and to put to rest the myth of literary barrenness in East Africa. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the region was in a state of cultural ferment, with new literary works and essays appearing in journals such as *Transition*, *Penpoint*, *Dhana*, and *Zuka*. This

was the period associated with famous artistic centers such as Chemi Chemi, established and run by Ezekiel Mphahlele, the then exiled South African writer, and Paa ya Paa, founded by the Tanzanian artist Elimo Njau and the Kenyan writer Rebecca Njau. By the late 1960s, the East African Publishing House, which had hired some leading writers such as Lennard Okola and Richard Ntiru as its literary editors, had established a Modern African Library to rival Heinemann's famed African writers' series. As younger writers such as Ntiru, Jared Angira, and Okello Oculi were published side by side with established authors, namely, Ngugi and p'Bitek, there was a feeling that East Africa was no longer a literary wilderness.

Makerere English

In retrospect, however, it is clear that East Africa had not been a literary wilderness. While the region was not to produce writers with international reputations until the 1960s, it had a substantial literary culture in African languages such as Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania, Somali in Somalia, and Amharic in Ethiopia. Because these literatures dated as far back as the fifteenth century, they often had a local and regional authority and reputation that writing in English could not easily match. Indeed, the existence of African language literatures had perhaps a greater impact on the nature of writing in English than the anxiety of influence that had driven Taban to declare East Africa a literary wilderness. Literacy in African schools in the region during the colonial period was primarily in local languages, and it was in such languages that many aspiring writers began their careers. The most notable of these was Okot p'Bitek, whose first two works *Lak Tar* (*White Teeth*) and *Wer pa Lawino* (later to be translated as *Song of Lawino*) were written in Lwo. Nevertheless, with the exception of p'Bitek, many writers in African languages were not university educated and what this meant, among other things, was that they did not have a voice in the debate on literature and culture in the 1950s and 1960s. In the end, the identity of East African literature was to be determined in university departments and literary journals and was thus to reflect the interests and anxieties of a small elite. And since this elite was to manage the institutions of literary production after decolonization, their perspective on what was – or was not – literature, was going to be seminal in the shaping of literary culture in East Africa.

A history of English writing in East Africa must hence begin with an accounting of the location of the university as the primary site of literary production. As Ali Mazrui noted in 1971, the Department of English at Makerere University

College could claim to have produced "more creative writers in English than any other Department, at home and abroad" (1973: 41–42). Indeed, the first attempts to produce an East African literature in English were made in inter-hall competitions at Makerere and in the English Department's journal *Penpoint* under the tutelage of British expatriates such as Hugh Dinwiddy, Margaret MacPherson, and David Cook. Work produced at Makerere by student writers, including David Rubadiri, Jonathan Kariara, Elvania Zirimu, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and collected by David Cook and David Rubadiri in *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology* (1965), constituted the foundational text of East African literature in English. But what exactly were the defining characteristics of Makerere English?

To answer this question, we must first reflect on the ideologies of literature and criticism that were taught at Makerere in the last days of colonialism in East Africa, for there is a distinct sense in which creative writing by student writers was an important counterpoint to the books they read and the methods of literary analysis they were taught. As Carol Sicherman has noted in her examination of Ngugi's colonial education, the syllabus and critical approach at Makerere, constructed along the lines Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis had popularized in the study of culture in Britain, promoted "'universal' moral values, interiority, and individualism" (1993: 19). Sicherman has provided a convincing list of the reasons this kind of literary education stifled creativity by alienating African authors from their sources and traditions, but she does not adequately consider the extent to which this alienation created the ideological and linguistic tensions that made writing possible. For while it is true that most of the writing contained in *Origin East Africa* was self-consciously "neo-European" in its form, it sought to discover and come to terms with a specific African context that the curriculum at Makerere negated. In looking at work produced by student writers at Makerere, then, what strikes the reader most is not their imitation of European form, but the ways in which their mastery of the Great Tradition would enable them to introduce African topics into their poetry or prose.

Rubadiri's famous poem, "Stanley Meets Mutesa" (see Cook and Rubadiri 1965: 78–80), was clearly fashioned after T. S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi," but it was through this self-conscious imitation of form that the poet was able to dramatize one of the most fateful colonial encounters in the history of East Africa – the meeting between Henry Morton Stanley, the Anglo-American agent, and the king of Buganda. The poem used the motif of the journey as it had been honed in the poetics of modernism, but its subject was a peculiarly East African event. Clearly, early East African literature in English was

defined by the obvious tension between European forms of literary expression and local materials or topics. The central motif in early Makerere literature (Jonathan Kariara's short stories "Unto Us a Child is Born" and "The Initiation" or Ngugi's "The Return" and "The Fig Tree" are fairly representative of this) was the struggle between the subjective desire promoted by the ideologies and forms of high modernism and the communal norms that were supposed to be characteristic of traditional African society (see also Ngugi 1975 and Kariara 1986). The moral conflict common in these stories, a conflict that arose when individuals were forced to choose between their unique identities and voices, and sense of community, was also an opposition between the forms of modern Englishness and the African setting of these fictions. The celebration of the individual as the arbiter of moral choice in these works was often reminiscent of the great masters of modernist fiction, most notably D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad, but the worlds they represented were typically African. Because of this overt identification with high modernist moral norms and their concomitant styles, Makerere writers were later to be accused of "cultural slavery" (Sicherman 1993: 20). But as David Rubadiri was to note in an influential discussion of the development of writing in East Africa, these stories, though written from "a personal point of view," were trying "in a rather vague and rather delicate manner to examine the position of the African and his community but hardly ever digging deeply into the people themselves" (1971: 149). Almost all the works collected in *Origin East Africa* can be read as a vague and tentative attempt, by an isolated colonial elite, to recuperate a precolonial African tradition in literary discourse. The rhetoric of failure that seemed to characterize the works in this anthology was as much a product of modern writing as taught at Makerere as it was a reflection of the authors' attempts to reconcile their own subjectivity with the position of their communities. Many of the writers represented in *Origin East Africa* had come to the university from colonial zones under states of emergency. The university – and with it culture and the production of writing – was often seen as a sanctuary against both colonial and nationalist violence.

Nationalism and literature

But if the writings of the university-educated elite were to capture critical attention because of their mastery of the idiom of modernist alienation, another tradition of East African writing had developed, not so much to challenge Makerere's literary culture, but to provide a deeper accounting of the communal histories that a colonial education had sought to repress. The earliest work

in this tradition is Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), an anthropological account of Gikuyu culture produced for Bronislaw Malinowski's seminar on cultural change at the University of London. Kenyatta's text was ostensibly concerned with the representation of precolonial Gikuyu culture, but its significance for the emergence of a literary culture in East Africa can be found in its powerful articulation of some of the key themes of cultural nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. The work was concerned with the existence of an autonomous Gikuyu culture with its own distinct traditions that were not at odds with modernity and modernization. It used the language of European social science to represent a version of African life organized according to rules and regulations, as a counter to primitivist discourses of the time; and it provided a local perspective on the effects of colonial policies on African families and communities.

Because of Kenyatta's imprisonment by the colonial government from 1952 to 1961, the effect of his work on East African writing was not to be felt until the early 1960s, but on the eve of decolonization, *Facing Mount Kenya* was to affect literary and cultural production in the region in two closely related ways. First, it was to provide a model for nationalist writers who could now draw on their own political experiences as representative of the African response to colonial rule. In works such as J. M. Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee* (1963), Tom Mboya's *Freedom and After* (1963), and Mugo Gatheru's *A Child of Two Worlds* (1964) previously taboo subjects such as "Mau Mau" could be represented by those who had witnessed the struggle for Kenyan independence from detention camps (Kariuki), the trade union movement (Mboya), or the squatters of the "White Highlands" (Gatheru). This writing, which came from the anticolonial frontline, provided an alternative to the kind of writing that was produced at Makerere in dramatic ways. As Ngugi was to note in his 1975 homage to J. M. Kariuki, the very existence of a literature produced by the witnesses of a now triumphant nationalism, was an unprecedented act of transgression. On its publication in 1963, the year of Kenya's independence, *Mau Mau Detainee* was, in Ngugi's words, at the "center of a critical rage and storm": it outraged the local settler establishment "because an African, a Kenyan native, had dared to write openly and proudly about Mau Mau as a national liberation movement . . . They did not know how to cope with Kariuki" (1981: 95).

The most transgressive aspect of Kariuki's memoir, and indeed of all the other works in this tradition, was apparent in its tone: against the *angst* that dominated Makerere writing, *Mau Mau Detainee* was admired for "the triumphant ring of hope rising above the sober and restrained tones of its rendering" (Ngugi 1981: 99). While university writers were trying to figure out the

exact relationship between the esthetic forms inherited from colonial modernism and the politics of nationalism, writers of nationalist memoirs had a more explicit view of their function. They were aware, as Tom Mboya was to note in his preface to *Freedom and After* (1963), that the process of decolonization engendered such radical reversals in the colonial relationship that the old paradigms could no longer account for the African experience: the speed of change was "heartening to a nationalist and a Pan-Africanist, but it is sometimes also daunting and awkward for an author" (1963: v). Since the central trope in these memoirs was the making of the author as a nationalist, there was an implicit belief that the political experiences would shape the form of writing itself; these memoirs were not simply attempts to remember a colonial past, but a celebration of individuals who had risen from colonialism to nationalist success. Almost without exception, these memoirs would open with the author's childhood experiences under the yoke of colonialism (Mboya in a sisal estate and Kariuki and Gatheru in a settler's farm) and end on the eve or day of Kenya's independence.

The second impact of the tradition of writing generated by *Facing Mount Kenya* and continued by *Mau Mau Detainee* can be garnered from Ngugi's remarks quoted above: reading nationalist memoirs allowed the Makerere writers to break out of their literary cloister and to confront the culture of colonialism outside the academic institution. Indeed, if the problem with Makerere English was that it alienated students from their histories, cultures, and experiences, as many of them were to later complain, the nationalist writers had provided a discourse in which the relationship between writers and their communities was dynamic and symbiotic. If Makerere English had furnished students with a Europeanized esthetic incapable of representing the pressures of colonial rule, nationalist memoirs provided striking models on how the contested history of colonialism in East Africa could be represented in writing, of how a painful colonial past could be mediated by the literary text.

For readers looking for evidence of the ways in which the nationalist memoirs came to affect the literature produced by the university elite, there is no better place to start than Ngugi's first two novels *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965). For while these works were still cast within a familiar European framework – the romance of childhood, the *Bildungsroman,* and the individual subject's search for a moral position above collective interests – the dominant themes were drawn directly from the discourse of cultural nationalism (see Gikandi 2000). As a result, historians of East African literature will find, in Ngugi's first two novels, an intriguing tension between modernist *angst*

and nationalist self-assertion: the main characters in both novels (Njoroge and Waiyaki) are archetypal subjects of the bourgeois novel, characters striving to acquire self-consciousness against the political demands of their families and communities. But it is through these modernist narrative forms that Ngugi would try to understand and valorize the key tropes of Gikuyu cultural nationalism since the 1920s, focused on questions of land tenure, religion, and education. And thus, if Ngugi's early works are not marked by the triumphant tone of the nationalist memoirs, as Jacqueline Bardolph has argued (1984: 37), it is because, like many members of the university elite, he was ambivalent about the violent history of colonialism in Kenya that he had chosen as a subject for his novels. What made Ngugi's works important for the development of literature in Kenya, however, was his ability to use the subjective language of the modern novel to represent political movements from which he was isolated or alienated. In this respect, his early works provided a model for a younger generation of university-educated writers seeking a form to represent the ambivalent narrative of decolonization.

Although Ngugi was emerging as the most important East African writer in English in the 1960s, the mode of writing he was promoting in his early novels – one in which the center of a narrative was the tragic conflict between an individual and his community – was not easily accessible or attractive to writers who were not necessarily engaged with the politics of "Mau Mau" and decolonization. Though not entirely indifferent to African experiences under colonialism, Grace Ogot's early works, *The Promised Land* (1966) and *Land without Thunder* (1968), were focused on the tragedies that befell individuals and communities trying to negotiate the precarious line between what was commonly known as modernity and tradition. Whether dealing with the psychological and economic problems confronting a migrant Luo family in colonial Tanganyika in *The Promised Land,* or exploring the strains put on old mystical beliefs by modern institutions in the stories collected in *Land without Thunder*, Ogot's early works were marked by an element of the gothic unusual in African writing. But for Ogot, gothic was more than a literary style; for in the absence of any self-conscious adoption of oral narrative in her work, the supernatural and the fantastic were the vehicles through which Luo traditions, identified as mystical or mysterious, were recovered and represented to a modern readership. Ogot was one of the first East African novelists in English to represent tradition as a bulwark against modern alienation.

This concern with tradition was also a major interest of Ethiopian literature in English published in the 1960s. But there is an important difference between the sense of tradition as it was represented in the works of Kenyan writers and

their Ethiopian contemporaries. While tradition was important to Kenyan writers because it enabled a discourse that could be used to resist colonial rule, in Ethiopia, which was the only East African country that had basically escaped European conquest, traditionalism was associated with the feudal system and was often attacked for retarding modernity and rationality. In works such as Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin's *Oda Oak Oracle* (1965), Sahle-Sellassie's *The Afersata* (1969), and Danichew Worku's *The Thirteenth Sun* (1973), the authors adeptly turned to ancient Ethiopian religious and legal sources to question an imperial order that was resisting change. In these works, it was not always clear that tradition was the cause of, or solution to, Ethiopia's entanglement with modernity and modernization.

The Okot school and the poetic tradition

For historians of East African literature, however, the most striking literary event in the region was the publication in 1966 of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. Okot had originally written the poem in Lwo, but this version, known as *Wer pa Lawino*, had been rejected by numerous publishers who did not think there could be an audience for poetry in an African language. Before the author offered the poem in translation, it was performed to audiences in Northern Uganda where it received an enthusiastic reception. Sometime in 1965, Okot read a small section of his English translation to a writer's conference in Nairobi where, as Rubadiri was to recall later, it changed the "whole tone of the conference" and the nature of East African writing (1970: 150). Within the context of writing in African languages, *Song of Lawino* did not mark a new event, but within the tradition of East African writing in English, a tradition struggling to establish its own identity, the poem enabled writers in the region to overcome a formidable psychological barrier – the belief that African oral forms could not be the basis of refined poetry and that the theme of cultural and political conflict "was not the kind of thing that a fine writer in the English tradition should be concerned with" (Rubadiri 1970: 151). *Song of Lawino* was the first poem in East Africa to "break free from the stranglehold of British writing" (Nazareth 1984: 10) and to assert the centrality of oral forms in literary production (see Lindfors 1984 and Heron 1976).

Though a university man himself, Okot p'Bitek had nothing but contempt for the great tradition of European writing. As he argued powerfully in *Africa's Cultural Revolution* (1973), literature was not epistemological by nature – the object of analysis and interpretation – but about "communication and the sharing of deeply felt emotions"; it was an expressive activity "between the

singer and the audience, between the story teller and his hearers" (1973: 22). In the circumstances, he argued, literature could not "meaningfully be a subject for an examination," but part of a "festival": "Let the people sing and dance, let them exchange stories and attend theatres for the joy of it," he asserted (1973: 23). It is this idea of literature as performance that was going to make p'Bitek's songs unique experiences in East Africa. For what p'Bitek had done in his construction of *Song of Lawino* and its sequel, *Song of Ocol,* was not simply to make token gestures to orality, but make Acholi notions of performance (especially dance, idioms, and songs) the center of his poetic project; in the process, he redefined the idea of literature itself and its terms. Through his songs, p'Bitek made the question of cultural conflict the central theme of East African writing in the late 1960s and 1970s and provided a new generation of writers with an alternative to the great tradition of European writing. In the wake of *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* and their unprecedented popular appeal, long poems in what came to be known as the Okot school include p'Bitek's own *Two Songs* (1971a), Okello Oculi's *Prostitute* (1968a), *Orphan* (1968b), and *Malak* (1976), and Joseph Buruga's *The Abandoned Hut* (1969). These poems were characterized by two main features: their concern with what Okot had already popularized as the "African cultural revolution" – how could African culture be rescued from the domination of European institutions? – and a self-conscious negation of the European poetic tradition and celebration of oral culture. For reasons that are not yet clear, most of the successful poems in the Okot tradition were drawn from the Lwo cultures of northern Uganda.

Although the songs were the talking points of East African cultural and literary debates during the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the majority of the poetry published during this period continued to follow an older poetic tradition in which established European forms were fine-tuned to represent local subjects. A significant development on the poetic front, however, was that even poets trained in the European tradition were now using their verse to intervene in the cultural wars and, for this reason, they were also appropriating oral poetic forms as a distinctive aspect of their works. In the 1970s, even the most subjective and lyrical East African poets, most notably Jared Angira (*Juices*, 1970, and *Silent Voices*, 1972) and Richard Ntiru (*Tensions*, 1971) were using their verse to comment on public issues such as corruption and urbanization, rather than to express a lyrical mode of retreat from the politics of everyday life. Here we had an East African poetry that was unashamedly modernist in form (Angira's preferred form was the Poundian canto while Ntiru was partial to the dramatic monologue) but emotively concerned with the violent politics

of decolonization. In "Canto for the Rain," for example, Angira would open with three verses invoking the generalized experience of rain and the images and symbols it conjured in the poet's mind; in the second half of the poem, however, the universalizing language of nature would provide the dramatic backdrop for subtle political commentary:

> And I say
> How can I ever
> Bury all these meanings
> All these symbols
>
> And these persistent images
> Of Kwame and Fanon
> Shiver my jaws, tremble my hands
> Wanting to raise the image
> In a mirage of the dream
> It is me to be raised
>
> (1979: 30–31)

It was not by accident that Christopher Okigbo was the figure that motivated and haunted young poets in East Africa during the late 1960s: his verse presented young writers with models of how the rich abstract language of modernism could be Africanized; his death at the Biafran front was a frightening example of the uneasy relationship between literature and politics (see also Okola 1967b). Something else was apparent in East African poetry in this period: beneath its homage to modern masters, it was being influenced as much by local events and writers within the tradition of African and diaspora literature. From the first two lines of Ntiru's poem "Ojukwu's Prayer" – "If we must live, let it not be like dogs, / To Whom a bone is flung after the meat has been shaved / away" (1971: 57) – readers could be simultaneously transported to the Nigerian civil war (or its painful images and headlines) and Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die," which Winston Churchill had used as a clarion to rally his troops against Nazi Germany. Still, as Rubadiri, the old master of European form, was to note, Okot's songs started a new trend in East African writing because they were boldly examining "the very kind of conflicts and problems that we had been frightened of trying to examine before . . . We found we had been brainwashed to think that these were not the kind of things that a fine writer in the English tradition should be concerned with" (1971: 151). Even an irreverent poet like Taban Lo Liyong (*Frantz Fanon's Uneven Limbs*, 1971), who sought to parody the Okot tradition in his works, was also using oral forms to comment on the ironic complexities of postcolonial life.

The crisis of decolonization

One of the most distinctive aspects of East African literature in the 1960s and 1970s was its adoption of a distinct regional character: the majority of the writers from the region had been educated at one of the three colleges of the University of East Africa, and it was not unusual for writers from one country to live and work in another; publishing houses such as the East African Literature Bureau and the East African Publishing House were regional in character; local newspapers and literary magazines were circulated across borders. By the late 1960s, however, it was clear that the different East African countries were developing in different political directions, and long before the collapse of the East African Community, divergent cultural policies were affecting both the character of the literature being produced in the region and its centers of concern. With the Arusha Declaration of 1967, Tanzania had embarked on a policy of socialist development in which Swahili was going to play a key role in what was supposed to be a cultural partnership between the nation's government and its writers. In Kenya, on the other hand, English continued to flourish with the encouragement of the postcolonial government, but writers were increasingly finding themselves at odds with the state in regard to political and cultural issues. Meanwhile, in Uganda, Somalia, and Ethiopia, military coups and the emergence of dictatorships were to restrict literary expression considerably.

Even with these divergences in political culture, however, the period from 1967 to 1977 was to witness the production of major works concerned with what has come to be known as the politics of disillusionment. The signature work of this period is perhaps *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967), the memoir of Oginga Odinga, a leading Kenyan nationalist and opposition figure, that, unlike earlier narratives in this tradition, plotted the path of nationalism from the vantage point of its unfulfilled promise and ultimate failure. Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), perhaps the most prominent novel in the tradition of disillusionment, used modernist techniques – a split temporality, interior monologue, and dialogic narration – to retell the struggle for independence in Kenya as a drama of betrayal and ironic reversal. Clearly, as the major East African writers tried to fashion literary forms for representing the crisis of decolonization, they seemed to have discovered a crucial affinity between the theme of postcolonial failure and modernist techniques. It is notable that novels concerned with what Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) had called "the pitfalls of national consciousness" were simultaneously adopting and undermining the established conventions of realist representation.

Indeed, the majority of novels written at the end of the 1960s located themselves squarely within an African avant-garde tradition made famous by foundational novels by Wole Soyinka (*The Interpreters*, 1965) and Ayi Kwei Armah (*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, 1968) in West Africa. The most prominent East African novels in this tradition were Rubadiri's *No Bride Price* (1967), Robert Serumaga's *Return to the Shadows* (1969), Peter Palangyo's *Dying in the Sun* (1968), Leonard Kibera's *Voices in the Dark* (1970), and Ali Mazrui's *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (1971). Novels of disillusionment in East Africa were an important mark of the parting of ideological paths between writers and nationalist politicians; going against the rhetoric of nation building promoted by the political class, they echoed a familiar rhetoric of modernistic failure in which intellectuals (the heroes of these novels) were shown to be uncompromising critics of the dominant political culture but, at the same time, incapable of affecting the process of social change in their respective countries (see Gikandi 1984: 240). The narrative energy driving these novels – especially the conflict between high philosophical ideals and the constraints of real politics – was derived from what Georg Lukacs, writing in a different context, has called the "romanticism of disillusionment" (1971: 112–13): a certain imaginative retreat from the public sphere was seen as the only way that the intellectual class could give meaning to its life in an age of postcolonial disillusionment.

But not all novelists from this period posited their works as modes of subjective retreat from the public sphere and nationalist politics. Indeed, in the works of Meja Mwangi and Nurrudin Farah, the most prolific novelists to come out of East Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, we have evidence of a new kind of writing fusing the best of modernist and realist techniques, to simultaneously represent and transcend the politics of everyday life. Meja Mwangi's fame rests on a series of award-winning novels (*Kill Me Quick*, 1973, *Going Down River Road*, 1976, and *The Cockroach Dance*, 1979) admired for their uncompromising representation of harsh life and what Angus Calder has called "the unselfconscious deployment of the techniques of 'popular' fiction" (1984: 177). In contrast, Nurrudin Farah's novels, beginning with *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) to the "dictatorship trilogy" (*A Naked Needle*, 1976, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, 1979, and *Sardines*, 1981) were notable for their selfconscious intertextual relationship to other modernist texts in Africa. If Mwangi's power as a novelist was due to his acute sense of urban life and a disregard of literary conventions, Farah's work was built around a selfconscious attempt to bring the techniques of modernism, and especially the avant-garde, to bear on the violent politics of the Somali dictatorship. Farah's fiction was hence highly intellectual in character. Except in his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, where the main character was an illiterate

peasant woman, the subjects of Farah's novels have been intellectuals with a profound knowledge of Somali and African politics and literary culture; their selfconscious, and often introspective, narratives are driven by the search for an experimental language that might be able to encapsulate the truer than fiction events surrounding the dictatorship.

From the 1970s to the end of the 1980s, three trends could be detected in East African writing. The first trend revolved around a series of works in which disillusionment with the politics of independence continued to generate important works. In different forms and genres, East African writers continued to produce works in which individual subjects and communities tried to figure out their own relationship with pressing political problems such as the individual's alienation in the urban space, corruption in the public sphere, and political repression. Writers such as Charles Mang'ua (*Son of Woman*, 1971) and Mwangi Ruheni (*The Future Leaders*, 1973) reached out to a reading public nourished on western popular literature, fusing entertainment with social commentary. Other writers, most notably Rebecca Njau (*Ripples in the Pool*, 1976) and Grace Ogot (*The Other Woman*, 1976) used the experiences of their heroines to probe a culture of silence and violence in which the repression of women was often synonymous with the consolidation of political oligarchies.

A second discernable trend during this period was one in which writers responded directly to social and political crisis in individual East African countries. The few English works produced in Tanzania during this period were, significantly, concerned with rewriting real historical events as a contribution to an ongoing debate on the role of culture in national development. Gabriel Ruhumbika's *Village in Uhuru* (1969) traced the development of one community from its creation, through German and British colonialism, to the consolidation of its independence under the leadership of the Tanganyika African National Union. Ibrahim Hussein's play *Kinjekitile* (1970) was a dramatic reworking of the 1904 "Maji-Maji" rebellion against German rule in Tanzania, while Ismael Mbise's *Blood on Our Land* (1974) was based on an actual land case brought before the United Nations by the Meru people of northern Tanzania.

This genre, which was, in Joe de Graft's words, "closer to life as men actually live it than any other form of artistic expression" (1976: 3), was especially attuned to the political and social crisis in the region during this period. While indebted to the established conventions of modern drama, the early plays of John Ruganda (*The Burdens*, 1972), Robert Serumaga (*The Elephants*, 1974a, and *Majangwa*, 1974b), Elvania Zirimu (*When the Hunchback Made Rain*, 1972),

and Francis Imbuga (*Betrayal in the City*, 1976) favored plots and themes that addressed the questions that were troubling their middle-class audiences: what had led to the failure of decolonization and what was the role of the African elite in the politics of national failure and decay? What was the place of the individual – and civil rights – in the corrupt politics of the postcolony?

A third trend in East African literature in the 1970s can be discerned in a set of imaginative works that sought to intervene in the debate revolving around the culture and politics of underdevelopment, a debate that had been initiated in the region by the publication of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) and Colin Leys's *Underdevelopment in Kenya* (1975) and had spread among the intellectual elite like wildfire. The major works in this tradition were *Muntu* (1976), a play by the Ghanaian expatriate Joe de Graft, and *Petals of Blood* (1977), Ngugi's great novel on the politics of neocolonialism in Kenya. While de Graft and Ngugi came from opposed political directions and worked in different genres, their works were remarkably similar in their imaginative ambition and temporal dimension: they both sought to present a panoramic view of African history from the precolonial times to the age of neocolonialism; they adopted a multiplicity of voices to capture the conflicting histories and visions of the continent as it struggled with its destiny; they were both driven by an esthetic belief in the capacity of language to capture the totality of reality and of literature to provide a resolution to the great problems of the age. The scope of these two works was unmatched in East African writing in English.

Writing in an age of globalization

In retrospect, however, *Muntu* and *Petals of Blood* marked the end of an era in East African writing in English, for from the beginning of the 1980s onward, writers and critics in the region were to find themselves in an unprecedented state of political, cultural, and economic crisis, one that was totally unexpected in the age of decolonization. This period will be remembered for the collapse of modern institutions such as schools, universities, and publishing houses constructed in the first two decades of independence, the failure of political experiments in Kenya and Tanzania, the destructive rule of Idi Amin in Uganda, the Ethiopian revolution, and the rise and fall of the military dictatorship in Somalia. Despite the difficulties facing writers in all these countries, each of these historic events generated important literary works. During Idi Amin's regime in the 1970s, for example, some important Ugandan writers (Pio Zirimu and Byron Kadadwa were the most prominent) had died under mysterious

circumstances and the country's major writers had been sent into exile. But the Idi Amin phenomenon had also generated a new kind of writing (see Nazareth 1984) as authors tried to respond to the challenge of writing about, and in, a state of political siege.

In exile in Kenya, John Ruganda wrote and produced *The Floods* (1979), a political drama matched only by Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* in the dictatorship genre in Africa. While Ruganda's play mesmerized audiences when it was first produced in Nairobi with its allegorization of violence and murder and its vivid invocation of Idi Amin's killing fields, his compatriot Robert Serumaga, who had stayed in Uganda during these difficult years, had come up with an even more novel response to the culture of silence imposed by the dictatorship: in remarkable experimental plays such as *Renga Moi* (1979), Serumaga chose to dispense with spoken language altogether using mime, dance, and bodily movements to recreate the story of political terror in Uganda. In the absence of spoken language, however, Serumaga's works relied on his audience's ability to decipher such floating movements and to connect them to Ugandan politics. *Renga Moi* was perhaps a powerful indictment of the Ugandan military dictatorship, but it was said that Idi Amin, unable to unravel the hidden meaning of Serumaga's play when it was performed at the National Theatre in Kampala, enjoyed it tremendously.

Political novels directed at military dictatorship also emerged in Ethiopia and Somalia at about the same time. Sahle-Sellassie's novel *The Firebrands* (1979) presented readers with a detailed portrait of imperial Ethiopia on the eve of the 1974 revolution, while the political and cultural challenge of responding to military rule in Somalia was the theme of Nurrudin Farah's dictatorship trilogy discussed above. In *Maps* (1986), Farah brought to the fore the turmoil of the Ethiopian revolution and Somali dictatorships in a work that sought to represent the minute details of life across national boundaries and to question the economies of gender, race, and nation that had become an unfortunate rationale for the political turmoil in the Horn of Africa. The stories collected in Hama Tuma's *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor* (1993) were satirical representations of the nervous politics of revolution and dictatorship in Ethiopia.

The dire political and economic conditions in the East African countries made it particularly difficult for new writers to emerge and establish reputations comparable to those of the canonical figures in the region. Established writers continued to produce new works in the 1980s and 1990s: Grace Ogot's two novels (*The Graduate*, 1980a, and *Island of Tears*, 1980b) were notable for their examination of the impact of politics on the private life of women; playwrights and poets such as Ruganda (*Echoes of Silence*, 1986) and Angira

(*Tides of Time*, 1996) brought a deep psychological understanding to their investigation of the impact of the culture of decay and decline on individual subjects. Because Ngugi's new fiction (*Devil on the Cross*, 1980, and *Matigari,* 1987) was originally written in Gikuyu, its success in translation excludes it from the corpus of East African writing in English and it is considered elsewhere in this volume. What is worth noting here is that *Matigari* drew critical acclaim for its incorporation of oral forms and popular culture as a way of representing – and coming to terms with – the contested realities of postcolonial life.

Matigari was also a novel produced in exile. This detail is important because it points to an unexpected phenomenon in the development of East African literature in the late 1980s and the 1990s – the political and cultural crisis in the region had forced its creative energies to shift elsewhere. The most important works from old and new East African writers were now being produced in Europe or North America. In this category belong Farah's later novels, *Gifts* (1993) and *Secrets* (1998), Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrim's Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), and *Paradise* (1994), and M. G. Vassanji's *The Gunnysack* (1989), *No New Land* (1991a), and *Uhuru Street* (1991b). Drawing mainly on their childhood experiences in East Africa, these writers were producing texts focused on prominent themes of home, migration, and departure, works located in the specific countries in the region but produced by an awareness of the authors' separation from their natal spaces. In contrast, works produced by writers still based in the region, including the Anglo-Kenyan writer Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (*Coming to Birth*, 1986) and Margaret Ogola (*The River and the Source*, 1994), were attempting, like earlier African literature, to emplace the African subject within specific histories and traditions denoted by concepts such as the family, the home, the region, and the nation.

In all these instances, creative writing in East African literature, which had come of age in the 1960s haunted by its inadequacy in relation to other regional literatures in Africa, had been able, within a space of forty years, to establish its unique identity in the world of pan-African letters. In spite of the regional characteristic of this literature, East African writers were, like their counterparts elsewhere on the continent, concerned with three questions: what was African literature? What was its language? Who were its readers? At the end of the 1990s, these questions were perhaps not as pressing as they had been forty years earlier, but they had become more complicated because in an age of globalization and multiculturalism, one was as likely to find an East African writer in London, New York, Johannesburg, and Toronto as in Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, Addis Ababa, and Mogadishu.

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24

Anglophone literature of Central Africa

FLORA VEIT-WILD AND ANTHONY CHENNELLS

The earliest books in English relating to Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are David Livingstone's (1813–73) *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) and *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and Its Tributaries* (1865). Although on both expeditions he entered present-day Zimbabwe only briefly, Livingstone's books serve to introduce the literature of the region. He regarded mission and colony as the necessary transforming agents for Africa and he hoped through his writings to convince Britons that Africans should be encouraged "to cultivate for our markets, as the most effectual means, next to the Gospel, of their elevation" (1857: 675). His enormous influence inspired two generations of missionaries, who introduced literacy, commercial agents, and administrators who had been instrumental in establishing a network of protectorates and chartered company colonies that put the entire region under British political control. The imperial impact and its multiple consequences including resistance to British domination became and still remain the main concerns of the literature that we will discuss in this chapter. Initially all the writers are white and the benefits of empire are promoted; once British control has been established its consolidation becomes a priority. In Southern Rhodesia after 1923 the growth of white nationalism can be discerned in white writing, which becomes more vociferous in response to an articulate black resistance throughout the region. This first opposes settler privilege and then imperialism itself and soon produces its own literature. The themes of post-independence literature remain public and the principal concern of much black writing is the recovery of a cultural identity that colonialism has shattered and the exposure of the corruption and sometimes despotism of the new political and economic elite who have taken the place of the colonial rulers.

Each of the three countries with which we are concerned – Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi – had a different imperial history. Zimbabwe as Southern Rhodesia had a relatively large settler population which from 1923 had almost complete legislative control over its affairs. There were only a few

settler farmers and entrepreneurs in Northern Rhodesia, which was to become Zambia, and in Nyasaland, which was to become Malawi, and the imperial presence in both countries was either through the colonial administration or large-scale capital ventures like the companies that owned the mines along Zambia's Congo border or the tea, coffee, and tobacco estates in southern Malawi. In 1953 Britain in one of its last great imperial gestures and, in an effort to counter Afrikaner nationalist power in South Africa, linked the three countries together as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland blacks saw the Federation as a scheme to extend Southern Rhodesia settler hegemony throughout the region and actively agitated against it until Britain finally was forced to agree first to Nyasaland's and then Northern Rhodesia's right of secession from the Federation. The independence of Malawi and Zambia followed the end of Federation in 1963. Only Southern Rhodesia remained under British control and, claiming that Britain had reneged on its promises of Rhodesian independence, the settler Prime Minister Ian Smith unilaterally declared the colony independent of Britain in 1965 (UDI). The Zimbabwe African National Union held at Gwelo in 1964 had opted for armed struggle and UDI confirmed that the militants had been correct in arguing that there was little to be gained from constitutional negotiation. By 1972 the Liberation War had begun in earnest and resulted in Zimbabwean independence in 1980.

Livingstone's books are the first of many records of hunting, travel, and missionary work that are highly conventional in their depiction of Europeans in Africa. Invariably they are plotted as romances in which white men successfully complete quests where they have pitted themselves against a savage continent and its savage people. The convention serves to define the heroic character of the European traveler. Survival is a measure of heroism in the earlier journeys; later the end of the quest is a colonial or at least a Christian order dominating and containing a culture written as savage. Typically such narratives affect a scientific detachment and the land and its people are subjected to what is presented as an objective European gaze. Thomas Morgan Thomas's *Eleven Years in Central South Africa* (1873) is a good example of the missionary genre in Zimbabwe, while Frederick Courtney Selous's *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (1881) served as a model for many subsequent books of hunting and travel in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Frederick Coillard's *On the Threshold of Central Africa* (1897) traces the history of the successful Paris Evangelical Mission in Barotseland in southwestern Zambia. That the mission envisaged itself as a new source of order is implied in the title of Dr. Elmslie's *Among the Wild Ngoni* (1899), which describes an initiative of the Livingstonia Industrial

Mission in Malawi that trained men in practical skills, who in turn were supposed to spread the influence of Livingstonia throughout Malawi and Zambia. The first Commissioner of the British Protectorate of Nyasaland, Sir Harry Johnston's *British Central Africa* (1897) is a mixture of genres, the geographical, anthropological, and historical accounts being predicated on the author's personal heroism. Journals and letters by early missionaries, hunters, and other travelers within the region were published in the nine-volume Oppenheimer series that appeared between 1945 and 1956 and includes the important journals of Thomas Baines (1820–75). During the 1960s and 1970s Books of Rhodesia published in facsimile editions over seventy nineteenth-century titles dealing with Zimbabwe.

Because of its large numbers of settlers, Southern Rhodesia was the only territory to produce a coherent body of literature, and before Zimbabwean independence in 1980 settler writers, or writers who had close acquaintance with Rhodesia, published more than three hundred novels, numerous volumes of short stories and poetry, anthologies of Rhodesian poems, and several plays. Thousands of poems and short stories, mostly of indifferent quality, can be found in the various newspapers and periodicals that over the years were published in Southern Rhodesia (see Pichanick, Chennells, and Rix 1977). The most widely read of all nineteenth-century African romances was Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). Haggard had used the ruins of Great Zimbabwe and the 1869 Ndebele succession crisis following the death of King Mzilikazi as the basis for his Kukuanaland and the early writers followed his formula. The Ndebele and the cities of forgotten colonies appear in A. A. Anderson's and A. Wall's *A Romance of N'Shabe* (1891), Ernest Glanville's *The Fossicker* (1891), and Edward Marwick's *The City of Gold* (1896). There are many others. Haggard himself contributed to the tradition that he had created with later novels like *Elissa: Or the Doom of Zimbabwe* (1900) and *Benita* (1906). In many of these novels the ruined and forgotten colony is made exemplary. Empire must transcend its obvious commercial motives and the search for treasure should never be allowed to become the only reason for the imperial journey.

In 1890 Rhodes's British South Africa Company occupied Mashonaland and in 1893 the company invaded the Ndebele kingdom. The company anticipated the occupation and invasion with a propaganda campaign that represented the kingdom as a military tyranny whose raids affected the entire region. Novelists were not only influenced by this propaganda but they also contributed to it with books like Grant Allen's *An Army Doctor's Romance* (1894) and Fred Wishaw's *Lost in African Jungles* (1896). In 1896 the Ndebele and sections

of the Shona rose against the settlers and the repression of the rising becomes in many of the novels a historical trope for the civilizing order of empire forcing savagery to succumb to its superior power. Several accounts of the rising were published by those who had taken part. These include Selous's *Sunshine and Storm* (1896) and Robert Baden-Powell's *The Matabele Campaign, 1896* (1897), which support the company's official report on the risings by attributing them to the power over black minds of an arcane religion rather than to a people's desire for freedom from the violence of company rule. Baden-Powell's book is the most frequently used source for subsequent novelists, for apart from routine accounts of military engagements, he makes his scouting expeditions into *Boy's Own Paper* yarns of schoolboy pranks and selfless heroism. J. Chalmers's novel *Fighting the Matabele* (1898) and a book for boys, William Johnston's *Against the Matabele* (1903) both show Baden-Powell's influence. Only with T. O. Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–97: A Study in African Resistance* (1967) was the story of the risings told from the point of view of the Shona and the Ndebele; the influence of Ranger's history on contemporary Zimbabwean literature has been enormous. There are also more considered contemporary fictional accounts of the Ndebele. Bertram Mitford celebrated the creation of the Ndebele nation in a series that included the novels *The King's Assegai* (1894) and *The White Shield* (1895) and by distinguishing between aristocratic Ndebele and the lesser nations whom they had absorbed, he explains away their role in the rising in *John Ames, Native Commissioner* (1909) and *In the Whirl of the Rising* (1904). By 1908 in *The Legacy of the Granite Hills*, the rising is sufficiently distanced for Mitford to identify Ndebele motives in attacking settlers as patriotism rather than rebellion. With the king dead, only the religion of the Matopos Hills provides a point of reference to the defeated nation. Frequently in settler literature, the Ndebele are represented as the natural allies of the British and bowed to Britain's superior power. An important settler myth was that the Ndebele aristocrats, while acknowledging British superiority, held in contempt the Shona who comprised, and still comprise, the vast majority of the country's people. The frequent repetition of this claim in novels allowed an even greater gulf to be fixed between the settlers and the vast majority of the people than had already been established by Rhodesia's segregation laws.

An alternative form of romance to narratives of whites confronting and overcoming savagery is romantic anti-capitalism where the colony is opposed as natural space to a metropolis soiled by industrialism and commerce. This theme runs through much of Haggard's work although in his Rhodesian novels it makes way for the more serious task of empire building. Cynthia Stockley's *Virginia of the Rhodesians* (1903) and Gertrude Page's *Love in the Wilderness* (1907)

are colonial pastorals, and the settlers are shown as people who discover their true selves by submitting to the freedom of the wilderness. Not surprisingly blacks cannot be accommodated in such novels and appear only as servants or actors in distant rebellions. Stockley's *The Claw* (1911) exemplifies the distancing of male fighting by a woman writer. Cullen Gouldsbury, who was a Native Commissioner, interrogates the idea of Rhodesia as pastoral in *God's Outpost* and *Circe's Garden* (both 1907). He shows Africa's unfamiliar vastness subverting the social codes of British men and women and both novels examine with some seriousness the consequent confusion of identity in characters left without familiar constraints.

Stanley Portal Hyatt adds another dimension to colonial pastoral in *The Marriage of Hilary Carden* (1909) and *The Land of Promises* (1911). He attacks capitalism as an inappropriate tool to advance the empire, and like several of the early novelists he regards the colonial-born as contemptible and valorizes only the English upper classes and those blacks who have been untouched by the colonial presence and whom he shows existing in some imaginary natural state. If both Hyatt and Gouldsbury are skeptical of the benefits to Africa of company rule, the Anglican priest and poet Arthur Shearly Cripps (1869–1952) attacks with uncompromising vigor in his novels *The Brooding Earth* (1911) and *Baytree Country* (1913) the consequences for blacks of company rule and the casual brutality and racism of the settlers. Cripps, however, adds yet another dimension to the colony as pastoral in these early novels and in his short-story collections *Faerylands Forlorn* (1910) and *Cinderella in the South* (1918). Without settlers or the company, Mashonaland is Arcadia, its people wanting only Christianity to bring to perfection their humanity.

The role of women writers in Southern Rhodesian settler literature is central. Page and Stockley soon stopped reproducing the country as wilderness and instead wrote about the possibilities of progress and development. Ethel Tawse Jollie was the first woman to sit in any legislative assembly in the British Empire and her *The Real Rhodesia* (1924), which for many years was a standard text, attacked both the company and the proposed union with South Africa and argued the case for responsible government. The challenge for characters in Page's later novels is not to discover more powerful emotions but rather to build a new white nation in what she represents as an empty land and to which only the white presence will give form. Page attacks company misrule in *The Rhodesian* (1912) and *The Pathway* (1914) and both novels promote the idea of a discrete white Rhodesian identity which sets the country apart from South Africa. In *The Veldt Trail* (1919), a future independent Rhodesia is actively debated. Like Page's, most of Stockley's novels were bestsellers, *Ponjola* (1928)

and *Tagati-magic* (1930) among them. Stockley is never as sentimental about Rhodesians as Page is. Her settlers are as likely to take to drink in response to hardship as to work for the future, but as with Page there are always central characters in her novels who are prepared to work so that the country may realize its potential.

After the First World War there was an influx of new settlers into Southern Rhodesia who in their fiction were eager enough to confirm the identity that Page and Stockley had helped to create. Many of these new arrivals were undercapitalized and suffered considerable hardship. Again the women novelists are the most important in turning hardship into a trope of the sacrifice needed to turn Rhodesia into a prosperous nation. Black uprisings and natural disasters are never far from the settlers in the novels of Vera Jervis, who wrote under the pseudonym of Jane England. Her novels include *Red Earth* (1926), *The Sjambok* (1929), *No Endings* (1934), its sequel *Outspan* (1935), and *A Farm on the Veldt* (1938). Sheila Macdonald, whose bestselling novels include *Margaret Venning: Rhodesian* (1928), *Jacaranda Nield* (1933), and *Mr. Crusoe's Young Woman* (1934), shows the good-humored energy with which Rhodesians were building a new country. In her novels blacks are intensely loyal to whites who treat them decently but are shown as a deeply conservative people, indifferent to progress and finally irrelevant to the new Rhodesia that white initiative is creating. They can have no other place in the new Rhodesian nation than as inferiors. Blanche Longden's *Who Begins to Live* (1940) is almost unique in suggesting the intellectual narrowness of Rhodesian life. The hardships faced by settlers on the land is the theme of Harding Forrester's novels as one of his titles *Sowers on the Dust* (1927) suggests. A daughter of these second wave of settlers, Doris Lessing was also to write about the hardship experienced by many whites on the land in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Martha Quest* (1952) (see Bertelsen 1985). She subverts the Rhodesian claim to heroism in the face of hardship and shows instead whites corrupted by the power that a racist society accords them. In the subsequent volumes of "Children of Violence," *A Proper Marriage* (1954), *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), and *Landlocked* (1965), urban whites are shown as a closed society who demand conformity to their narrow racism and rather than being a new people replicate British culture. The first volume of Lessing's autobiography *Under My Skin* (1994) recalls the Rhodesia in which these novels and her African short stories are set.

The principal thrust of white immigration into Rhodesia came after the Second World War and several of these arrivals joined Lessing in producing a fiction that registered the economic and political disabilities of blacks.

Ann Mary Fielding's *The Noxious Weed* (1951) details the brutal treatment of farm workers and Peter Gibbs's *Stronger than Armies* (1953) reconstructs the 1948 general strike and shows that while a black proletariat is using strike-action as a political weapon, white Rhodesians are still imagining blacks in the stereotypes derived from the 1890s. The strike was the first obvious sign of black militancy that was to develop in intensity into the Liberation War. Elizabeth Fenton's *Rhodesian Rhapsody* (1958), Ronald Leavis's *Hippodile* (1961), and William Rayner's *The Reapers* (1963) register some awareness of modern black political initiatives, although they believe they can be contained by liberal reformism.

The Zimbabwean Liberation War started in earnest at the end of 1972 but there were numerous isolated guerilla incidents from 1966 and the escalating violence provided the background for over twenty novels (see Chennells 1995). One of the earliest of these, John Gordon Davis's *Hold My Hand I'm Dying* (1967), became an international bestseller, and although it shares the racism of the other novels, it stands out from them in its assumption that black rule is inevitable. For most of the novelists the war provided an excuse to repeat the racial prejudices of eighty years. Local blacks are shown as primitives who are incapable of sustained organization. Their superstitious fears are played upon in Daniel Carney's *The Whispering Death* (1969); a man influenced by American Black Power ideologies foments black discontent in Peter Stiff's *The Rain Goddess* (1973); and European communists manipulate the guerillas in Robert Early's *A Time of Madness* (1977). Laurens van der Post shows a Chinese communist organizing resistance to settler rule in *A Story like the Wind* (1972) and *A Far-Off Place* (1974). Only Michael Hartmann's *Game for Vultures* (1975) recognizes the war as an attempt by blacks to take command of their own destinies. In 1980 the bestselling writer and Zambian-born Wilbur Smith published *A Falcon Flies*, which was to be the first of his Ballantyne novels that trace the history of whites in the Central African region but particularly Zimbabwe through the fortunes of the Ballantyne family (see Chennells 1984). The other titles are *Men of Men* (1981), *The Angels Weep* (1982), and *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness* (1984). The first two titles are plotted as conventional imperial romances with whites bringing Africa under their control. The last two titles, written after Zimbabwean independence, show order and reason slowly giving way to the corrupt political and military elite of the new order.

Of the over eighty volumes of verse published in Rhodesia the vast majority are of little interest. Kipling's ballads are imitated to provide narratives of frontier life and English Georgian conventions can be seen in poetry about the Zimbabwean landscape long after these had dropped out of fashion in

England. Arthur Shearly Cripps's *Lyra Evangelistica* (1909), *Pilgrimage of Grace* (1912), and *Pilgrims Joy* (1916) are evidence of his technical ability but his attempt to impose Arcadia on Mashonaland prevents his poetry from articulating his profound insights into the country under company and settler rule. His satires against Rhodes, the company, and his fellow settlers are more memorable. Only with Noel Brettell does one find a poet consciously developing a new diction to describe the settler experience of Rhodesia. Brettell's *Bronze Frieze* (1950) influenced Hugh Finn and D. E. Borrell who published short selections of their poetry in 1978 and 1979, respectively. The first anthology of Rhodesian poetry was John Snelling's *Rhodesian Verse 1888–1938* (1938). The biennial *Poetry Review*, later to become *Rhodesian Poetry*, began in 1952 to select the best from the poetry that was appearing in the newspapers and journals. In 1964, the quarterly *Two Tone* was launched and, for the first time, black poets were given an opportunity to publish in a periodical devoted solely to poetry. D. E. Finn's *Poetry in Rhodesia: 75 years* (1968) draws on these journals as well as Snelling's anthology. Her selection shows that the poets writing after the Second World War are conscious of the need for new forms and diction to explain their responses to Rhodesia. These serious innovations, however, had difficulty in surviving the confusion experienced by many whites at the end of Rhodesia. The various periodicals that helped to express them soon stopped publication in the new Zimbabwe.

The few white-authored novels set in the countries north of the Zambezi all reveal an anxiety that with a small white population the necessary distinctions between black and white are in danger of being obscured. In *The Silent Rancher* (1909), Gertrude Page writes hysterically about interracial sex in Northern Rhodesia and its possible consequences for a white Rhodesian nation. Cullen Gouldsbury, who was posted to Northern Rhodesia for writing openly in *God's Outpost* (1907) about sex between the races in Southern Rhodesia, subsequently in *The Tree of Bitter Fruit* (1910) shows a young black man's sense of identity being destroyed when a foolishly philanthropic Native Commissioner sends him to England to be educated. Sarah Gertrude Millin's *The Wizard Bird* (1962) is set in Barotseland and is dedicated to Federal Prime Minister Roy Welensky. The novel develops a parallel between Britain's losing the will to rule in Africa and an English girl agreeing to marry a black man.

The first generation of black writers in Central Africa emerged prominently in the 1950s and 1960s when a black middle class was beginning to be formed. The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the postwar years together with the more tolerant atmosphere of Federation allowed a black journalism to develop which advocated social and political advancement. In

Southern Rhodesia, Stanlake Samkange and Lawrence Vambe laid the way for black writing (see Veit-Wild 1992c and 1992b). Samkange, writer, journalist, politician, educationalist, owned a newspaper, *African Businessman,* and covered the Federation for the South African magazine *Drum*. In 1953 Vambe became editor-in-chief of the African Newspapers Group comprising eight papers in the Federation and launched *African Parade,* the first magazine in the region "edited and printed by Africans for Africans," which became an important publishing outlet for black writing. Apart from publishing short stories, it serialized between 1958 and 1961 Ndabaningi Sithole's *Busi*, the first novel in English written by a black Zimbabwean. *Busi* deals with a girl who helps to transform a rural school into a progressive center for the community. Samkange and Vambe were among those black intellectuals who, with a few whites, campaigned for a multiracial society. Sithole was to become the first president of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). They met in associations like the Capricorn Society and the Interracial Association, but Southern Rhodesian settlers were intransigent and the liberal initiatives soon became irrelevant as white politics became more and more reactionary. The Rhodesia Front, which had been formed to keep political power in white hands, won a general election in 1962 and the African National Congress of Southem Rhodesia, the National Democratic Party, and the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Party were banned in succession. Southern Rhodesian nationalist politics were additionally complicated when Sithole split from Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) and formed the Zimbabwe African National Union creating a division in black opposition whose effects can still be observed in Zimbabwean public life.

The Rhodesia Front government imposed an ever stricter censorship on what was allowed to be published so that it was impossible for blacks and whites to write honestly about politically sensitive issues. Writers using English had to publish abroad, and vernacular writing was restricted to genres of romance, folklore, and other matters that the authorities did not regard as threatening. While the more militant nationalists such as Nkomo, Sithole, Herbert Chitepo, Leopold Takawira, and Robert Mugabe turned increasingly to the armed struggle as the only practical strategy for change, the more moderate Vambe and Samkange produced fiction and historical works that described the long years of colonialism. Samkange published his first historical novel *On Trial for My Country* (1966), and in it, the spirits of Rhodes and the Ndebele king Lobengula are tried for the different parts they played in the white occupation of the country. It is symptomatic of Samkange's tolerance that while detailing Rhodes's unscrupulousness in gaining the royal charter

for his company, the novel recognizes that both black and white have a right to call the country theirs. There was, however, no place for a black liberal in Smith's Rhodesia and in his subsequent novels, *The Mourned One* (1975) and *The Year of the Uprising* (1978), the possibility of a political compromise between whites and blacks in Rhodesia is shown to be increasingly remote.

A common form of protest writing in Zimbabwe was the nationalist autobiography in which the experiences of the writer's life are offered as typical and thus become for the reader the experiences of the people as a whole. The first four chapters of the 1959 edition of Ndabaningi Sithole's *African Nationalism* are autobiographical and provide the material for his subsequent theorizing. Nathan Shamuyarira's *Crisis in Rhodesia* (1965) traces his growing disillusionment with a multiracial political option. From 1956 to 1963 he had been editor of *The African Daily News* and his part in the events of those years is recalled with the authority of a man in a position of considerable influence. Vambe's response to the Rhodesia Front was *An Ill-fated People: Zimbabwe Before and After Rhodes* (1972), in which the history of his VaShawasha people is interwoven with his own and his family's history. Didymus Mutasa's *Rhodesian Black behind Bars* (1974) recalls the inspiration of Guy Clutton-Brock for his generation of nationalists and the Tolstoyan socialism of the Cold Comfort Farm Society. Maurice Nyagumbo's recollections in *With the People* (1980) include his numerous clashes with settler authority and years of detention and imprisonment after he had become a nationalist leader. Joshua Nkomo's *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (1984) recounts the multiple influences from traditional spiritual authority to trade unionism on a turbulent political career, from which he was to emerge as Zimbabwe's Vice-President in 1988 after ZANU (PF) and ZAPU joined forces.

In 1957, Solomon Mutswairo published the first novel in Shona, *Feso,* the only one so far to have been translated into English (1974). Although it purports to tell how Feso rescues his people from a precolonial tyranny, it is today read as an allegory of opposition to white rule. In much of his writing Mutswairo is concerned to recover both the people's culture and their history. To this end he has used traditional storytelling techniques to recall the lives of past heroes: in *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978) and *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983).

Literature in Zambia and Malawi took a very different course. The highly unpopular Federation had given nationalism considerable impetus and with the end of Federation Zambia became independent. The United Independence Party (UNIP) won the first national elections and Kenneth Kaunda became president, a post he held until 1991 when UNIP was defeated by

Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multiparty Democracy. Kaunda's autobiography *Zambia Shall be Free* (1962) is the equivalent of the Zimbabwean autobiographies of protest and explains the Christian humanism that he believed should inspire the new nation. Kaunda was acutely aware of the potential of ethnic politics to divide the new nation and this was used as a justification for installing a one-party system in 1972. The Nyasaland African Congress derived massive support from its opposition to Federation and in 1958 invited Hastings Banda to return from England where he had lived for many years to take over the leadership. As the Malawi Congress Party, it won the first independence elections in 1964.

In 1947 the colonial governments had instituted the Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Joint Publications Bureau to promote literature for primary schools in the indigenous languages of Zambia and Malawi. Although these were to be based on traditional tales, those that dealt with inter-ethnic clashes were explicitly forbidden. In Zambia in the 1950s and early 1960s the bureau was responsible for publishing novels in Bemba, Lozi, Tonga, and Lenje. With independence the development of literature in English was one of Kaunda's strategies to replace ethnic loyalties with loyalty towards a single nation. The National Educational Company of Zambia (Neczam) was formed to replace the Publications Bureau and was the principal publishing outlet for Zambian writers using English. Literary journals such as *New Writing from Zambia* and *Jewel of Africa* (1968–70) and the anthology *Voices of Zambia* (1971), edited by Mufala Liswaniso, gave writers the opportunity to publish both short stories and poetry.

Many stories are constructed around the clash of traditional and modern lifestyles and values, which was particularly acute in Zambia because the massive development of the copper mines resulted in rapid industrialization and urbanization. Fwanyanga Mulikita's collection of short stories *A Point of No Return* (1968) is the first volume of Zambian fiction in English by a single writer and Andreya Masiye's *Before Dawn* (1971) is the first novel in English. In the same year, Dominic Mulaisho's novel *The Tongue of the Dumb* appeared. Both deal with the conflicts and hardships of the era "before dawn," that is, before the gaining of independence. In his second novel, *The Smoke that Thunders* (1979), Mulaisho gives a fictionalized account of the events that led up to the break-up of Federation and Zambia's struggle for independence.

A different, more topical journalistic and what was to prove peculiarly Zambian, style was introduced by Gideon Phiri's novels *Ticklish Sensation* (1973) and *Victims of Fate* (1974). This style was further developed by the Zimbabwean William Saidi, a journalist who wrote for *Drum* magazine and later became

assistant editor of Harare's *Daily News*. His novel *The Hanging* (1979), which he wrote while he was in exile in Zambia, is a fast-moving political thriller. In his novel *Sofiya* (1979), Storm Banjayomoyo captures the dynamics of urban life in the bars and hotels of Lusaka, which allows him to reproduce the style of spoken urban Zambian English. Confusions of identity brought about by colonialism are directly addressed in Grieve Sibale's *Between Two Worlds* (1979), in which a young man feels betrayed when his white employer returns to South Africa.

Zambian fiction in the 1970s was complemented by Zambia's most important modern genre, popular drama. Kabwe Kasoma is generally regarded as Zambia's most prominent dramatist and his plays have been praised for providing a "commentary on the whole spectrum of post-independence African society from the point of view of the common man in the town, as opposed to the urban elite" (Etherton 1976: 29). The modern and the traditional are brought together in his use of songs and dances and he accommodates Zambia's ethnic diversity by using different Zambian languages. His *Black Mambo* trilogy (1973) is one of the few examples of published Zambian drama.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the collapse of the Zambian economy. The economic climate in turn affected the literary culture and it is difficult to discern a peculiarly Zambian voice in recent writing. Susan Chitabantu's *Behind the Closed Door* (1988) is one of the few Zambian novels written by a woman and it attacks the power of both traditional and contemporary patriarchy. Other recent novels include Lazarus Miti's *The Father* (1985) and Lazarus Luangala's *The Chosen Bud* (1991).

Though economically less developed than Zimbabwe and Zambia, Malawi has always had a relatively high literacy level, which is a legacy of the early missionary work. Missionary presses published a novel in ChiChewa by Samuel Josiah Ntara as early as 1933, another one in 1949. Both were immediately translated into English under the titles *Man of Africa* (1934) and *Headman's Enterprise: An Unexpected Page in Central African History* (1949), although their merits were regarded as anthropological rather than literary (Gérard 1986: 961–71).

While black writing in Zambia and Zimbabwe had common links with South Africa, in Malawi the first writing in English was oriented towards the intellectual centers of East Africa, the Makerere University in Kampala and the University of Nairobi. These relationships were first established by the poet and novelist David Rubadiri. He contributed poems to the Makerere anthology *Origin East Africa* (1965) and co-edited *Poems from East Africa* (1971) with David Cook, a lecturer who promoted literary activities at Makerere.

Rubadiri's only novel, *No Bride Price,* was published by Nairobi's East African Publishing House in 1967. Aubrey Kachingwe published *No Easy Task* in 1966 and the prolific Legson Kayira, who settled in the United States in the late 1960s, had published five novels by the mid-1970s all in the United States or Europe: *I Will Try* (1966), *The Looming Shadow* (1967), *Jingala* (1969), *The Civil Servant* (1971), and *The Detainee* (1974b). Two successful drama festivals, organized in 1974 and 1976, resulted in the collection edited by James Gibbs, *Nine Malawian Plays* (1976).

The principal constraint on the development of Malawian writing was the thirty-year dictatorship of President for Life Hastings Banda. Rubadiri and Kayarira both opted for exile rather than live under the regime and others were simply silenced. Not only were local books subjected to censorship but important books from all over Africa and the rest of the world were banned and could not be imported into Malawi. It is no coincidence that the major literary genre in Banda's Malawi was poetry, which is able to circumvent censorship through density of allusion; criticism of authority need not appear so blatant. An important cradle for Malawian poets was the Malawi Writers' Group founded at the University of Malawi in 1970. Talented students were supported by expatriate lecturers such as David Kerr, Landeg White, James Gibbs, Angus Calder, and Adrian Roscoe. Internationally renowned poets Jack Mapanje, Felix Mnthali, and Steve Chimombo were all associated with the group. It published its own journals and magazines, some of them clandestine, such as *Expression, Soche, Cedar,* and *Odi*. Several of its members published in international journals outside the country, among them *Staffrider, West Africa*, and *Kunapipi*. The Writers' Group published the anthologies *Mau* (1971), *Namaluzi* (1984), and *The Haunting Wind* (1990) and initiated the Malawi Writers' Series, which was launched in 1974, an Open-Air Theatre, and the University Travelling Theatre. It was always difficult for members of the group to distribute material: "In 1975 literature professors at the university had to rip out, publicly, David Rubadiri's poem, from an anthology on East African poetry before the authorities would allow the anthology in the classroom" (Mphande 1996: 95). The only individual poetry collection that reached publication in the 1970s was Frank Chipasula's *Visions and Reflections,* published in 1973 by Neczam in Zambia. Shortly afterwards, Chipasula fled Malawi from fear of having said too much. He published four more collections of poetry, *This is the Time* (1982), *O Earth, Wait for Me* (1984), *Night Watcher, Night Song* (1986), and *Whispers in the Wings* (1991), and edited the pioneering anthology of Central and Southern African poetry *When My Brothers Come Home* (1985). Felix Mnthali, author of *When Sunset Comes to Sapitwa* (1982), spent nearly a year in prison.

The most publicized case of human rights' violations under Banda was the sudden arrest and detention of Malawi's outstanding poet Jack Mapanje in 1987. Only after persistent pressure from the international writers' and human rights' communities was Mapanje released after spending nearly four years in jail. Mapanje has been extraordinarily prolific. His poems in his mother tongue, ChiChewa, and in English have been published in many local and international journals and anthologies. In 1981, his first collection appeared, entitled *Of Chameleons and Gods*. In the introduction he explains the mythic importance of the chameleon in the Malawian context: "One is tempted like the chameleon . . . to bask in one's brilliant camouflage" (1981: vii). Fellow writer Steve Chimombo comments: "The volume itself is a demonstration of the chameleon-like techniques of simulation, mystification, dissembling, camouflage designed to teach, tease, admonish, exhort, ridicule situations the poet has observed in the 'ten turbulent years' in which, of necessity, he was also trying to assemble different voices heard in his poetry" (1988: 113). Mapanje drew on traditional forms of writing, particularly the art of riddling, to put across his messages in a disguised form, as he explained in his paper entitled "The Art of Malawian Riddling," which he presented after his return from London at the University of Malawi in 1976. His "cryptic voice" did not serve to make the Banda regime regard him as any less dangerous. His collection of poetry was never officially banned but it was withdrawn from circulation, apparently because the censors wanted to avoid too much publicity. Five months after he gave a talk about censorship in Malawi at a writers' conference in Stockholm, he was arrested without charge or trial. After his release he received many international honors and awards and found a base at the University of Leeds. In his collection of poems *The Chattering Wagtails of Makuyu Prison* (1993), he works through his devastating experiences in jail where friends were tortured and killed.

In Mapanje's next volume, five years later, *Skipping without Ropes* (1998), he writes about his impressions of life in exile after his release from prison, a farewell to fellow writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, murdered by the Nigerian military regime, as well as his feelings about his return to Malawi in 1994 after Banda was removed from power. He was accompanied by a BBC film crew and was joined by David Rubadiri, who after thirty years of exile took up once again his former post as Malawi's representative at the United Nations.

In the 1980s an indigenous publishing industry developed in Malawi that included much self-publishing. These initiatives provided exposure for local writing such as the collections of poetry by Chimombo entitled *Napolo Poems* (1987) and Edison Mpina's *Raw Pieces* (1986) and *Malawi Poetry Today: A*

Telephone Conversation (1986), which he wrote together with Paul Engle. Mpina was also in jail without charge for five years during the 1970s. In his poetry Mpina consciously distances himself from the academic preoccupations of the University Writers' Group and aims instead at a poetry that draws its inspiration from rural Malawi and its people. It is worth noting how other Malawian poets make use of traditional culture to attack the Banda regime. Chimombo, like Mapanje, uses the mode of subversive allegorization and in his *Napolo Poems* he allows the mythic subterranean serpent Napolo to carry a concealed criticism of Banda. Frank Chipasula, on the other hand, wrote most of his poetry from exile and did not need allegory to camouflage his attack on Banda's Malawi as a neocolonial nation. With the end of the Banda regime new possibilities presented themselves for Malawian literature. In 1990 Chimombo launched *WASI*, a magazine for the arts in Malawi, although it was not until 1992 that freedom of the press was incorporated into the constitution, thus ending thirty years' control of the media. Chimombo started a series of political satires and in his long poem *A Referendum of Forest Fires* (1997), which was published by Wasi Publications, he no longer had to resort to allegory in order to write about the affairs of the nation.

Black Zimbabwean writers of the second generation produced a remarkable body of fiction in the mid- and late 1970s that has become known as the literature of "those years of drought and hunger." This was the title of the first study of black Zimbabwean writing in English, by Musaemura Zimunya, *Those Years of Drought and Hunger* (1982), and refers to book titles like Charles Mungoshi's *The Coming of the Dry Season* (1972) and *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), *The House of Hunger* (1978) by Dambudzo Marechera, and the metaphorical drought of skepticism alluded to in the title of Stanley Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980). The paradox of Zimbabwean literature during the 1970s is that while the armed struggle for Zimbabwe's liberation was being fought with ever greater intensity, these outstanding literary works view both the war and political processes more generally with pessimism. Their authors grew up amid the racism of the colonial state but their attitudes were also molded by the violent clashes between ZANU and ZAPU and the increasing ethnic polarization of nationalist politics in the 1960s. Overcrowding in areas officially set aside for black occupation and the racial segregation in the government educational system combined to promote deep hostility towards the settlers and their regime.

The University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland had been founded in 1953 as a "multiracial island of learning" to express the most positive ideologies of Federation. In practice it never escaped the racism of its immediate context,

and as Zambia and Malawi established their own universities, it became the University of Rhodesia – even more racially polarized than it had been in the past. Student demonstrations on campus in 1973 and subsequent clashes with the police led to mass arrests and detentions. Many of the imprisoned students went into exile after their release, among them future writers and critics like Marechera, Zimunya, Nyamfukudza, Ranga Zinyemba, Kizito Muchemwa, and Rino Zhuwarara. A creative writers' group at the university organized by white lecturers in the English department fostered the early writing attempts of several of these writers and their poems appeared in *Two Tone* and *Rhodesian Poetry.* Increasingly, however, young black poets felt it was inappropriate that their work should contribute toward a Rhodesian literature and a black-writing group was formed on the campus in 1975. This belief in the necessary difference between black and white writing in the Rhodesia of the 1970s resulted in the publication of the first anthology of black writing in 1978. It was edited by Kizito Muchemwa and provocatively entitled *Zimbabwean Poetry in English,* Zimbabwe as a name for the country being still regarded as seditious. Muchemwa's selection reflects the ambivalent spirit of the time: the poetry of nationalism, cultural retrieval, and black self-assertion is balanced by poems expressing only futility and despair.

Marechera's first published work, *The House of Hunger,* reproduces the confusion of this "lost generation." The book won him the 1979 Guardian Fiction Prize (jointly with the Irish writer Neil Jordan) and recalls the violence to which his generation had been subjected. Living in England, often as a homeless writer tramp, Marechera seemed to embody the myth of the mad artistic genius. This led to accusations that he was modeling himself on the European artist and betraying the African poet and storyteller whose art promotes social solidarity. In other works written during his eight years of exile in England, Marechera developed his ideas about the artist as intellectual anarchist. He focuses in *Black Sunlight* (1980) on a group of urban guerillas and uses them to show that the greatest damage an artist can do to his or her art is to conform to some larger collective. In *The Black Insider* (published posthumously in 1990) Marechera relentlessly unmasks the "African image" as a cover for the totalitarianism of many of the new African regimes. In *Mindblast* (1984), a compilation of prose, drama, and poetry, written after his retum to Zimbabwe in 1982, he was the first local writer to attack the corruption and false socialist rhetoric of the new Zimbabwean regime. At the time of his death from AIDS in 1987, he left behind numerous manuscripts that were published in a sequence of three volumes by the Dambudzo Marechera Trust: *The Black Insider* (1990), *Cemetery of the Mind* (1992), a collection of his poetry, and *Scrapiron Blues* (1994),

a compilation of prose, drama, and children's stories (see Veit-Wild 1992a). His work has gained international recognition as an important contribution to postcolonial literature (see Veit-Wild and Chennells 1999).

Stanley Nyamfukudza's novel *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1977) was also written in exile in England, and was the first novel about Zimbabwe's liberation war (Chimurenga), but its perspective is neither nationalist nor celebratory. The protagonist travels from the city to his home village only to discover his family divided by envy and greed and is accidentally shot by the local guerilla commander.

The third eminent writer to emerge during the 1970s, Charles Mungoshi, is exceptional for having developed an innovative style in both English and Shona. His first volume of short stories in English, *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), already shows evidence of his characteristic introspective narratives and his sparse, subtly nuanced prose. They were later anthologized together with other stories by Heinemann in *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* (1988). In his novel *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), Charles Mungoshi explores the disintegration of a rural family and the alienation of their educated son.

The apparent absence of patriotism and the sense of futility in Mungoshi's, Marechera's, and Nyamfukudza's writing in the late 1970s drew hostile comments from nationalist critics reviewing the existing literature of the newly independent state: "on the eve of Independence, Africa does not tolerate cynics like . . . Nyamfukudza's Sam and 'tourists' like Mungoshi's Lucifer" and "to move from Nyamfukudza to Sam is to move from cynicism to oblivion, from sickness to death, to nothingness," wrote Zinyemba in an essay entitled "Zimbabwe's 'Lost' Novelists in Search of Direction" published in *Moto* magazine in August 1983. A book that better fitted the nationalist landscape of the time was Wilson Katiyo's novel *A Son of the Soil* (1976), whose young protagonist, persecuted by the Rhodesian state, does not leave the country but joins his comrades in the armed struggle, staying where he belongs as a true "son of the soil."

With Zimbabwe's independence in April 1980, conditions for black writing changed dramatically. The vast expansion of secondary and higher education, new publishing outlets, access to the international book market, and writers' conferences provided a conducive atmosphere for creative writing. The Zimbabwe International Book Fair, inaugurated in 1983, made Harare a major center in Africa for publishing and for the exchange of ideas between writers. There seems every chance that the Harare International Festival of Arts, first inaugurated in 1999, will be another important event allowing dramatists and poets an audience for their work. Although the festival did not take place

in 2002 because it clashed with the presidential elections, against all odds it was successfully held in 2003. The book-publishing industry flourished in the 1980s and 1990s to an extent unequaled by any other African country and several literary works were published that received wide international acclaim. Writers' associations were formed, such as the Zimbabwe Writers' Union, the Budding Writers' Association of Zimbabwe, the regional Association of University Teachers of Language and Literature, and the Zimbabwe Women Writers, all of which have helped create a critical culture contributing to the development of writing and reading in Zimbabwe.

A major preoccupation of post-independence writing is the liberation war. Zimunya's and Xavier Kadhani's poetry anthology *And Now the Poets Speak* (1981) brings together voices speaking of colonial oppression, detention, war, and victory. Prominent poetic witnesses of the war are Zimunya himself and Chenjerai Hove, who subsequently published his own collections *Up in Arms* (1982) and *Red Hills of Home* (1988b). Hove won international fame with his first novel in English, *Bones* (1988a), which earned him the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1989. Hove, who also writes in Shona, combines a modernist, nonlinear narrative technique with a lyrical prose style that transliterates images and idioms from Shona into English. He aims to give "voice to the voiceless," so in *Bones* colonialism and the liberation war are viewed partly from the perspective of women laborers on a settler farm; but he also invokes the ancestors' voices to recall the first Chimurenga. Hove's works – subsequent novels are *Shadows* (1991) and *Ancestors* (1996) – appear in many translations and foreign editions. A few novels and poems published shortly after independence idealized the heroes of the liberation struggle. Typical among them is Edmund Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983), where the guerrillas perform superhuman feats and unyielding allegiance to tradition becomes the test of the truly patriotic fighter (see Kaarsholm 1991).

In the mid-1980s the historical and literary discourse on the liberation struggle began to change, although no writer has ever questioned the necessity of overthrowing the settler state. The violent attacks that the Harare government launched on civilians in Matabeleland in the early 1980s, which called into question the seriousness of Mugabe's commitment to a democratic nation; the first corruption scandals involving government ministers and nationalist veterans; the failure to redistribute to the genuinely landless the land that became available to the government in the early 1980s; the deterioration of health and education despite the initial dramatic expansion of schools, clinics, and hospitals after independence, all combined with inflation and economic

stagnation to make the leadership's attitude to the war appear self-serving. Alexander Kanengoni was the first ex-combatant to demythologize the war. His novel *When the Rainbird Cries* (1987) exposes the opportunism and recklessness of some liberation fighters which needlessly endangered many people's lives. Several stories in Kanengoni's collection *Effortless Tears* (1993) and his novel *Echoing Silences* (1997) examine the traumatic effect of the war on some fighters and victims alike. Female ex-combatant Freedom Nyamubaya, in her poetry collection, *On the Road Again* (1986), drew attention to the fate of women guerrillas who fought like men but had to return to their traditional roles once the struggle was over. Her more recent collection of short stories and poetry, *Dusk of Dawn* (1995), refers to the betrayal of the armed struggle since independence but also affirms the spirit of its author which refuses to be broken. The anthology of interviews with thirty women about their experiences during the war, edited by Irene Staunton, *Mothers of the Revolution* (1990), reveals both the role of women noncombatants in the struggle as well as the brutality to which some were subjected from both sides.

The first white-authored novel written since independence about the war is T. O. McLoughlin's *Karima* (1985). He shows the hopes and anxieties that both sides bring to the fighting but he also exposes white ignorance about the people on whose behalf they claim to speak. With *White Man, Black War* (1988) by Bruce Moore-King and *Kandaya: Another Time, Another Place* (1993) by Angus Shaw, white writers started to recall their part in the liberation war as members of the Rhodesian armed forces. With a mixture of remorse and cynicism, they expose the brutality of the war as an inevitable extension of the racist settler regime which it was attempting to perpetuate. A very different white voice can be found in the work of John Eppel whose first two books were awarded important South African prizes: the Ingrid Jonker prize for his volume of poems *Spoils of War* (1989), and the M-Net prize for fiction for the novel *D G G Berry's The Great North Road* (1992). He has published two further novels, *Hatchings* (1993) and *The Giraffe Man* (1994), and another volume of poetry, *Sonata for Matabeleland* (1995). His novels are satires enacted by grotesque characters and directed at such disparate targets as white nostalgia for Rhodesia, Christian fundamentalism, and the political and financial corruption in contemporary Zimbabwe. In both his poetry and *Hatchings* the resilient bush of Southern Matabeleland is both literal setting as well as symbol of Zimbabwe's power to renew itself.

Shimmer Chinodya's major novel on the liberation war, *Harvest of Thorns* (1989), earned him the Commonwealth Literature Prize Africa Region. It has received a great deal of international attention and has been extensively

translated. *Harvest of Thorns* is a comprehensive exploration of the three periods of Zimbabwean history: the postwar society that frames the narrative and lends it its title; 1950s and 1960s Rhodesia; and the war itself. By centering his narrative on the subjective impressions of a young and naive guerilla protagonist, Chinodya does not allow the country's national history to be reduced to a succession of events that lend themselves to only one interpretation. Another impressive novel about the war is Charles Samupindi's *Pawns* (1992). Like Chinodya, Samupindi also shows that the new Zimbabwean order has failed to fulfill the hopes that inspired people to play their part in the struggle. The pawns of his title are the ordinary Zimbabwean people as well as the guerrillas and, in a narrative that often refers to actual incidents during the war, Samupindi suggests that even during the fighting itself, powerful and ambitious people were concerned to further their political ambitions at the expense of the lives of ordinary people.

A remarkable feature of Zimbabwean writing has been the quality of short-story writing. Novelists of the 1970s have produced several volumes, among them Nyamfukudza's *Aftermaths* (1983) and *If God was a Woman* (1991); Mungoshi's *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* (1988), *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories* (1980), and *Walking Still* (1997). In his stories Nyamfukudza retains his independent voice refusing to reproduce conventional attitudes whether they concern the unquestioned heroism of all who fought on the nationalist side in the war or gender issues. Mungoshi is one of Zimbabwe's most impressive prose writers in English. He handles with equal ease the lives of city people and those of people who draw support from the land and the ancestors and few of his characters whether in town or countryside are not subject to the spiritual demands of Shona tradition. Invariably in a Mungoshi story the certainties of much African realism are refused and whatever meanings are being given to city or countryside remain tentative, the authorial voice withholding its right to speak with final authority.

Musaemura Zimunya, who is Zimbabwe's leading poet, has also produced a volume of short stories, *Nightshift and Other Stories* (1993). Zimunya's poems have always been alert to the people's culture and the aspirations of the nation. Yet, his sense of humor and awareness of human diversity are too acute for his writing to lapse into the simplicities of propaganda. While his early poetry celebrated the monuments of Zimbabwean culture and the capacity of ordinary people to endure colonial oppression, his stories and his later poetry show a bitter contempt for bureaucratic arrogance and government ineptitude in independent Zimbabwe. His poetry collections include *Thought-Tracks* (1982) and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* (1982).

The first publications in English by black Zimbabwean women authors appeared in the mid-1980s with the Ndebele writer Barbara Makhalisa's collection *The Underdog and Other Stories* (1984). These stories, despite offering rather conventional Christian solutions for all life's difficulties, are sensitive to the range of problems Zimbabwean women confront. A major breakthrough in women's writing was achieved with Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), which has found an assured place within international discourse on black feminist writing. Based on the development of two very different young girls growing up at a mission school, it traces the effects of both patriarchal and colonial oppression on the psyche of black women, the "nervous conditions" under which they have to live. While related to Frantz Fanon's concept of colonial neurosis, the novel extends this to the question of gender glaringly omitted by Fanon.

The second important woman writing in English, Yvonne Vera, made an immediate impact with her first volume, a collection of short stories, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1994). In these stories, Vera employs a conventionally realist narrative to examine the lives of Zimbabweans both during and after the liberation war. The technique that has become her hallmark, however, was first developed in *Nehanda* (1993). The novel is named for its protagonist, the spirit medium who organized the first Chimurenga in Central Mashonaland, and the story unfolds within her unconsciousness. As woman and medium, Nehanda is shown to be deeply sensitive to nature, soil, people, and the spirit world linked into a unified system that colonialism seeks to smash. In her subsequent novels, *Without a Name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1996), and *Butterfly Burning* (1998), images and symbols create a highly patterned prose that explores sensitive issues in gender relations such as rape, child abuse, and abortion.

Since 1996 Zimbabwe has experienced severe economic recession and in mid-2003 inflation stood at over 250 percent. This makes the publication industry less and less viable and has already resulted in fewer commercial outlets for both established and emerging writers. As the ruling party becomes conscious of its own unpopularity, it has responded with legislation designed to silence all expressions or shows of dissent that would have been regarded as excessive in Rhodesia. The official media attribute any internal opposition to the influence of the west bent on re-colonizing Zimbabwe and to counter this imagined global conspiracy, international news organizations like the BBC are prevented from reporting from Zimbabwe, foreign journalists are deported and their replacements are routinely refused work permits. Despite this, a culture of openness is kept alive by the courageous independent press whose editors and journalists endure routine arrests and detentions even if they are seldom

charged. This culture is also made possible because Zimbabweans are relatively well educated and they regard the official propaganda with contemptuous skepticism. The realization that the ruling party can make people conform to its wishes only through state violence creates a space of free thinking from which Zimbabwean imaginative writing draws its energy and its diversity.

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25

West African literature in English: beginnings to the mid-seventies

DAN S. IZEVBAYE

The roots of English-language literature in West Africa may be traced to the formation of various cultures in reaction to external contacts during successive overlapping historical periods. The literary traditions of the region have been shaped by these interlocking cultural histories, just as the cultural identities of the region are products of its many-layered history. These cultural strata have had such a strong influence, and writers borrow so freely across cultures that it is not always possible to determine the essential African element from the invasive or the syncretic product. Each of the major literatures is the product, not of any one tradition – not even of one as dominant as English colonial culture – but of live traditions that are always available to creative writers even when they are inactive: as Wole Soyinka puts it, "the past exists now" (1988: 19).

The dominance of English as a linguistic medium has tended to obscure this fact. Only the colonial connections of the culture are implied in categories like "Commonwealth literature" – where the literature is seen as an extension of the English tradition, or "postcolonial literature" as a product of European cultural imperialism to which it is a counterdiscourse. Femi Osofisan sees in the latter category a revival of the "grand myth of [precolonial African] Absence" (1991: 1). The exclusion of indigenous traditions is inherent in such language-based classifications of Europhone African literatures. The continuing influence of the different traditions is an essential part of the literary history.

The primary historical phase of West African culture was pre-literate. It has been acknowledged that the oral heritage from this past is an endangered tradition to be preserved from extinction in the face of social change and the introduction of literacy. Though many recorded oral texts reflect the influence of literacy, quite a few are of obvious antiquity. Because of the cultural assurance that it provided, the recorded heritage has been the invigorating resource for West African writers of the postwar period, and a nationalist refuge from the mimicry of later, dominant foreign traditions. The literary revival of the 1950s

and 1960s owes much of its vigor to archival collections and the continuing interest in oral-tradition research. The preservation of this heritage was in part initiated by nineteenth-century anthropologists and missionaries, while the International African Institute and government agencies provided material and organizational support in the 1930s.

The Islamic influence marks the second phase of the cultural evolution of West Africa. This influence was initially modified by the physical geography of the region. Before moving in a southerly direction, it tended to follow an ecological divide roughly defined by the Niger River, which runs almost like a fault line along the points of contact between the cultural influence of Islam and that of the Christian west. Consequently, British literary influence has left the English-speaking Islamic areas of West Africa largely untouched, in contrast to the situation in the francophone areas. The influence of English literature was almost limited to the attempts by British education officers like Rupert East, who initially tried to introduce Hausa writers to narrative realism.

Hardly any significant English-language literature was produced outside the southern regions before independence. For a long time this gap was bridged mainly by adaptations and translations into English, like Hiskett's 1967 translation of Tafawa Balewa's *Shaihu Umar* (1934), which was subsequently adapted for stage, and *An African Night's Entertainment* (1962a), Cyprian Ekwensi's adaptation of a Hausa fictional work by J. Tafida and Rupert East. In anglophone writing, the presentation of the half-familiar world of Islamic culture had the inevitable distancing effect of romance, since the authors themselves are at a spiritual distance from the tradition that they appropriated. Some representation of this world occurs in Cyprian Ekwensi's *The Passport of Mallam Ilia* (1960) and *Burning Grass* (1962b), set in the Hausa Fulani grasslands that would soon be disturbed by new ideas and new social relations, as *Iska* (1966) illustrates. This world also occurs in Soyinka's evocation of the Sudanic court of Mata Kharibu in *A Dance of the Forests,* and in the characterization of the blind beggar from the north in *The Swamp Dwellers* (1963) (see Soyinka 1973b). There is some idealization of the beggar's world in the stoicism of a personality that has been molded by the mercilessly arid land from which he has just migrated to a swamp in the Niger delta. However, the setting serves the ideological direction of the play rather than any specific geographical purpose, and the beggar's presence is not cultural or ethnic. His theatrical function is to resolve dramatic conflict by calming the incensed victim of exploitation with his promise of ecological renewal. In contrast, the cultural referent of Ekwensi's romances of northern Nigeria is recognizable in the savannah setting.

The origins of English as a literary medium in West Africa may be traced to early contacts with European traders. The earliest of such contacts in the modern period was with the Portuguese (Spencer 1971: 7–9). Some memorials of Portuguese contacts survive in the plastic arts, former trading forts, and residues of Portuguese in some coastal languages. But the social and political impact of these contacts is not significant, and Portuguese themes do not seem prominent in West African oral narratives. The presence of English has been more enduring for mainly political reasons; but it was chiefly for commercial reasons that Africans were introduced to the western form of literacy, and only late in the eighteenth century did the social conditions and the interaction of the two regions reach a point when an African would keep a diary of his commercial transactions, and ex-slaves use writing to further the cause of emancipation.

One of the first Africans to use English for record keeping was Antera Duke, a Calabar trader. The significance of Duke's 1787 diary is sociological and linguistic rather than literary; but it does reveal the distant roots of the pidgins and creoles (Elugbe and Omamor 1991: 125) so widely used as lingua franca and for popular literature and drama in some of the coastal cities of West Africa. A tradition has developed from the continuity of these popular forms of English usage. The affinities of Duke's English are with the non-standard "pidgin" variety of Amos Tutuola's fantastic narratives and the chapbooks produced for the barely literate urban masses in the 1950s and early 1960s. It survives in the variety fondly christened "rotten English" by Ken Saro-Wiwa. The cultural situation that produced such pidginization encouraged Gabriel Okara to experiment with its literary possibilities in *The Voice* (1964), although these possibilities are only partially realized in the novel. The situation also provoked the debate about the language of African literature for, by this time, English was already being seen as the language of domination rather than a language of contact and trade.

The slave-trade era that produced Antera Duke's English also produced, among other things, the slave-holding society of the west, literacy among domestic and liberated slaves, the slave narrative and, eventually, the literature of Africans in exile, with its centered memories of home and childhood. The early classic of the genre is Olaudah Equiano's autobiography (1789). Those who sold its author, Equiano, into slavery probably spoke the same variety of English as Antera Duke, Equiano's contemporary, although Equiano himself was not necessarily familiar with this variety, having acquired English in the west after his enslavement. The entry of subject Africans into the increasingly global world created by the west sowed the seeds of a modern theme. As

an African adopting a typical eighteenth-century European form for writing about his travels, Equiano has contributed to the making of this world. So, in their different ways, have many of his contemporary ex-slaves.

The different receptions of Equiano's text reflect its plural cultural status, like the author's own change of name – "Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa." In many respects an eighteenth-century Anglo-American work and one of the founding texts of the African American literary tradition, Equiano's narrative has become ancestral to African literature since it was recovered as a specifically African text in Paul Edwards's abridged edition, *Equiano's Travels* (1966). Until quite recently, criticism by African scholars has focused on Equiano's Igbo origins, and much of this criticism is based on what many consider the remarkable acts of memory that enabled the uprooted exile to overcome amnesia (Obiechina 1975: 251). Chinua Achebe has been more cautious, pointing out in a 1973 essay that Equiano's "ancestral Igboland had become a fragmented memory" (1988: 63).

A new direction in the scholarship has been charted by S. O. Ogude (1982), who questions the mimetic assumptions of Equiano's account of his homeland by emphasizing Equiano's extensive reliance on contemporary ethnographic accounts of "Guinea." Ogude thus shifts emphasis from the representational view of the text by arguing that Equiano's true achievement is not his ethnography of his homeland but his celebration of the black race in the face of its denigration by influential eighteenth-century intellectuals. In other words, Equiano's writing is strategic rather than mimetic, and the text owes its enduring quality to its "considerable narrative power," rather than to any efficient memory work. In his writings on black autobiographies, James Olney has similarly pointed out that historical writing is hardly possible without imaginative reconstruction. Given that Equiano was no longer fully in touch with the oral traditions and mnemonic resources of his childhood culture by the time he wrote, he would naturally rely on the literate conventions of his acquired culture even in reconstructing the fragments of his childhood memory. But while the act of memory may require supplementation from literary and oral sources of knowledge, the memory of childhood is not necessarily the inscription of secondhand sources on a blank slate.

The reception of Equiano's narrative as the story of West Africa's lost son is a prologue to the rise of a pan-African consciousness in the African diaspora. Some of the roots of the hegemony of English may be traced to its role in the liberation and social acceptance of Africans in the diaspora. As proof of the humanity of former slaves, the act of writing was the first step in the liberation of black consciousness, and it heralded – and also indirectly influenced – the

next stage, African nationalism. There is a kinship between the liberating literacy that was of such importance for the making of slave narratives and the idea of political commitment and social relevance that the early Congresses of Negro Artists saw as the defining qualities of the literature of Africa and the diaspora.

Although pan-Africanism is not yet a culture or a "tradition" in which writers grow up, or even an established set of literary conventions, it is still an important source of political vision and literary images for many writers. Some political contexts are more conducive to its influence than others. The earliest literary works that were inspired by this movement came from those countries that participated in the early pan-African congresses, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana (when it was still the Gold Coast) – especially Ghana, where the movement has sprouted its most tenacious roots. The earliest of these works, *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), by J. E. Casely-Hayford of the Gold Coast, was published after the first Pan-African Congress of 1900. The nationalist vigor of the pan-Africanist movement made Africa a popular theme in the versified political sentiments of Dennis Osadebay and Michael Dei Anang. It was also the theme of *The African* (1960) by William Conton, a Gambian-born resident of Sierra Leone. The novel's idealized treatment of the homecoming of a western-educated African to a successful political career was already slightly dated by the time of its publication. By 1960 the western-educated African was already the antihero of various satirical, absurd, and tragic works. Achebe's more naturalistic treatment of the theme in *No Longer at Ease* was published the same year, and *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), Peter Abrahams's novel about pan-African politics in West Africa was already available to the reading public; so was the English translation of Mongo Beti's satirical treatment, *Mission to Kalaa* (1958). The increasing realism of the independence years eventually overshadowed the idealism of pan-Africanism; but this does not mean that the literary impact of pan-Africanism was declining. Ama Ata Aidoo exploits its topicality in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), where an African American returns "home" with her Ghanaian husband. It survives in the concern with slavery and exile in the writings of the following decade, like those of the Sierra Leonean poet and critic Lemuel Johnson.

Some of the literary peaks of this tradition began to appear in the 1970s when America, the main source of the movement, became an alternative setting and of particular importance for authors who had some contact with this source. For some Ghanaian authors it became not just an influence but a source of inspiration, although their attitude to this source was almost invariably mediated by a postcolonial consciousness of new forms of imperial control

and cultural hegemony. The character and scope of the experience posed a new kind of formal challenge to the authors. Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) is a novel about the shaping of an African revolutionary by his experience of racism in America and imperialism in Africa. More ambitious than the earlier novels, it deliberately provokes responses to its black-and-white picture of the racial subversion of African education and revolution by the weapons of sexual exploitation and violence. Kofi Awoonor's *Ride Me, Memory* (1973), uses traditional African verse forms of praise and abuse to bring the African experience of America into focus and heighten the sense of alienation and nostalgia that are inherent in the condition of the exile.

Some writers simply take the African experience for their expansive theme. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) is a communal dirge on two millennia of Arab and western imperialism in Africa. Its simplified doctrine of the recurrent enslavement and spiritual regeneration of Africa is presented in the mode of an oral historian's exhortations to his divided community. In *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), conceived during his exile in Ghana, Soyinka develops on a larger scale the idea of a national epic that first appeared in "Idanre" (1967). As a pan-African hero-myth in which, at Samora Machel's call to arms, the different histories meet, and "the forests merge / With the Savannah" in a military alliance against apartheid South Africa, it recreates the will to act against apartheid during the years of confrontation. The archetypes for its pan-African hero are taken from the cultures of the Akan, the Yoruba, and the Zulu.

In Soyinka's own pre-text for literary pan-Africanism – *Myth, Literature and the African World*, which was also published in 1976 – the paradigms of African culture are drawn mainly from Yoruba myths and contemporary African literature. The case for an African world based mainly on Yoruba archetypes has been contested by Kwame Anthony Appiah, who argues that "Shaka and Osei Tutu – founders, respectively, of the Zulu and the Asante nations – do not belong in the same narrative, spoke different languages, and had conceptions of kinship (to bow to an ethnographer's idol) that were centrally patrilineal and matrilineal" (1992: 82). This does not allow for the view, argued by Biodun Jeyifo, that Soyinka's African world is not a Negritude-like "conflict-less synthesis [but] a nexus of dynamically disparate and contradiction-ridden matrices" (1988: xv). Appiah concedes that a case exists for the unity of the African experience, but that given the cultural diversity of Africa, a pan-African unity is best sought not in any "metaphysical or mythic conceptions" but in a common experience of western imperialism, and in the erosion of traditional communal values by new economic relations and the technology of the word, resulting in essentially individualistic forms such as the novel. However, certain kinds

of creative work require just such a process of making connections across cultures by constructing archetypal parallels, especially for dramatic situations like the gathering of the tribes in *A Dance of the Forests* (see Soyinka 1973b). It is appropriate that *Ogun Abibiman*, with its pan-African military alliance, should come from Soyinka, a Yoruba, who was Secretary General of the Accra-based Union of Writers of African Peoples, with Dennis Brutus the South African, as a founding member. In such works, the artist may imagine a unity that transcends the actualities of history and tradition, and thus anticipate future reality by projecting his vision beyond historical facts.

The history of Christian missions in West Africa is a history of one of the most enduring cultural legacies of the region. The missions pioneered educational development, translated the Bible into many indigenous languages, nurtured a culture of literacy, and ensured a Christian sensibility for the evolving literary culture. During the 1930s, the process of literary development was carried further by African associations and government-literature bureaux through programs for stimulating the growth of indigenous literatures and local publishing. Two traditions evolved from this endeavor. Western-educated Africans were encouraged to take a scholarly interest in the preservation of their own oral traditions by collecting and translating material from their own languages. They were also encouraged to create their own traditions of writing. Much of their activity found a practical outlet in schools and among the new reading publics. The products of the pre-Second World War cultural revival – D. O. Fagunwa, I. O. Delano, Pita Nwana, F. K. Fiawoo, and J. H. Nketia – helped to found the new vernacular traditions (see Gérard 1980). The first of Fagunwa's fantasy novels enacts the transition from an oral consciousness to a literary imagination in the story of a scribe who writes down for posterity the fantastic adventures being narrated to him by the hero. The transformation of the oral heritage into archival and creative forms has influenced subsequent literary activity. Amos Tutuola, for example, is the inheritor of both Fagunwa's practice and contemporary collections of traditional tales. As Irele establishes in "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer," it was a process that developed into a specific ethnic tradition within West African anglophone writing, with its cultural continuity in the writings of Soyinka, Fagunwa's translator (Irele 1981: 174–97).

Seen in this context, Tutuola's fiction occupies an important place in West African literature. The reception of his work has fluctuated between the competing claims of the Yoruba context of his work and the universe of archetypes that hold his tales together. His work is marginal to mainstream English and its literature insofar as its deviations from the accepted English norm mark

him as an outsider. Outside this tradition critics like Gerald Moore and Harold Collins were encouraged by the universalizing theories of Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Northrop Frye to establish his kinship with storytellers in other folkloric traditions. Such mainly nonhistorical, archetypal approaches have given way to culture specific interpretations, like the compilation by Bernth Lindfors (1997: 87–117) of a specifically West African motif index for the *Palm Wine Drinkard*. Tutuola's significance lies in his drawing attention to a culture whose native storytelling traditions lie outside the authority of the literary forms of the colonial period, and revealing an African alternative to the realist conventions of the rationalist tradition. The most eloquent tribute to this alternative tradition and its Yoruba interpreters is the fantasy-based fiction of the non-Yoruba, British-based, Nigerian author, Ben Okri.

Translations from the oral tradition also became the primary source of literary renewal before and during the independence years. The Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor developed his personal style by experimenting with the verse forms of his native Ewe culture from the early 1960s, and another Ghanaian poet, K. Adali-Mortty, contributed translations of Ewe poetry to the journal, *Black Orpheus*. Such texts in translation are often assimilated into the literary tradition of the receptor language, as Olumbe Bassir does by including translations from Yoruba and Akan oral traditions in *West African Verse* (1957).

The literary appropriation of texts that had been stripped of their cultural context became standard practice in the 1950s and 1960s. The Nigerian Christopher Okigbo adopted this compositional practice in his later poetry, incorporating an English translation of a Yoruba praise poem into his "Lament of the Masks," and Nketia's translation of an Akan drum poem into his "Lament of the Drums" – appropriating the same material as Brathwaite's "The Making of the Drum" in *Rights of Passage*. African drama, in particular, has benefited from the process, because of its dependence on oral performance. J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's major play, *Ozidi* (1991), is a creative by-product of his groundbreaking literary and taped recording of the traditional performances of an Ijo saga.

Translation served the Christian missions differently. The missions were interested in developing literature primarily for sustaining the young culture of literacy and for their evangelism. The endeavor of the Christian missions, which began in the nineteenth century before the formal establishment of British imperial rule in West Africa, did more to transform the African worldview than colonial rule itself. The translation of the Bible and its supplementary texts was one of the chief instruments of this transformation.

The indigenous languages were not immune from the resulting cultural transformation. The new literatures remained traditional in content and form, but their discourse became Christian. That is why, despite the precedent of writing in local languages, the choice of English was more than a mere historical imperative for writers like Achebe, Okigbo, Soyinka, and Awoonor, who had an ambivalent relationship to this discourse. Their frequent resort to Christian tropes was an ideological choice in the struggle to control the dominant language of the new reality. Their style was mimetic of the cultural synthesis that created the new reality.

The literary response to Christianity as a powerful agent of change can be seen at its most dramatic in the personality of Professor in Soyinka's *The Road* (see 1973b). The conception of Professor was probably as old as the response to Christian music recollected in the opening chapter of a much later work, *Aké* (1981). In it, a disembodied narrator hears the sepulchral voice of the Christian God in the deep sounds of the church organ; but hardly can this voice be distinguished from the funereal chants of the *egungun*, the ancestral spirits of the Yoruba. Years later, these ambivalent organ sounds of the author's childhood seem to be incarnated in Professor, who is trapped in his verbal inquiry into two conflicting theologies of transition – the "Word made flesh" of Christian doctrine, and the "flesh dissolution" of the *agemo* cult. Here, as in plays like *The Strong Breed* (see 1973b) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), the religious discourse is a means of reaching beyond the material processes of transition by visually suggesting their spiritual essence.

Yoruba culture has been profoundly influenced by a strong ecumenical spirit since the first translators of the Yoruba Bible in the nineteenth century appropriated what seemed to be traditional equivalents of Christian concepts. The influence of the early writers who shaped the literary language was decisive, especially in developing new narrative forms in which traditional characters are given new identities. The process was repeated in many of the cultures in the region. It produced a transitional form of narrative that Janheinz Jahn named neo-African (1966). Fagunwa's characterization often follows the precedence of the choices made by the translators of the Yoruba Bible by making the deities of the Yoruba pantheon perform new functions in a narrative that is explicitly Christian in form and spirit. For example, in his second work of fiction, the Yoruba divine messenger and mediator, Esu, retains his traditional attribute as the presiding spirit of crossroads while also functioning like Lucifer in an explanatory tale that is obviously modeled on the Christian account of the fallen angel. The not-always-easy marriage of Yoruba and Christian religious ideas was eventually resolved and made orthodox by E. Bolaji Idowu's

scholarly interpretations in *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962), where the four-hundred-and-one divinities of Yoruba religion are accommodated within the monotheistic theology of Christianity.

Since the late 1950s, writers who were to form the Mbari movement found an answer to the ideological implications of this religious syncretism by turning to the communication value of transcultural myths, without necessarily conceding the advantage to Christianity. Soyinka's archetypal figures are drawn from both Yoruba and Christian narratives, and they interact in a contemporary setting. In *The Strong Breed* (staged in 1963), the cultural intervention of Eman, a type of Christ, renders obsolete the traditional role of the ritual carrier. In *The Interpreters* (1965), the presence of Lazarus highlights the failed promise of the interpreters, the modern incarnations of Yoruba divinities. There is surely more to such mythmaking than the transcultural matching of archetypes; it implies the transition out of a cultural crisis. It is significant that Achebe, who is by no means an opponent of change, argues that by a similar biblical translation of Igbo deities the "early Christian missionaries . . . escorted a two-headed, pagan god into their holy of holies!" (1975: 100).

The awakening of this neo-African form of consciousness would have occurred at different stages in the cultural education of the writers. What Mbari provided was a focus for this consciousness and an appropriate cultural climate for its expression. Soyinka's film, "Culture in Transition" (1964), is an audiovisual anthology of the literary forms of an emerging national culture from an Mbari perspective. The cultural role of Christianity was often a reference point for writers of the period. In *Heavensgate*, originally an Mbari publication (1962), Okigbo adopts the structure of the Catholic Mass as his model for a religious procession during which, reminded of his own mortality, the communicant hero pauses in the middle of the ritual to offer an unorthodox prayer of intercession to his patron saint. The hero's irreverence is a theological provocation disguised as a private joke for, according to Ben Obumselu (personal communication), the first line of the following extract has its source in the funeral of the poet's deceased mother:

> O Anna of the panel oblongs
>   protect me
> from them fucking angels
>   protect me
>   my sandhouse and bones.

This psychological outlet for the hero's cultural insecurity underscores his recognition of the need for a creative, hybridized response to the new reality.

Since language is a key to this response, some critics have argued that the choice of hybridization would only reinforce the hegemony of English. This fear of "glottophagy" – Louis-Jean Calvert's term for linguistic imperialism (Gérard 1984: 47) – is best understood in the context of strong vernacular traditions in Nigeria and Ghana. Chantal Zabus restates the problem in her argument that when African writers try to indigenize English, they become "logos-eaters" who submit to cultural amnesia (1990: 19–20). Writers of the Mbari culture understood the dangers of wandering beyond what Okigbo terms the "siren limits" of discourse, and the need to fasten themselves to the mast of their heritage in their engagement with English.

Such a metalinguistic awareness of the problem was not typical of the period. The influence of the missions endures in most other works at this time. The favored genre was the actual or fictionalized autobiography of the age of transition, with nostalgic or elegiac memories of childhood and traditional life. Christianity, education, and hard work are linked with success. The central figures are the father, the teacher, and the priest, and the site of the conflict is usually childhood experience at a Christian institution – a mission home, a school, or a church. The Ghanaian works, which tend to be fictionalized autobiographies, include Joseph Abruquah's *The Catechist* (1965), Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966), and Amu Djoleto's *The Strange Man* (1967). The Nigerians' novels were inspired by Achebe's success, but are often anthropological. Their treatment of Christianity and traditional life range from ethnography in Onuora Nzekwu's *Wand of Noble Wood* (1961), to comedy in Nkem Nwankwo's *Danda* (1964), and Obi Egbuna's *Wind versus Polygamy* (1964) – a novel reminiscent of the light satire of T. M. Aluko's *One Man, One Wife* (1959). This theme – the tensions caused in a traditional rural setting by Christian conversion or a Christian education – is more skillfully handled in John Munonye's *The Only Son* (1966) and *Obi* (1969), the first two novels of the most prolific writer in the group.

The considerable effect of British colonial rule on the development of literature in West Africa can be treated differently from the literary influence of the Christian missions, and from the political influence of pan-Africanism on the early writings by the new West African elite. The British influence predated the formal creation of West African colonies. It began with the newspaper contributions in the nineteenth-century culture that Michael Echeruo (1977) described as "Victorian Lagos." The literary influence of British culture extended to the end of the Second World War. It survives in the medical education and literary productions of the Gambian-born poet Lenrie Peters, and the generation of Sierra Leone intellectuals like Sarif Easmon and, notably,

Abioseh Nicol, whose European-type cosmopolitanism could not but influence their literary accounts of the new cultural syncretism in the colonial setting of Sierra Leone. It is therefore useful to identify those cultural aspects of colonial history that bear directly on the emergence of West African literature.

The first of these factors was the image of Africa, sustained by an extremely influential literature of imperialism to which some serving colonial officers, like Joyce Cary in northern Nigeria, contributed. Its reading public included not only colonial officers, but also West African schoolboys whose range of prescribed and supplementary reading was circumscribed by this canon. Achebe gives a graphic personal account of the typical African schoolboy in the colonial system whose reading included "R[i]der Haggard and John Buchan and the rest, and their 'African' books. I did not see myself as an African to begin with. I took sides with the . . . white man [who] was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts" (in Petersen and Rutherford 1990: 7).

The second effect of colonial policy was the creation of a West African community linked by a common communications network that embraced air, road, and postal links, as well as an imperial currency and the English language. However, although colonialism proved that a language unites and languages divide, the separate administration of the territories also laid the foundation for the rise of national consciousness and the beginnings of national literatures. Up to the end of the Second World War, this regional community was still an imperial province whose literary experience was fostered by the metropolitan tradition. The postwar period was marked by the rapid rise of popular literatures in the Nigerian market town of Onitsha, and the Ghanaian capital, Accra. The fuel for this energy came from the increased resources for the cheap production of printed matter, and the increase in urban mass literacy.

The link between this popular literary culture and the new tradition initiated by Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) was forged when Cyprian Ekwensi and Asare Konadu, the two major authors produced by the popular tradition, gained access to an expanded publishing and distribution network. Ekwensi has since achieved some success as a writer of sentimental urban chronicles. His first full-length fiction, *People of the City* (1954), was originally serialized in the national press, and was not too distant in spirit from the social context of his early chapbook. Written in the picaresque convention of urban realism, it reveals as much about its city setting, as it does its characters. His most

popular book, *Jagua Nana* (1961), is a sentimental city tale of an aging courtesan. Konadu, a journalist who printed and published his own early works, entered the African Writers' Series list with *A Woman in Her Prime* (1967), and had his most popular, locally published, work, *Come Back, Dora* (1966) reissued in 1969 as *Ordained by the Oracle* under the Heinemann imprint.

The emergence of the African Writers' Series as a major provider of African fiction and poetry in English and in English translation was due almost completely to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. According to Allan Hill (in Petersen and Rutherford 1990: 150), Heinemann ventured into African publishing after one of their educational advisers, Professor Donald MacCrae, reported that *Things Fall Apart* was "the best first novel [he] had read since the war." Achebe looked for more than critical acclaim. He recovered from the psychology of the colonized when he recognized a colonial reflection of himself in the savage that Conrad's Marlowe thought he saw in the Congo. Achebe hoped that his works would in turn help restore the pride of Africans who had internalized a negative image of the self after years of denigration and mental dependency, and of being obliged to see the self through the negative representation of Africans in the discourses of others. He specifically cites as examples of such discourses the African writings of Conrad and Cary, two authors whose works had become canonical by that time. The awakening of the postcolonial consciousness began with such a recognition. The combination of historical insight and literary skill needed for answering back at colonial history and its discourses seemed to depend on a certain type of intellectual milieu.

The seeds for just such a culture were sown at the foundation of the University College, Ibadan, which admitted Chinua Achebe and John Munonye among its first set of students in 1948. *Things Fall Apart* was published a decade later. The nature of its considerable influence is exemplified by the novels of Elechi Amadi and Flora Nwapa, both Ibadan alumni.

Amadi recreates internally troubled traditional societies in near-idyllic settings early in the century. The tragic inadequacy of his villagers' reading of a historic event in *The Great Ponds* (1969) is reminiscent of the apocalyptic image of Achebe's first title. However, Amadi's first two novels are typical of the kind of imaginative writing that led to the growing dissatisfaction with the literary portrayal of women and the absence of their viewpoint, like the objection to the idealizations of women by Soyinka and Okigbo. Even *Things Fall Apart,* one of the few classic texts that took the gender question into account while attempting an historically faithful representation of Igbo culture, did not answer the objections. Whatever the merits of Achebe's empathy and Armah's attachment to Akan matrilineal values, feminist criticism implies that

it is better to speak in one's own voice than be made a ventriloquist's doll – a gender extension of Achebe's principle. Before Armah's fiction, a female viewpoint had appeared in the Ghanaian plays, Efua Sutherland's *Edufa* (1967) and Aidoo's *Anowa* (1969); but in Nigeria, Nwapa's novel *Idu* (1969) became the first test of the principle.

The early novels of Amadi and Nwapa illustrate the kind of issues that influence the critical orientation of feminists. Both published their first novels, *The Concubine* and *Efuru*, in 1966, and the second, *The Great Ponds* and *Idu*, in 1969. Both first novels deal with the myth of a marriage prohibition imposed on a woman who is beloved of a sea-god or a lake-goddess respectively. But while Amadi – a gifted storyteller – presents his female character as a *femme fatale*, Nwapa's heroine is a victim who confronts her fate with dignity.

The cultural construction of woman as wife and bearer of male children is revisioned in the fiction of Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. Their early texts focus on the all-important theme of fertility. As a pioneer of this revision, Nwapa is accommodating, even conciliatory in her mythologizing of the problem of female fertility. Emecheta, began her writing career in the early 1970s with an open challenge to the male-dominated world that shaped her early life and social awareness. She has remained unrelenting in her probing of the problems of wifehood, from her first two autobiographical novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974), up to *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), which confirms her significance as a fiction writer. Nwapa's subsequent fiction has extended from traditional culture to life in modern urban settings, fiction of interethnic relations, and the Nigerian civil war. In contrast, a new voice in the mid-1970s, Buchi Emecheta, begins from a different position by confronting the problems of the Igbo woman, first autobiographically, then in traditional and urban contexts. By the 1970s, the intervention of female novelists and dramatists in Ghana and Nigeria had brought some balance to the literature by redefining the terms in which women and their history will be represented. Even this literary representation would not have been complete without subsequent critical and theoretical support (Davies and Graves 1986).

Things Fall Apart is also significant as a representative product of its milieu. The intellectual culture of the 1950s gave Achebe's generation a sense of the historic responsibility of the new elite in an age of transition. The growing emphasis on African history and traditional religion at Ibadan was a culturally recuperative act. So was the writing of *Things Fall Apart*, which goes beyond its tragic story of culture change. As an expressive medium of the shift from a traditional to a modern form of discourse, the narrative is the first of Achebe's

continuing fictional history of the transformation of consciousness. The narrator appropriates the languages of both cultures to create a new reality (Innes 1990: 35–36), so that in the context of Achebe's reading public, the story takes on added significance as a continuing contest of discourses – between the master narrative referred to at the end of the story, and the novel itself as the counternarrative.

Lagos, the setting of Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), is not the lively Lagos of Ekwensi's realist fiction, but a culturally fragmented place for trying out new identities and escaping the old sanctions of community and tradition. Achebe's naturalistic treatment presents Obi, the grandson of Okonkwo, as the victim of history and of his genes; but he is also the westernized civil servant who is ruined by the economic pressures of the new society. Gikandi (1987: 154–59) reads the often allusive and ambivalent *Arrow of God* (1964) as a deconstructive representation of myth as an instrument of knowledge and power, and argues that "the battle for Umuaro's soul is fought as much in the real world as it is fought in the symbolic and mythical universe" (1987: 154). Achebe traces the culture's transition from a ritual priesthood to the secular institution of warrant chiefs appointed by the colonial government. Its haughty and inflexible protagonist finds himself trapped between the immutability of ritual destiny and the certainty of historical change.

Soyinka complains that Achebe's ambivalence toward the gods enables the priest to treat the cultural practices and ritual precedents of his culture's history with equivocation (1976: 87–92). However, it is in the nature of realist texts to seek an ambivalent resolution of the supernatural, as Elechi Amadi does in *The Concubine* (1964). Soyinka's observation throws some light on his own practice. While he is not skeptical about numinous experiences, his own literary style is hardly ever free of certain types of ambiguity. If Eldred Jones and Abiola Irele are able to affirm his continuing significance and relevance for our age, it is because of the dynamism of an imagination described by Biodun Jeyifo (1988) and Thomas Whitaker (1992) as dialectical or antinomian.

While the difference between Achebe and Soyinka may be partly one of artistic temperament, the difference is all the more striking in light of their similar educational backgrounds. Like many writers of their generation, both Achebe and Soyinka have been shaped by the same complex of recent histories: mission education in childhood, growing up under British colonial rule, education at regional government colleges and at the young University College, Ibadan (before Soyinka left for Leeds). The decisive factor lies in their different cultures. Achebe's narrative thrives on Igbo traditions of speech and oratory; Soyinka feeds his creative energy on Yoruba myth, ritual, festival, and popular

theater practice. The contrast between the forms adopted by the two authors transcends their individual practice as writers. Behind Kole Omotoso's *Achebe or Soyinka* (1996) is the subtext of cultural tendencies and alternatives implicit in the work of the two writers. The cultural sources are important, for both writers exemplify the creative genius of their respective cultural traditions. Many scholars have noticed the predominance of Igbo novelists in Nigerian literature, and of Yoruba playwrights in Nigerian theater.

Up to the middle of the 1970s, the only Igbo playwright of any importance was Zulu Sofola, the first Nigerian female playwright. Her traditional plays are based on western Igbo culture, and her own community is monarchical by tradition. In contrast, most of the eastern areas of Igboland were traditionally a loose association of villages, many of which did not have monarchs before the period of the "warrant chiefs" depicted in *Arrow of God*. Sofola's drama does not reflect the mainstream of the performing arts of these Igbo communities east of the Niger River.

The following outline of differences may not necessarily lead to the essence of Yoruba and Igbo art forms. But it could shed some light on the factors that influence the orientation toward those forms that eventually become dominant. This question is not to be confused with the ritual/drama controversy that split Igbo scholars into camps offering Greek-centered or Africa-centered explanations (Amankulor, Echeruo, Enekwe [and Obiechina] in Ogunbiyi 1981). Onuora Nzekwu (1981: 134–35) suggests that the story element in Igbo festival does not indicate an evolution of the form, as Echeruo would later argue, but was originally that part of the borrowed masquerade form that was not assimilated into the basic Igbo festival, and did not appear at subsequent performances in modern secular contexts.

Performance as an artistic characteristic of rituals and festivals is not unique to specific cultures. The uniqueness of each culture's artistic tradition lies in the particular aggregation of theatrical and dramatic possibilities as a result of various cultural factors. As the Ozidi saga shows, individually the elements of performance – music, mime, dance, and acting – and the forms of myth, ritual, and history, are not unique to Ijo culture. It is their combination within a structure of cultural preferences that creates a specific tradition that is identifiable as Ijo.

The historical process that produced the rich theatrical tradition of the Yoruba is well-documented. Chris Dunton summarizes some explanations for this growth (1992: 145–46). They include the highly urbanized culture of the Yoruba, its centralized, monarchical institutions and a secularism that contrasts with the theocratic tendencies of a similarly urbanized Hausa culture.

However, such is the nature of the centralized system of the Hausa that theater seems to thrive much better than the Islamic prohibition of representational art seems to suggest.

In Yoruba culture, virtually all the main transitions from the oral tradition to modern dramatic forms have been made. The historical circumstances and social institutions that made this continuity mainly possible are: the availability of patronage and markets for artists and craftspeople, the conventions for personality adjustments to social roles, and the relation of the language to centralized institutions.

The survival of traditional theatrical forms has been assured by the importance of social groups like royal courts, compound-based extended families, and semiprofessional associations that patronize the arts. The vitality of theatrical forms was virtually guaranteed by the social recognition enjoyed by family-based guilds of specialized artists – drummers, praise singers, acrobats, cloth weavers, wood carvers – whose products are theater prerequisites, and who provide the vital ingredients of festivals, contemporary folk operas and "concert parties," as well as the tradition of traveling players which grew out of history and myth (Adedeji 1981: 221–49).

Such continuity occurs naturally in a culture that encourages role playing and has formalized various masks for coping with the personality shifts required of individuals performing social roles in earnest or at play. Certain professions – like those of king, hunter, warrior and priest – are distinguished by costume items such as the beaded crown, charms hanging like medals from the hunter's smock, and the priest's chain of palm-nuts. This recognizable iconography is convertible to stage property, since drama is the representation of such masks of identity – those cultural forms that mark the change of identity when individuals slip from their normal self by enacting roles that are socially ascribed, or assumed at the moment of desire, or involuntarily taken on at possession rites. These vehicles of social, political, and religious identities are often translated and distilled into the formal conventions of art among the Hausa and the Yoruba, and appropriated by modern playwrights (Horn 1981; Adelugba 1981). Such masks are a normal aspect of Yoruba culture, with its ubiquity of dramatic and theatrical opportunities at royal court, site of worship, and market place. The *oba* is costumed like a masquerade when he steps into his ascribed role as God's deputy and, as *The Road* demonstrates, role playing breaks out spontaneously among motor-park touts and mechanics' apprentices.

The models for heroic and tragic roles are transmitted in Yoruba story traditions. The narrative element in Yoruba performance was reinforced by

church plays and by historical narratives, notably Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* (1921), which supplied Duro Ladipo, Wale Ogunyemi, and Ola Rotimi with heroic plots. The presence of large urban audiences who were literate in the traditional plots and conventions of the theater facilitated the movement of performance from church halls to secular spaces. Biblical stories were originally put on stage to enhance the spiritual experience of Christian worshippers; but the resulting experience in practical theater was valuable for the stage tradition developed by Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, and Kola Ogunmola, the fathers of modern Yoruba theater. The religious origins of this theater also reinforced the cultural foundation of secular plays that explore the cultural history of African communities, like Soyinka's dramatization of the carrier as tragic actor in *The Strong Breed* (1973b).

Such transitions were facilitated by the liberal spirit in Yoruba culture, the same spirit that encouraged the rise of African indigenous churches with their permissive use of traditional dance and instrumental music in church worship. But while this seems to have encouraged a culture of drama and theater, it also created the kind of social practices parodied in plays like Soyinka's *The Jero Plays* (1973a). In contrast, the dominance of orthodox Christianity in Igboland gave little room for the kind of nativist church movement that features so strongly in the history of Christianity in Yorubaland.

The history of the indigenous languages has had a significant impact on the literary fortunes of drama and the language of the literature-in-English. Literary Yoruba is a product of the political and linguistic centralization that began with the ascendancy of the Oyo Empire, continued with the translation of the Bible into the Oyo dialect, and reached a decisive point with the colonial choice of Ibadan, an Oyo town, as the administrative capital of the region. Consequently, not only did the Oyo dialect become the language of Yoruba literature, the spread of the language facilitated the mobility of the traveling theaters, which found large settler audiences even in the non-Yoruba towns of northern Nigeria.

The Igbo language has not had the same history of one dominant dialect of the language because there was no comparable centralized order, even as a starting point for the translation of its Bible. However, Igbo culture seems to have offered the speakers of the language a different kind of advantage in rhetorical conventions that appear to be widespread both within the relaxed atmosphere of domestic hospitality and in more formal public assemblies. Both Achebe (in his fiction) and Obiechina (1975: 64) have demonstrated the value attached to conversation as an art in Igbo culture. The customary presentation of "kola" creates the necessity for polite conversation so that, in spite

of its formulaic framework, the eventual prayer over the hospitality kola-nut sometimes turns into a miniature monologue. This is reinforced at the village congregation where the gifted orator has an opportunity to develop his persuasive skills. In Achebe's fiction the skillful orator is credited with the "ownership of the word," as he would be in tradition. Whatever one thinks of the rhetorical skills of Chief Nanga of *A Man of the People*, the art has survived the translation from village oration to soap-box speech making. Nanga is only a literary parody of the modern corruption and abuse of a respectable tradition. Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose reputation grew with the occasions of his political speeches during the period of Nigerian nationalism, is the popular and respected product of the tradition.

The stylistic orientation of each culture is affected by the language of powerful social groups and individuals, and their preferred idiom may obscure other competing forms. The influence of such groups on the traditional orientation of modern Yoruba seems to have been too firmly rooted to be easily upset by new socio-linguistic forces like the growth of Yoruba- and English-language newspapers whose history dates back to the nineteenth century. The adaptation of the language to the kind of everyday prose required in modern print and electronic media was not as rapid as the sophistication of the culture would lead one to expect, until the recent modernizing work of a committee of Yoruba language specialists began to influence the orientation of professional users of the language. Perhaps everyday Yoruba prose did not earn a high public profile until recently because of the high value placed on verbal complexity – the riddling and punning of Ifa divination, the diplomatic indirection of royal aides and courtiers, as well as the verbal labyrinths of the sometimes hermetic praise names of individuals and lineages. Of the two traditions of Yoruba that continue to influence English literary usage, the type of prose required for media use has enjoyed less prestige than prose descended from the idiom of religious cults and specialized groups. The hermetic idiom of the latter is only a by-product of its metaphysical themes. Its influence is evident in the preface poem "Alagemo," inserted to assist the producer with the mask idiom of *The Road*.

The paradigm behind Soyinka's revival of the forms and symbols of traditional Yoruba myth and ritual is the hero-myth of Ogun, an incarnation of the natural cycle of destruction and creativity that materializes in the seasonal cycle of nature, and in the recurrence of history. The hero exemplifies the human capacity to confront the seasonal threat of destruction and re-enter a creative cycle. Soyinka insists on the ideal-type of this paradigm – the metaphysical, because of its potential for infinite extension and relevance; but the plays deal

with its specific manifestations. In Soyinka's works, history tends to follow a recurrent, rather than linear, pattern. But their specific historical locations are established by allusions, especially in the later texts. While the dramatic interest of an early play like *The Strong Breed* centers on the carrier ritual, in *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), the metaphysics of ritual finds expression in an actual incident. Soyinka often recreates traditional Yoruba myths and worldview in specific historical and social contexts. Historical precedent is central to the theme and method of *A Dance of the Forests* although, like the narratives of Fagunwa and Tutuola, the play is set in the spirit-populated forest of Yoruba tales and anecdotes. Soyinka turns this forest into a sacred space for the harrowing of errant humans. Even the metaphysical theme of death and transition in *The Road* is anchored in the social insecurity and the cultural and psychological uncertainties of urban Nigeria in the first half of the 1960s. The play remains close to historical reality in spite of its metaphysical focus. The subtext surfaces in the acts and pronouncements of the characters as they assign to Ogun's agency the dreaded Nigerian highway with its carnage, propitiate the god at the drivers' festival, and are enraged at the intellectual probing of their sacred rites. Only stage illusion separates the social referents of these actions from their status as theater. In contrast, the illusion in *Kongi's Harvest* (Soyinka 1974) is foregrounded by the metaphors through which the process of political succession is presented. Between 1965 and 1967 period costumes were dictated by the prevailing political ethos, as military dictatorships displaced the fragile democracies that were successors to traditional monarchies. This gives "transition" a distinctly political meaning, different from transition as the metaphysical arrest of time around which *The Road* is played.

The concern of the Ibadan literati of the 1950s with the recovery of a lost spiritual community and the cultural heritage that sustains it, became a central theme in subsequent literature, from the decline of community in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, to the impotence of the intelligentsia in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. It is, however, in the evolution of Christopher Okigbo's poetry that the problem finds its autobiographical expression and esthetic resolution. Okigbo's poetry represents the imagination's private quest through ancient and modern civilizations – the Middle East, the west since classical times, and Africa since colonial times. His project consists in shaping a cultural form out of the shattered fragments of what should have been his cultural heritage. That is why the early poems are a prelude to his postcolonial synthesis, as he compensates for the apparent absence of a coherent imaginative tradition with fragments of English and American modernists. The act of composition began with fragments – almost pastiches – of a literary tradition.

The poet's progress becomes a ritual quest, achieved by shaping an esthetic wholeness out of chaos, not unlike the regenerative progress in Soyinka's hero-myth. This healing process of making-whole is achieved through a structural patterning of poetic fragments composed originally as individual lyrics and linked by musical echoes and allusions. This spiritual and literary wholeness is implicit in the imagery of surgery and awakening. Okigbo rationalizes the end product of this originally exploratory process in his statement that all his pre-1966 poems in *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* (1971) are "one poem," "Path of Thunder" being the publisher's posthumous addition. The poems in the apparently unfinished "Path of Thunder" sequence are arguably the beginning of a new prophetic sequence in the newly discovered public voice of the poet.

Like Okigbo, J. P. Clark(-Bekederemo), was part of the unusual constellation of students at Ibadan during its first decade. Many had had their literary apprenticeship at secondary school, and had not come to Ibadan to become writers. What Ibadan provided was a cosmopolitan community and the opportunity to create a medium for their writing which, in the intellectual climate of the time, soon became the source of the creative energy of "those magical years," to borrow Robert Wren's description of the period (Wren 1991). *The Horn*, with Clark-Bekederemo as the founding editor, was only one of the many creative initiatives at Ibadan. Some of the key figures connected with the foundation of *Black Orpheus* and the Mbari Club – Ulli Beier, Gerald Moore, and later, Ezekiel Mphahlele – were tutors at the Extra Mural Department of the college. They sponsored a literary culture as a refreshing alternative to an English literary canon that was backed by the authority of the educational system.

For Clark-Bekederemo (whose *Collected Plays and Poems* appeared in 1991), the overwhelming environment of the Niger delta is not only the source of themes and imagery, it is the backdrop to the ritual cleansing required for resolving the destructive conflicts of powerful private passions that cannot be contained by social custom in his drama. The strong political and environmental pressures on the Ijo people – partly dramatized in *The Raft* (1964) – have also helped in shaping the critic of the colonial adventure in "Ivbie" (1958), and the recorder of national political crises in *A Reed in the Tide* (1965) and *Casualties* (1970). His mixed Ijo / Urhobo ancestry is his paradigm for the cultural identity of the postcolonial African as a cultural mulatto. His verse has evolved from its occasional dependence on modernist poetry to the clarity of speech and the adaptation of the oral forms of folktale and folksong in the later poetry. Similarly, while the plots of Ijo folklore in his first two plays, *Song of a Goat* (1960)

and *The Masquerade* (1964), are interpreted through the classical and western conventions of tragedy and verse drama, his major play, *Ozidi* (1966), makes no such concession to the European stage. It is a radical adaptation of the total-theater esthetics – suggested by Ijo performance – to the requirements of the modern stage.

Some of the issues raised by Clark-Bekederemo's plays are important for the dramatic development of Ola Rotimi, who adapted *Oedipus Rex* to a local situation in *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (1971a). He also wrote and skillfully directed plays, drawing on the nineteenth-century histories of the Yoruba in *Kurunmi: An Historical Tragedy* (1971b), and the Edo in *Ovonranmwen Nogbaisi* (1974).

The culture of modern drama in Ghana is similar in important respects to those in Nigeria, especially the traditional rituals and festivals that became a key source of themes and theatrical devices, the folk plays and concert parties and the great popularity of school plays. The early years of Ghanaian independence also saw the development of theater facilities, notably through the resourcefulness of the playwright Efua Sutherland and the director-producer Joe de Graft. However, the development was slow in fulfilling the promise of its theatrical energy. Some of this may have been due to state patronage, which lasted up to the fall of Nkrumah. Joe de Graft seems to be more gifted as a play director than as a playwright. He has remained within the conventions of European drama in spirit and in form, both in *Sons and Daughters* (1964), which is similar to Sarif Easmon's domestic drama *Dear Parent and Ogre* (1964), and in his experimental psychological drama, *Through a Film Darkly* (1970). This was hardly a technical advance for African drama, given that Kobina Sekyi (1974) used the same genre to satirize colonial mimicry among Ghanaians in *The Blinkards*, first performed in 1915. The most important innovations were Efua Sutherland's use of traditional storytelling, modifications in designing the performance area, and the adaptation of the *Ananse* story cycle during her work with the Experimental Theatre Group. However, these innovations were applied mainly in entertaining plays, except in adaptations of *Alcestis* and *Edufa*, which depict the corrupting effects of a decadent materialism on a marital relationship.

The most important development in poetry occurs in the evolution of Awoonor's verse from the early adaptations of traditional dirges into the major poetic statements on the colonial experience and the neocolonial condition of Africa. This was a major formal advance on the work of two older Ghanaian poets, Kwesi Brew and Albert Kayper-Mensah. Russian-educated Atukwei Okai seeks to adapt oral poetry to an urban context, and pays minimal attention

to formal matters. His *Lorgoligi Logarithms* (1974) is typical of his approach to poetry as public performance with musical accompaniment.

The mid-1960s was a turning point for West African politics, fiction, and poetry. There was a shift from the mainly social and political emphasis in earlier fiction to their moral and spiritual dimensions, and an increasing turning to older forms of narrative already implicit in Tutuola. The themes of this period center on two moral touchstones: whether western-educated Africans were able to fulfill the promise of their dual heritage, and to what extent the dreams of independence were being realized under the rule of the African politician. Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964) is the first of the novels to express the new mood of despair in what Gikandi (1987) calls "parabolic form." Okara is an accomplished lyric poet, and critics are impressed by the poetic effect of Ijo syntax on English. However, the style is far from ordinary speech, unlike Tutuola, whose style is also nonstandard, but speech-based and suited to his hero.

The other key texts of the half-decade were Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), and Armah's *The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born* (1968). *The Interpreters* presents the contemporary severance from cultural roots as the source of spiritual and social disintegration. Its central figures, "the new gods," are only vaguely aware that their personalities are cast in the mold of the old gods. They are measured by the template of the Yoruba pantheon, and are found wanting.

There was very little in the existing fiction of Ghana to lead one to expect the publication of *The Beautyful Ones*, although hints of the psychological symptoms of urban degeneration appear in Cameron Duodu's *The Gab Boys,* published a year before. Most of the other works deal mainly with the social and psychological effects of Christianity and western education. The vision of *The Beautyful Ones* is Platonic. The underlying reality of the last days of Nkrumah's Ghana is accessed through the hypersensitive consciousness of an unnamed city dweller, whose heightened senses give the sights, sounds, and smells of Accra slums an intensely religious meaning. As a historical explanation of the present decay, Ghanaian history is recast in great seasonal cycles and natural processes. The highly selective picture and restricted viewpoint are consistent with the parabolic design of the novel, enabling Armah to fit the Ghanaian experience into a ritual design of pollution and cleansing. In the autobiographical *Fragments* (1970) he symbolically rehabilitates a nearly forgotten past in the decadent present through the structure and rituals of the novel. The publishing history of his novels reflects his journey into the historical origins of contemporary decadence. This journey back is reflected

in the logical relation between the actual historical sequence of the events represented in the novels and the reversal of this sequence in the order of the novels' publication.

Arthur Ravenscroft (1969) has described the fiction of this period as "novels of disillusionment" because of the overwhelming mood of despair. Abiola Irele named it "the new realism," emphasizing the stylistic shift from the novels of resistance and cultural nationalism to a tougher rhetorical confrontation with contemporary reality (see Irele 1981). The shift at this moment of the literary history was fundamental. It signaled a recognition that Africa was part of the fallen world, as Obumselu put it at the time (1970), as well as expanding the formal bounds of the novel form which had hitherto conformed with the realist mode associated with the early novels of Achebe and Ekwensi. Even Achebe's *A Man of the People* is a departure from his usual naturalist mode. Absurd and satirical elements now supplant the elegiac and the tragic mood of the earlier novels. It is typical of the literature of this period that the novel accurately anticipated – some would say, prophesied (Achebe 1988: 104–05) – the failure of the inherited colonial state in just half a decade of independence.

Apart from satire the new fiction is heavily influenced by poetry and myth. One of its strong features is the crossing of genres, and this suggests that an important change was taking place in the cultural environment. New political realities were forcing the artist to change his perception of the nature of his social responsibilities. With the exception of the fiction of Achebe and Armah, the new realism of the mid-1960s consisted mainly of first novels by established writers. Okara, Soyinka, Lenrie Peters, and Kofi Awoonor were poets before they were novelists, and they introduced the formal features of their accustomed genre into their new novels. Not able to reproduce the traditional context of ritual and musical performance and accompaniment, as they would in play production and poetry reading, they resorted to metaphorical strategies. The lyricism of Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* (1971) is compensation for the absence of the customary musical environment of the implied Ewe funeral dirge. An operatic source for Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973) is implied in its verbal and structural pun on Orpheus and Eurydice; but the text is more than a libretto – the score is implicit in the musical metaphor. Its verbal simulation of music and its mythic structure are mimetic of a musical arrangement.

Even more fundamental than the shift of style and theme at this time is the nature of the central character, who is usually endowed with a poet's vision, but burdened with a fatalistic temperament and a proneness to martyrdom.

Okara's Okolo, Soyinka's interpreters, Peters's Dr. Kawa, Armah's Oyo's husband, Awoonor's Amamu, are perceptive and discerning but politically naïve and powerless. Sometimes the author seeks a dramatist's distance from his characters, as Soyinka generally does; or, like Lenrie Peters in *The Second Round* (1965). The heightened prose and introversion of Okara's single-minded hero obscures the social relevance of his vision, so that his political impotence is not challenged by alternative visions. The centering of characters that are so close to the political concerns of the author is the clearest sign of a change in the cultural status of the writer, and of the writer's romantic claim to prophetic privilege and seer-hood.

The political reasons for this change are best seen in the poetic practice of the period. The practical limitations of writing, however politically committed and affective, became increasingly evident, as some of the writers moved out of the purely rhetorical world of literary practice to acts of direct political engagement. Within the decade, Okigbo had traversed the distance between his romantic isolation and commitment to poetry, and the martial engagement that ended in his death in 1967. During the same period Soyinka traveled a similar distance without having to modify his view of the poet in politics, although there was a new rhetorical response to the changing political circumstances. The moral contrast between the carver and the warrior in *A Dance of the Forests* is reversed by the realities of the 1966 events that dictated the polarities of "Civilian and Soldier"; but in "For Fajuyi," both in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), Soyinka celebrates the ideal warrior in his tribute to the self-sacrifice of the Nigerian military governor, Fajuyi. Soon, these circumstances would require more direct political engagement. The greater rhetorical influence of poetry on the novel is matched in the real world by the artist's increasing commitment to political action, from Soyinka's trial and acquittal for allegedly holding up a radio station, to his imprisonment, apparently for his political comments on the Biafran war. As in Nigeria, Awoonor's experience in Ghana shows that nowhere does writing protect the artist from the dangers of political engagement.

The military rule which followed the last phase of the age of disillusionment with politicians soon ushered in the age of despair and inter-ethnic conflicts that were frightening because they were like rehearsals for a civil war that would soon be repeated elsewhere in the region. The literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the shock of the violence leading up to it marks the beginning of a formal break with the literary culture of the independence period. There are moments of laughter and hope in the literature of the period, notably in Achebe's short stories, Munonye's fiction, and *Kolera Kolej* (1975), a

satirical novel by Femi Osofisan, who, with a group of other young writers and critics, would soon challenge the literary establishment by his radical criticism, playwriting, and stage productions. But the dominant moods of the period are represented by the anguish of Clark-Bekederemo's *Casualties: Poems 1966–1968* (1970), Soyinka's horrifying vision of postwar Nigeria in *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) (see Soyinka 1974), and the emblematic language and structure of his *Season of Anomy* (1973) – a work that is not really a novel, but a political dirge in which the pogrom of 1966 is transformed into a nature myth. Unlike that other adaptation – *The Bacchae of Euripides*, also published in 1973 (1973b) – *Season of Anomy* is not just a reworking of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice; it is a poet's lament for a country abducted by the agents of death. The Greek myth is only one of many other parallels through which Soyinka dramatizes his ritual archetype.

Since the late 1960s, a growing body of radical opinion had become impatient with political satire – because it tended to obscure the fact that underdevelopment was the logic of colonialism, and with ritual and myth – because these were seen as obstructing the progress of revolutionary literature. The unanticipated publication of *Death and the King's Horseman* at the heyday of the radical movement in the mid-1970s exposed, and thus accelerated, the growing ideological divide between the older generation of writers and the new. Although this was a work of the playwright's maturity, it belongs in theme and spirit to the earlier decade when it was first conceived – a period when novelists and dramatists were strongly attracted to the theme of the ritual scapegoat or carrier. The period extends from Soyinka's own *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and *The Strong Breed* (1963), through Duro Ladipo's *Oba Waja* (1964) and Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), to its use as a motif in Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* (1972), and its cargo cult transformation in Armah's *Fragments* (1970). James Gibbs's periodization of Soyinka's works (1986: 117) quite correctly directs attention at the playwright's exile as the "trigger" of the eventual composition of *Death and the King's Horseman*. Most radical readings of the play have tended to take off, not from this biographical fact of Soyinka's development, but from the ideological implications of the dramatic revival of such a decadent tradition at that point in Africa's cultural evolution. Its most angry critics were the cultural inheritors of the consequences of colonial history. They had known, but had not directly experienced, the causes of the older artists' political impotence that found expression in the predominance of genres like the dirge or the lament, or in failed action resulting in imprisonment or death. The older generation had witnessed the euphoria of African nationalism, the subsequent

disappointment at the misrule of nationalist politicians and the cultural values of the "been-to," and the eventual failure of the West African colonial state after independence. The political tensions and violence of the mid-1960s signaled the delayed collapse of "the pacification of the tribes" of the Guinea Coast that the imperial powers accomplished in the nineteenth century when they created new nations out of separate, conquered peoples. The concern of the radical generation was not with verbal experiments, but with the direct social effects of radical solutions. The immediate prelude to their own age was the Nigerian civil war.

The Nigerian civil war was the cause for an outpouring of war literature. The most representative narratives of the period were Elechi Amadi's war diary, *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), Munonye's *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1976), and *The Combat* (1972), a parable of the war by Kole Omotoso, a new voice on the literary scene. But there were also formal experiments with the moral issues raised by the war, like Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976). The period also saw a substantial contribution to literature by a new crop of mainly expatriate Creole writers of Sierra Leone – Lemuel Johnson, Syl Cheyney-Coker, Yulisa Amadu Maddy. The new writers were defining their culture differently from their predecessors by re-examining the class differences underlying Sierra Leonean society, through satire, local speech forms, and a focus on non-middle-class characters.

The mid-1970s was a watershed time in many respects. It marked the emergence of a new generation of writers, and heightened the increasingly distinct character of the national literatures of the region. Some of these national differences derive from the common colonial legacy of the region. In Nigeria, the conflict of loyalties to local communities is a natural offshoot of the colonial experiment in forging one nation out of nationalities with distinct cultural histories and languages, as Achebe's *A Man of the People* implies. While the early cultural influence of a westernized settler elite was receding in Nigeria, the traces of a cosmopolitan attachment to the literary conventions of the former metropolitan culture are understandably still evident in Sierra Leonean literature of this period. The exile's point of view in the writings of a new generation of Sierra Leone authors is linked to the post-emancipation settlement of the coastal cities of Freetown and Monrovia, which treated the indigenous hinterland only as attachments. In the earlier writings of the Liberian Bai T. Moore and the Sierra Leonean Sarif Easmon the proper integration of this dual heritage constitutes the unresolved search for an appropriate language and form. And nowhere is this problem more clearly evident than in Cheyney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990).

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26

South African literature in English

DAVID ATTWELL

Questions of boundary-definition and entitlement to the term "African" have been a feature of literary scholarship and the criticism it has produced on the continent since at least the 1960s. Those questions have not been superseded, as is evident from the continued currency in certain quarters of the term "Europhone" to identify imaginative literature by Africans in English, French, or Portuguese. But if such questions are characteristic of the field of African literary scholarship as a whole, they acquire a different kind of complexity in the South African context, with its peculiar history of far-reaching colonial settlement, industrialization, and crosscultural encounter. Part of that complexity can be discerned in the emergence of strains of African nationalism that have developed out of the repudiation of the prescriptive forms of ethnic identity inscribed in apartheid, prompting many writers of African origin to turn to English as the language most appropriate to their context and aspirations. To speak of African writing in English in South Africa, therefore, is to confront a situation for which prior debates in literary historiography on the continent provide little by way of an appropriate framework within which to begin distinguishing the various lines of development.

There is also the unsurprising fact that in South Africa itself there has been a lively debate over the literary historiography of the region, a debate conducted with only passing reference to the question of the place of South or southern African literature within the context of the literary production of the continent as a whole. The main question in contention is the desirability or otherwise of an integrated, indeed properly national literary history, in which the histories not only of black and white writing in the colonial or colonial-derived languages (English and Afrikaans), but also of writing in the indigenous languages – nine of which are now enshrined in the postapartheid constitution as official languages – might achieve collective recognition. This is not to mention whole areas of literary culture that would require distinctive treatment within such a

history, such as oral literatures, women's writing, and black journalism (which has engendered, not merely co-existed with, literary black writing). Indeed, such a great deal has been said on the subject of a properly national literary history that it would be irresponsible to attempt even a brief survey of English-language writing such as the present one without reference to it. To make the point acutely: the central current in efforts over the past two decades in South African literary historiography is directed *against* the very idea of a single-language literary history. In the mid-1990s, two publications helped to focus the historiographical debate: *Re-Thinking South African Literary History* (Smith, van Wyk and Wade 1996), a collection of essays from a colloquium sponsored by the Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages (CSSALL) at the University of Durban-Westville, a body founded precisely with the intention of producing an encyclopedic, multilingual history of South African literatures; and Michael Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* (1996), a single-handed attempt to provide such a history – of the entire region, in all its languages.

One of the earliest and most authoritative voices to call for a "comparative survey of South African literature, on a multilingual, polyethnic basis," was that of Albert Gérard, who at the time (1986) took the absence of such a document to be a sign of a continuing colonial legacy (1986: 172). Gérard's editorship of the South African entries in *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, however, was to prove how difficult such a project might be: a path-breaking comparative survey of English (both black and white) and Afrikaans writing is offered collectively by Stephen Gray, Tim Couzens, and A. J. Coetzee, but only up to the Second World War; thereafter, in the very period when the literature may be said to assert a degree of autonomy, white writing is segregated into English and Afrikaans, and Lewis Nkosi's essay on black writing is exiled to "Protest Writing Outside French Africa." Between Gérard's survey and the efforts of CSSALL and Chapman lies South Africa's watershed year of 1994: the end of formal apartheid and the accession to power of a democratically elected government under Nelson Mandela, events universally taken to represent the demise of the sociocultural order Gérard was lamenting. One might have assumed that in the wake of this transition, recent advocates of an integrated national literary history might have had some hope of seeing their efforts come to fruition. The victory, however, if such it is, has been Pyrrhic at best. *Rethinking South African Literary History* records a project that in certain respects stalled at its outset over a debate that questioned the very purposes of national literary histories, and while Chapman's history is

recognized as a major achievement – it is, and is likely to remain for some time, the most valuable single source of information about its field – its reception in the country has been equivocal.

Among the most salient objections to a composite history is the argument made by Malvern van Wyk Smith – himself the author of an introductory survey of English-language writing, *Grounds of Contest* (1990) – that if the desire for a single history assumes the prior existence of a unity that sufficiently assiduous archival efforts will reveal, such an assumption has little basis in fact. For while there has been considerable cross-pollination of traditions and genres – for instance, via the syllabus of the mission school – it is rarely the case that writers have actually listened to one another and responded in anything like Harold Bloom's conception of these matters in *The Anxiety of Influence*.[1] Several other writers on the question feel that a national history is premature when the histories of literature in the various languages, as well as the histories of minority cultures, have not yet been adequately documented (see Swanepoel 1996; Msimang 1996; and van Niekerk 1996). Another trenchant objection is voiced by Michael Green who, on the strength of his *Novel Histories*, a study of South African historical fiction, argues that it is not clear what purpose would be served by constructing a regionally specific conception of literariness and yoking this to concepts of *nation* and *history* that are seriously in question in cultural studies today. If the links between canon-formation and cultural nationalism deserve philosophical and even political scrutiny, Green implies, this is as true in postapartheid South Africa as it might be anywhere else (1996: 224–35; see also Green 1997). Leon de Kock argues, on the basis of his study of nineteenth-century missionary discourse and the African response, *Civilising Barbarians* (1996b), that what deserves investigation is not literary history per se but the processes of cultural translation whereby the categories of literary history – poetry, the novel, scripted drama – become accepted currency. His proposal – borne out by his own study – envisages a cultural poetics that seeks to explain how literary value becomes an index of national development, and as such it would speak volumes about the uses of cultural power in a divided and still-forming public sphere (de Kock 1996a: 85–92). Contributions to literary historiography such as these suggest that the moment may have passed for the kind of introductory work proposed in an integrated history.

Chapman's reception was equivocal largely because of its timing.[2] Conceived in the late years of apartheid but published only after its legal disestablishment, his history aroused the suspicion which falls on many an act of postcolonial cultural nationalism, that it is not respectful enough of linguistic, regional, or minority specificity, although its intention is precisely to insist

on the value of the larger picture in the wake of apartheid's deliberate balkanization of South African culture. The grounds for a common literary history are located by Chapman in the narrative of colonialism, industrialization, and the struggle for democracy, the argument being that despite linguistic and cultural differences, all South Africans are part of this common narrative, therefore their histories are defined by similar points of reference. The need for a collective literary history arises, Chapman suggests, from the imperative of postapartheid society to foster a sense of belonging within democratically minded institutions, especially in education. This humanism reflects the social origins of literary studies in England, despite Chapman's repudiation of traditional conceptions of literary value. But ironically, in his insistence on judging literary performance rather heavily on the basis of its contribution to the emergence of a more egalitarian public life, Chapman may stand accused of undermining the very notion of civil society that he is attempting to foster. The historical cusp on which his work is located entails, on one hand, the intellectual activism of a politicized, nation-building literary history, and on the other, a liberalized, transitional culture already beginning to question such commitments.[3]

Stephen Gray's analogy for the geography of South African literatures – underpinning what was the first systematic introduction to the field, namely his *South African Literature: An Introduction* (1979) – has an appropriateness that has never been seriously questioned: the field is an archipelago of distinct but linked histories. Later, in 1989, Gray was to propose that the way to circumvent the divisiveness of single-language literary histories, while simultaneously recognizing their points of connection, would be to write about the boundaries themselves as the principal subject of inquiry:

> our system does have some norms peculiar to it. For one thing, the writer is always forced into a position of having to negotiate between extremes, in crossing the language-colour barrier; he or she can only be a syncretist and hybridiser. And *therefore* the basic act of writing is one of carrying information across one or another socio-political barrier, literally of "trading" – and that is probably the writer's source of greatness. I propose, thus, a new identikit portrait: the writer exists at any of several boundaries (*not* at the centre of one self-enclosed group); his or her act of making literature is part of transferring data across that boundary, from one audience to another – an act which in the broadest sense may be termed "translation." (1989: 20–21)

Notwithstanding van Wyk Smith's caveats regarding the failure of many writers to work from within a sense of a national tradition, Gray's observations are essentially correct, and they enable us to move toward defining the

particularity of the English-language literature of the region. Clearly, South Africa's writing in English is the only literature in which writers of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds participate collectively to any significant extent, given the language's position as a lingua franca. While there is a black Afrikaans literature, its scope is certainly restricted by comparison with English-language writing by black South Africans; needless to say, there is virtually no writing in the indigenous languages by white authors. These sweeping observations ought to be qualified by the point that most black writers using English as a means of written literary expression have access to at least one, and in several cases more than one, of the indigenous languages, not to mention Afrikaans, and to the polylingual patois of black speech in every one of South Africa's major cities. To single out Solomon Plaatje, for instance, purely as the writer of the first English-language novel by a black South African, is to overlook his contribution to Setswana literature via his work as an oral historian and his translations of Shakespearean and other texts from English into Setswana. The fact that Plaatje was multilingual also had a significant impact on the kind of *English* he wrote: *Mhudi* is laden with the residual orality of Plaatje's Barolong background, and while his English is self-consciously Edwardian in register at times, it is never unmarked by the ironies of his rhetorical position, which is that of having to prove his credentials to an English readership while arousing an awareness of a distinctly non-British historical perspective. But this complexity is typical, not idiosyncratic to Plaatje; it is true, each in his or her own way, of all black writers. Njabulo Ndebele has attempted to turn the un-English palimpsest which underlies the English writing of black South Africans into a fully developed esthetic in his *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991), where he advocates, inter alia, the development of an English that approximates the orality and heteroglossia of the Reef township, reminding us that these choices have epistemological, not only esthetic, implications. The English of black writers is thus distanced to some degree from its source and transculturated through contact with other languages and through its subjection to cultural objectives remote from the concerns of those who brought the language to the subcontinent as their mother tongue.

But an analogous situation is true of white writing in English. "White writing" is indeed the phrase used by J. M. Coetzee to describe, not necessarily writing by whites, but writing "generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African" (1988: 11). All "settler-colonial" literatures may be said to embark on a history in which a regional dialect begins to break free of its metropolitan origins, eventually achieving relative independence. The national literary histories of the United States, and later of Canada and

Australia, instantiate this narrative, and it is relevant to the story of white writing in South Africa as well. In the South African context, however, scholars are often squeamish about asserting a regional settler- or postcolonial-white identity, since such constructions have been corrupted in South Africa by their proximity to, and possibly (at certain moments of history) reliance on, the project of apartheid. Therefore, while it is no longer the case that South African writers gloss the regionalism of their English to satisfy the demands of metropolitan readers – by 1979, for instance, a pick-up truck in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* could unashamedly be given its local, Afrikaans-derived name, a *bakkie* – there is nevertheless a sense in which the Africanity of the English used by English-speaking South Africans, and of that community's writers, will always be in question. It is not merely the passage of time that makes the emergence of a postcolonial identity possible; more profoundly, the conditions of possibility for such a development lie in the prevailing historical relationships.

If we are to look for a common element in all this, it is that writing in English by South Africans of all backgrounds is marked, not just by traces of transculturation across linguistic and racial divides, but also by a sense of provisionality, a sense in which historical forces constrain the continuities and undercut the assurances which might otherwise lead to the confident appropriation and/or transplantation of English. It is not for nothing that J. M. Coetzee, once again, speaking of what it means to inhabit the language as his medium of novelistic expression, says that South African English is, for him, "a deeply embedded foreign language" (1993: 7). One should not confuse this with the foreignness of a second or third language – Coetzee grew up speaking English, while having access to Afrikaans through his family. Although the remark is personal, it characterizes the structural position of the language in the country, a position shared by all who use it, to a greater or lesser extent, including mother-tongue speakers of English. Yet this provisionality – a sense that one uses the language under historical pressure – might also be a source of strength in the creation of the local literature, as Stephen Gray is quoted as saying. Other scholars have made analogous observations: it contributes directly to what Michael Green has called the "resistant form" of much South African fiction, and writing that Graham Pechey describes as a series of "radiant fissures" in the generally self-consolidating narratives of identity that characterize the ideological landscape of South African political and public life (1994: 166). The provisionality located in the use of the English language, of course, goes hand-in-hand with a characteristic generic instability, certainly in the English-language novel, a feature of South African fiction from

Olive Schreiner to Plaatje to Peter Abrahams to J. M. Coetzee, a case of writers inventing local narratological solutions to problems arising from conflicted communicative circumstances, not to mention, at best, a refracted sense of tradition.

English-language writing about the region begins as a monocultural affair, to be sure, if we take as our point of departure reports by Renaissance travelers. Following the tracks of the Portuguese, by the end of the sixteenth century, Englishmen such as Thomas Stevens, Sir Francis Drake, John Davis, and later, Thomas Herbert and William Dampier had written about the Cape, a landscape that is presented as being poised evenly between paradise and purgatory (van Wyk Smith 1990: 1–2). The one enduring image to emerge from the Renaissance literature about Southern Africa is the figure of Adamastor, the last of the Titans, who features in the Portuguese poet Luis de Camoens's epic account of the voyage of Bartholomew Diaz to round the Cape and open the sea-route to India. Adamastor's forbidding presence alerts the sailors to the dangers associated with the interior, this prescience serving well into the twentieth century in English writing as a topos for African resurgence.

A literature that speaks of the beginnings of settlement rather than arm's-length exploration can be found in the work of writers living at the Cape following the first British occupation of 1795, notably Sir John Barrow and Lady Anne Barnard. The latter, wife of the secretary to the governor, wrote letters home where she was well connected as the daughter of the Earl of Balcarres and a friend of the Prince of Wales, although her chief correspondent was Henry Dundas, secretary of war and the colonies. Barnard's letters offer vivid accounts of life of the Cape, occasionally straying into the political sphere with revealing observations about colonial relationships. Barrow's *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa* (1806) is ostensibly a work of naming and mapping necessitated by British efforts to take control of the Cape from the Dutch who had, of course, established the settlement in 1652. But Barrow's text is deeply conflicted: he misrepresents the Dutch trekboers as a peasantry and, as Mary Louise Pratt has shown, his imperious ethnography of the Khoisan scarcely masks the inherent violence of his position, and does little to usher in a governance of benign English civility (Pratt 1985). In Barrow's *Travels* we can recognize that element which haunts every text in the voluminous eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century tradition of exploratory discourse about southern Africa – a literature Gray rightly describes as international, with contributions by Dutch, German, Swedish, and French geographers, ethnologists, and naturalists – namely, representations of landscape and subject peoples that render them amenable to the European presence.

The nineteenth century sees the emergence of three symptomatic strands of South African writing, each of which is intimately connected with British imperialism. These strands are loosely interwoven, but it is important that we see their connection, which may be represented by the concurrence by the 1880s of three remarkable publishing events: Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), and the appearance of the first independently owned black newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (1884). Haggard's writing is only the most well known of the low-life imperial equivalents of scientific exploration: the hunting stories (William Cornwallis Harris, William Baldwin, Gordon Cumming, F. C. Selous) and the imperial romance (R. M. Ballantyne, Percy Fitzpatrick, John Buchan). Of these, Haggard's is undoubtedly the most celebrated, especially *King Solomon's Mines*, followed by *Allan Quatermain* (1887), *She* (1888), and *Nada the Lily* (1892). While he is usually discussed as the quintessential imperialist and exporter of local riches to a boyish readership in England, the problem Haggard represents is more complex, for the relationship created in *King Solomon's Mines* between the white fortune-seekers and the servant-turned-monarch Ignosi is one that resembles the patronage inherent in the system of indirect rule being explored by the "native administration" of Natal under Theophilus Shepstone. In other words, Haggard found a fictional language for what was, in effect, colonial policy. However, Haggard's evident reverence for the idea of Zulu identity based on a warrior tradition (fictionalized in the Kukuanas) is but one early manifestation of an ideological nexus that has been profoundly influential in shaping the course, not only of white attitudes, but of Zulu nationalism itself (Hamilton 1998). Haggard's legacy lives on today both in the distressing popularity of Wilbur Smith, and in the tourist industry where the "Lost City" still proves to be a saleable commodity, even in postapartheid South Africa. Haggard's uses of the region may be manipulative, but they also point to a mutually corrupting relationship between the European desire for the exotic, and the opportunities for local self-construction promised by exotic representations.

Not all of the intellectual by-products of frontier relations in the nineteenth century are as painful to rehearse as Haggard's fictionalization of Anglo-Zulu contact in Natal and Zululand. The Eastern Cape, following the English settlement of 1820, becomes a site of quite different, and in some respects more promising forms of transculturation until the end of the century. The first significant figure here is, of course, that of Thomas Pringle, cited in many a literary history as "the father of South African English poetry." Possibly restricted in poetic reach but expansive in moral vision, Pringle may have given more to twentieth-century readers than those of the nineteenth. As a graduate of the

University of Edinburgh and a co-editor of what became *Blackwood's Magazine*, Pringle came to South Africa with the 1820 settlement as one of its most accomplished intellectuals. He stayed only six years, becoming prominent through his association with *The South African Journal* and his clash with Governor Somerset over its demise. His *African Sketches* (1834) comprises the prose of *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, and the poetry of *Poems Illustrative of South Africa*. Opinion of Pringle's achievement falls between J. M. Coetzee's assessment in *White Writing,* which emphasizes the distance between Pringle's Romantic lyricism and the inhospitality of the landscape of the South African interior, and Michael Chapman's, which emphasizes the integrity of Pringle's ethical positions on press freedom and the effects of colonial practice on the Khoisan and Xhosa. Some of Pringle's most enduring poetry is ethnographic in intent – sharing settler and missionary discourses on the "future of the native races" – but the ethnography is also reflexively focused on the colonists' own failures. Pringle died in England as secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society, and the reinterment of his remains in South Africa in 1970 seems a fitting conclusion to a life whose principal intellectual achievement was to outline a humanitarian response to colonial racism.

If Olive Schreiner can be construed as Pringle's heir in a tradition of liberal responses to imperialism, this is not true in any obvious sense. *The Story of an African Farm* scarcely touches on questions of race, choosing as its focus the lives of young people born into a settler-colony in which Europe is already rather remote, having to make their way in a world of limited opportunity created by predatory adults in the service of larger historical forces. Schreiner is South Africa's first novelist of any stature, and her importance begins with her assertion directed at the assumptions governing the imperial romance: stories "of wild adventure; of cattle driven into inaccessible 'krantzes' by Bushmen; 'of encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes' . . . are best written in Piccadilly or the Strand . . . But, should one sit down to paint the scenes among which he has grown, he will find that the facts creep in upon him . . . Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the gray pigments around him" (Schreiner 1975: vii). Though she was moved by Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalism and Herbert Spencer's principle of natural unity, Schreiner's charting of the inner life and fortunes of her young protagonists is bleak, the Cape Colony emerging as relentlessly destructive of their aspirations. For this reason, Schreiner is frequently cited as the point of origin for a tradition of liberal realism in which the white encounter with the physical and human geography of the interior produces disillusionment, suffering, and at best, muted symbolic transformations. The tradition would

run from Schreiner through William Plomer to Dan Jacobson, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, and J. M. Coetzee. An important if less sustained tradition is the satirical critique of colonial officialdom, as represented in the fiction of Douglas Blackburn (*Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp*, 1899; *A Burgher Quixote*, 1903; and *Leaven*, 1908). Schreiner's life's work goes well beyond her most celebrated novel that helped to found a tradition of liberal realism. *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), an allegory attacking Cecil Rhodes and the activities of his Chartered Company in Zimbabwe, is perhaps the best known of her other writings, but *From Man to Man* (fiction, 1926) and *Woman and Labour* (political writing, 1911) have received attention for their emphasis on the social construction of gender and heterosexual relationships. Having established herself as a public intellectual, Schreiner wrote polemically on the political issues of her mature years, the Anglo-Boer War and the Act of Union, but she also wrote stories and allegories in pursuit of psychological and esthetic insights that her political work could not easily accommodate.

While the missionary presence preceded the settlers in the efforts of the London Missionary Society from as early as 1799, it was considerably expanded following the British settlement of 1820, and in this expansion lie the seeds of African literary expression outside of the oral tradition. In their determination to refashion the way of life and identity of the African, partly by giving Africans access to devotional literature, the missionaries introduced literacy, in English but perhaps more consequentially, in the indigenous languages. The earliest and most assiduous efforts in this regard were directed at the Xhosa, with the Presbyterians introducing the first mission press (1823) and the Wesleyans printing the first Xhosa newspaper (1837) after the invention of an orthography and the construction of a grammar. It was within the terms of the missionary project – with its Victorian and Protestant ethos – that the first generations of Xhosa intellectuals began to found a tradition of African letters, though it took several decades for what we might call an autonomous voice to emerge from this process. Arguably, such a voice surfaces in writing such as Tiyo Soga's Xhosa contributions to the newspaper *Indaba* in 1862, and his celebrated rebuttal in English in 1865 of racist stereotypes proffered by one of his white brethren in the settler newspaper the *Kingwilliamstown Gazette*. Soga was the first black ordained minister in South Africa, trained in Scotland, and he is responsible for the first literary work in Xhosa, a translation of the first part of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Later, men like W. W. Gqoba, J. T. Jabavu (who founded *Imvo Zabantsundu*), Walter Rubusana, and John Knox Bokwe developed the Xhosa journalism that sustained the publication of the earliest political commentary and poetry in English. Bokwe's English-language biography (1904)

of the prophet Ntsikana, which seeks to establish in the figure of its hero the beginnings of an Africanized Christianity, can be taken to represent a decisive moment in this history, when a "New African" nationalism begins to fashion its own hybrid mythology constructed from mission-derived resources and a reinvented Africanity.

Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje is arguably the most accomplished representative of the New African tradition. His *Mhudi* (completed in London in 1920, published only in 1930) is the first novel in English by a black South African, but the range of his achievements is far more considerable. He was a founder member and first general secretary of what became the African National Congress, and twice traveled to England to appeal to the imperial government on behalf of his people. His *Native Life in South Africa*, written in support of the first of these petitions, documents the legislation and effects of the infamous 1913 Natives Land Act. He was also a newspaper editor, Boer-war diarist, and, as already mentioned, translator of Shakespeare and oral historian. He traveled extensively in the African diaspora, collaborating closely with W. E. B Du Bois. Like Schreiner's, Plaatje's novel is partly a reaction to the imperial romance: it revisits the 1830s, when the interior of South Africa was the scene of several epic migrations, and tells the story of the encounter between the Barolong, the Matabele, and the Boers, establishing rights of continuity and settlement on behalf of its leading couple, Mhudi and her husband Ra-Thaga. Despite being a work of historical fiction looking back over a century, in several ways *Mhudi* is extraordinarily in tune with the forces of its own historical moment: it suggests the emergence of pan-ethnic loyalties and positions its protagonists on the cusp of their people's emergence into modernity and national formation, and it delivers a critique of the increasingly anachronistic, race-obsessed thinking that was emerging in legislation affecting Africans from the Union government formed in 1910. It achieves these effects while employing modes of narration normally associated with the oral tradition, such as the folktale, the praise poem, and especially prophecy. *Mhudi* employs a cyclic conception of history, thus keeping open the possibilities for transformation and renewal.

South Africa's most successful novelist between the two world wars – by the standards of her era – was Sarah Gertrude Millin, most famous for *God's Step-Children* (1924), a dynastic saga in which the effects of "miscegenation" return to visit tragedy on subsequent generations. There could hardly have been a more appropriate endorsement for the hardening of racial attitudes at the time, seen in the promulgation of the segregationist policies that would be developed and refined as apartheid by the National Party after 1948. But alongside Millin's popular eugenics we should place the explosive, protomodernist

estheticization of interracial love in William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1925). While a conventional literary history would deal with this period in terms of the development of liberal realism – with the "arrival" of modernist narrative strategy seen as a phenomenon only of the 1970s, marked by the appearance of J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* (1974) – there is, in fact, a remarkable affinity between Coetzee's early fiction and *Turbott Wolfe*'s treatment of the break-up of the post-Cartesian, rational subject in the electricity of racialized sexual politics. Plomer has survived better than either of his two principal collaborators on the literary review *Voorslag* (Whiplash) which they published collectively, Roy Campbell and Laurens van der Post, though both established considerable reputations in the English-speaking world, Campbell as an individualist and writer of symbolist, and later satirical, verse, and van der Post as a writer of travelogue, romanticized ethnography, and fiction. This triumvirate possibly represents the last moment in which a late-colonial, largely rural canvas could be used as the backdrop for white modernist self-fashioning; by the next generation, the contending forces of African and Afrikaner nationalism would transform that canvas into a field of more dire struggles. Rural South Africa between the wars could sustain two other distinctly individual and important voices: Pauline Smith, whose humane, essentially pastoral fiction recognizes the pathos of the life of communities living in the little Karoo, and Herman Charles Bosman, whose stories set in the district of the Groot Marico use the voice of a homespun raconteur to mask a trenchant critique of that world's provincial self-delusion.

H. I. E. Dhlomo and Peter Abrahams are the most significant black writers of the period 1940s and 50s. Despite a rather precarious professional life as schoolteacher, librarian, and editor, Dhlomo managed a prodigious output as a journalist, poet, dramatist, and essayist on the form and function of contemporary African drama. His most discussed work is his epic statement of cultural nationalism, *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1941), a poem of over a thousand lines, but his most sustained work was in drama, where his writing ranges from a reinterpretation of the Cattle-Killing of 1857, in *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1936), to historical dramas on the Zulu kings and works of protest on such themes as the pass laws. Dhlomo defended the practice of writing serious "literary drama" on African themes in English, believing this was the route to the modernization and nationalization of the cultural heritage; however, his plays are seldom performed today and his readership is largely academic, because Dhlomo – unlike Plaatje, whose irony is a saving grace – seldom overcomes the influence of the elevated diction of the English Romantics, which he picked up in the mission school. While Dhlomo's sense of Africanity was

located in landscape, history, and myth, for Peter Abrahams it was inseparable from race, so much so that Abrahams's career sees him gradually casting off the pluralism of his pan-South African attachments and the contradictory mélange of Marxism and liberalism that he brought to bear on them, and embracing the racial mythology of the diaspora – eventually, Abrahams made his home in Kingston, Jamaica. His agonistic relationship with South Africa is told in two autobiographies, *Tell Freedom* (1954) and *Return to Goli* (1953), while his fiction spans the migration to the cities in *Mine Boy* (1946), a reprisal of the history explored in Plaatje's *Mhudi* in *Wild Conquest* (1950), and the politics of postcolonial nationalism in *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956).

An auspicious irony of South African literary history is the coincidence in 1948 of the National Party's accession to power and the publication of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. In such a pluralistic, but also thinly spread literary culture, there has never been a serious debate over whether a "great national novel" exists; but Paton's comes as close as any work might be expected to in fulfilling the requirements: in its central focus on the race question, its appeal for national reconciliation across this central divide, its attempt to bridge the rural and the urban, and not least, in its extraordinary lyricism, indeed sentimentality. With each successive wave of confrontation in the country, from the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, to the Soweto Revolt of 1976, to the State of Emergency in 1985, to the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990 and the first democratic elections of 1994, public rhetoric has drawn on the sonorous injunctions of Paton's closing paragraphs: "It was Msimangu who had said, Msimangu who had no hate for any man, I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they turn to loving they will find we are turned to hating" . . . and "but when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret" (261–63). Paton's liberalism and touches of paternalism have angered some black readers, but Paton is not unaware of the claims of militancy to deal with white intransigence; indeed, he rejects those claims directly, by contrasting the moral courage of the Reverend Stephen Khumalo with the careless demagoguery of his brother, John. And although Paton became increasingly conservative in his later years, falling out with black opinion over his opposition to economic sanctions, his legacy and that of the nonracial Liberal Party, of which he was national leader, are apparent in the postapartheid settlement with its Bill of Rights and commissions devoted to the strengthening of civil society, especially the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is no wonder, in fact, that Paton's novel provided the South African film industry with its first blockbuster of the postapartheid years. Like Schreiner's, however, the success of Paton's first novel

turned him into a public intellectual and led to a life torn between this role and his desire to sustain his writing. Apart from *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953), on interracial sex, he struggled to regain the passion that had produced his major work; nevertheless, the record provided by Paton's poetry, biographical writing, and memoirs is recognized as an important national legacy.

Cry, the Beloved Country was serialized in the first few issues of *Drum* magazine, which was aimed at a new market of urban black readers. It was not the first novel in English to address the urban black experience – both *An African Tragedy* by R. R. R. Dhlomo (the brother of H. I. E. Dhlomo, most well known for his short stories, his novel proselytized the mission perspective) and *Mine Boy* by Peter Abrahams preceded *Cry* in what came to be known as the "Jim-comes-to-Jo'burg" theme. Later, *Drum* would acquire a different ethos and play a leading role in the formation of a generation of black writers schooled in the short story, ironic commentary, and investigative journalism into the social conditions being spawned by the growth of administrative apartheid. *Drum* was indeed the locus of what has been called a "failed renaissance," a burgeoning of black literary talent in the 1950s that was interrupted in the early 1960s by the banning and exile of its leading protagonists (Visser 1976).[4] The *Drum* writers – Ezekiel Mphahlele (later Es'kia), Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, Richard Rive, James Mathews, Alex La Guma, Casey Motsisi, Nat Nakasa – asserted a city, cosmopolitan identity against apartheid's efforts to fix the identities of black South Africans in rural, indeed tribal terms. But *Drum*'s style was as important as its content: as Mphahlele put it as fiction editor, the *Drum* mode was "racy, agitated, impressionistic, it quivered with a nervous energy, a caustic wit. Impressionistic because our writers feel life at the basic levels of sheer survival, because blacks are so close to physical pain, hunger, overcrowded public transport, in which bodies chafe and push and pull . . ." (1987: 11–12). *Drum* was also frequently escapist, however, emulating the culture of jazz, of American B-grade movies and gangsterism, but its confident embrace of urban culture was entirely in tune with the nonracial political activism of the period, with events such as the Kliptown conference that produced the Freedom Charter, the Defiance Campaign and the Treason Trial. Lewis Nkosi's coinage, "the fabulous decade," remains the period's most apt description (1965).

The central figures in the movement that was *Drum* went on to establish distinctive careers that give shape to the country's literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Mphahlele went into exile after being prevented from pursuing a teaching career under Bantu Education – the National Party's policy of producing a class of black hewers of wood and drawers of water – and then produced South

Africa's most widely read black autobiography, *Down Second Avenue* (1953); later, a seminal work of criticism, *The African Image* (1962); and after working in Nigeria, Paris, Kenya, and the United States, he became one of the diaspora's leading commentators. After the success of *A Walk in the Night* (1967d), Alex La Guma wrote four novels in the tradition of critical realism, an oeuvre that stands out as the most sustained attempt in black writing to develop a properly socialist corpus. La Guma ended his days as the representative of the African National Congress in Cuba. Lewis Nkosi made his way into academic life in the United States, where he augmented his existing reputation as a writer of fiction and autobiography by producing a searching critical monograph on anglophone African literature, *Tasks and Masks* (1981). And Bloke Modisane contributed to the already sizeable volume of autobiography written by this generation after its scattering, with the memorable and moving *Blame Me on History* (1963). The writing of the 1960s is substantially a literature of exile, as is illustrated in this central shift from guerrilla journalism and the short story – the defining features of what came to be called protest writing – to autobiography, but some of the most poignant of the writing to articulate the anguish of exile is to be found in the poetry, most notably, in Arthur Nortje and Dennis Brutus. Nortje's life was cut short by suicide in Oxford, but he leaves an oeuvre of intense, largely lyrical poems that combine a modernist and political sensibility; Brutus went on to a life of political and intellectual activism in the United States, campaigning in particular for the sports and cultural boycott of South Africa. He has produced a corpus of keenly felt, at times aphoristic poetry, which, like Nortje's, is both political and esthetically self-aware.

A bitter consequence of the scattering of the *Drum* generation – and the systematic censorship of its more political work, both through the "listing" of individuals and the direct proscription of specific texts – is that a generation of black writers was to emerge by the end of the 1960s without meaningful intellectual grounding in the work of its forebears. This situation was exacerbated by the curriculum of Bantu Education: while most of the *Drum* writers were products of mission schools, which, for all their faults, did encourage a certain critical literacy, the products of apartheid education had to fight their way into articulacy against almost impossible odds. What sustained them was the political culture of Black Consciousness, the movement led by the South African Students Organization (SASO), whose moving spirit was Steve Biko. Black Consciousness emphasized the recovery of black subjectivity and self-esteem, specifically in opposition to Bantu Education, and drew its strength from the intellectual products of Third World resistance movements and the Black Power

movement in the United States. The literary expression of Black Consciousness came in the form of theater, where Athol Fugard's improvisational work in the early 1970s with John Kani and Winston Ntshona *(Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* and *The Island*) spawned a resilient tradition of theater groups using similar methods, but also in poetry, and once again, the short story. The poetry and short fiction were sustained by *Staffrider* magazine published by Ravan Press in Johannesburg. As far as poetry is concerned, *Staffrider* (the title refers to the practice of riding daredevil style on the running boards of Johannesburg's commuter trains) was itself a conduit for an essentially oral literature being performed at rallies and funerals in the townships of the Rand following the Soweto Revolt, the most striking performance of which was undoubtedly Ingoapele Madingoane's *Black Trial* (1979). Some writers were schooled specifically by *Staffrider*, while others who had been publishing came into prominence in the general intellectual ferment of the period: Mongane Serote, Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Gwala, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Achmat Dangor, Ahmed Essop, Sipho Sepamla, Miriam Tlali, Mandla Langa, Njabulo Ndebele. Mzamane, Sepamla, Tlali and Serote went on to write fiction based on the turbulence of the Revolt and its consequences.[5] While Black Consciousness as a political movement became largely subsumed in the resurgence of nonracial, alliance politics in the 1980s, its intellectual legacy has been profound, and many of its leading protagonists hold prominent positions in the postapartheid administration as heads of broadcasting services and commissions, universities, and as parliamentarians.

The agitprop, workshop theater spawned by Fugard in the early 1970s should be seen as part of a much wider tradition. Although English-language theater has been dominated by an imported culture – since at least the founding of the Opera House in Cape Town in 1893 – there has been a rich indigenous vein of which Fugard is the most internationally respected representative. To provide only a few key markers, it would go back at least as far as Stephen Black ("Love and the Hyphen," 1908), include H. I. E. Dhlomo, Fugard's *No-Good Friday* (1958), and later, plays like *The Blood Knot* (1963), *People Are Living There* (1969), *Boesman and Lena* (1969), and Lewis Sowden's *The Kimberley Train* (first performed 1958). It would also include the founding of The Space (1972) and Market (1976) theaters in Cape Town and Johannesburg respectively, particularly the latter, which through the work of Barney Simon and Mannie Manim nurtured the careers of a number of prominent directors and playwrights, notably Matsemela Manaka (*Egoli,* 1980), Maishe Maponye *(The Hungry Earth*, 1981), Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema (*Woza Albert*, 1983), and the Junction Avenue Theatre Company (*Sophiatown*, ed. Malcolm Purkey and Pippa Stein,

1988). The Junction Avenue Company popularized a strong revisionist movement in academic social history, but it would be fair to say that the critical tradition in South African theater in general has had as its métier the representation of communal life in the form of lively storytelling. Standing apart from this tradition is the satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys, whose most memorable work lampoons the stupidity, self-contradiction, and inhumanity of apartheid's leading politicians.

The Soweto Revolt and the rise of Black Consciousness mark the beginning of what Nadine Gordimer called South Africa's "interregnum" years, from the mid-1970s until 1990, during which apartheid seemed to be in a state of permanent crisis. Gordimer herself, thus far South Africa's only recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature, wrote what many readers regard as her most accomplished fiction during this period, especially *Burger's Daughter* (1979), and *July's People* (1981), although *The Conservationist*, for which she won the Booker Prize in 1974, anticipates the revolutionary energy of the later years. However, while the "interregnum" produced a spate of novels speculating about what seemed to be an imminent cataclysm, the period included some surprising, crosscutting threads that questioned the wholesale politicization of the literary culture. One of them was the emergence of J. M. Coetzee, who in *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1978), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983, also a Booker prizewinner), produced an allegorical account of late colonialism, the fracturing of its discourses and forms of subjectivity, and a self-conscious reprisal of novelistic tradition, all of which could not be contained in the tidy category of the political novel. Criticism has tended to polarize Gordimer as the social realist and bearer of witness to oppression and resistance, and Coetzee as the postmodern critic of realism and historical discourse; but in fact, currents in the work of both writers leak out of these categories: in Gordimer, we seldom encounter "history" in its raw state, since it is usually filtered through a vulnerable subjectivity which is itself the object of scrutiny; and Coetzee has not refrained from representation of the contemporary scene, as in *Age of Iron* (1990) and more recently, *Disgrace* (1999, his second Booker prizewinner) – although Coetzee also refracts direct social representation with self-conscious fictionality.

There is a strain of lyric poetry in this period that aligns itself with Coetzee's determination to protect the limited sphere of the literary without ignoring the corrosiveness of the wider conflict. Its most accomplished representatives, arguably, would be Lionel Abrahams, Patrick Cullinan, Stephen Watson, and Ingrid de Kok. Behind these poets stands a tradition of lyric poetry that flowered after the Second World War, in Guy Butler, Sydney Clouts, Anthony Delius,

Roy Macnab, and David Wright. Butler is a figure of eminence who since the 1950s, as an academic, critic, poet, and autobiographer has, among other things, given thoughtful attention to what it means to carry the identity of the English-speaking South African. He will leave a lasting legacy through his influence in founding what became the National English Literary Museum and the 1820 Settlers Monument in Grahamstown, which is the centerpiece of the country's liveliest showcase of theater, literature, dance, music, and the visual arts, the annual National Festival of the Arts.

Another of the surprising elements in the ferment of the "interregnum" years is the criticism and fiction of Njabulo Ndebele. Extrapolating from misgivings expressed in the 1960s by Lewis Nkosi and Es'kia Mphahlele, in *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary* Ndebele developed a persuasive, if at times dismissive critique (in its judgments of individual writers) of the limitations of protest fiction. In its efforts to "strike a blow for freedom," he argued, protest fiction resorted to stereotypical – "spectacular" – representations of oppressive conditions, of victimizers and victims, which debased the "social imagination," the capacity of readers (and writers themselves) to recognize the subjectivity of black South Africans and its relationship to historical processes. In his conception of the "ordinary," Ndebele stressed the importance of discovering the inner dynamics of history as process, the ways in which subjects experienced them, and the need to develop an epistemology in which black South Africans were in control of history's representation. The legacy of Black Consciousness is clear in this project with its emphasis on self-recovery and knowledge as forms of power, but Ndebele's influence has been anything but politically sectarian, extending beyond the reconceptualization of literary protest to educational reform and the re-examination within activist circles of the language of political organization. Ndebele's cultural criticism has still not been superseded.

One of the distinguishing features of the 1990s was the developing critical interest in a tradition of writing by black women. It would begin with Noni Jabavu, *Drawn in Colour* (1960) and *The Ochre People* (1963), which is particularly interesting in providing a feminine reprisal on the "New African" generation. It would continue with Bessie Head, born "coloured" and abandoned by the white middle-class family of her mother. Head's finely drawn, intense writing – short stories (*The Collector of Treasures*, 1977), fictionalized autobiography (*A Question of Power*, 1974), fiction (*Maru*, 1971), and an account of life in her adopted country, Botswana (*Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, 1981) – currently enjoys sustained critical attention. The tradition develops during the Soweto period with Ellen Kuzwayo (*Call Me Woman*, 1985) and Miriam Tlali (*Muriel*

at Metropolitan, 1975 and *Amandla*, 1980). Both Kuzwayo and Tlali seek to locate women as subjects and spokespersons within the framework of Black Consciousness, with motherhood and the black women's struggle within the context of the wider racial oppression emerging as dominant issues. Gcina Mhlope has established a position of national prominence for her work as a storyteller, in print but more especially on the festival circuit and on television. Much of her work entails reviving the folktale tradition, but in her own play, *Have You Seen Zandile?* (1988), she presents an autobiographical account of a young girl acquiring a sense of her own agency while struggling with the urban–rural divide, racial oppression, and the different expectations of the Zulu and Xhosa branches of her family. Lauretta Ngcobo (*And They Didn't Die*, 1990, and *Cross of Gold*, 1981) stands out as the member of this tradition who writes most cogently about rural women. Sindiwe Magona, who though qualified as a schoolteacher, escaped a life of poverty as a domestic worker and single mother in Cape Town's townships to work for the United Nations in New York, offers a poignant perspective as an autobiographer. More recently, Magona has produced an anguished historical novel dealing with the roots of township violence in *Mother to Mother* (1998). Finally, Zoë Wicomb (*You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, 1987 and *David's Story*, 2000), almost as well known for her criticism as her fiction, having held university positions in Cape Town and Strathclyde, is a careful craftswoman, weaving metafiction and historical revisionism through a precise, often ironic narrative voice.

Because apartheid, for better or worse, was the central issue from 1948 to 1990, the prospects for South African literature after apartheid were the subject of some speculation in the early 1990s. Comparisons were made with Soviet literature after *glasnost*: what were writers going to do when apartheid was gone? Rob Nixon is representative in asking:

> How will writers adjust to the loss of those dependable obstacles, which had become their signal themes and even, for some, their creative mainstays? In recent years, South African writers have faced the end of censorship, of political detention, and of exile, not to mention the waning of *écriture engagée* and resistance culture. These epic shifts have cast doubt on the writer's social status, public role, motivation, and imaginative focus. (1996: 64)

But predictions of an impasse have not been fulfilled, although unsurprisingly, there have been marked shifts of emphasis which Nixon accurately anticipates. To speak of the literary culture in general terms: whereas under apartheid, to separate the political from the esthetic was to risk political censure, after apartheid that separation became widely endorsed, for the liberalism of the

new order is more accommodating than a prerevolutionary culture could be, to the re-invention of tradition, to irony, and textual play. Writers became freer to write in a more personal vein and indeed, the transition has produced a new wave of autobiographical writing that looks back on childhood lived under apartheid.

Whereas in the intense 1980s, anxiety about the future fueled a number of novelists, now it is the past that is more in vogue. Autobiographical and confessional writing about childhood under apartheid includes J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997), Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995), Pamela Jooste's *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter* (1998), Jo-Anne Richards's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (1996), Jann Turner's *Heartland* (1997), and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998). In certain texts, like Mandla Langa's *The Naked Song and Other Stories* (1996), memory turns on uncomfortable truths within the exiled liberation movement. All of this work bears comparison with the concerns of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the text most closely related to it is Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998). Krog is a journalist who covered the commission for the English radio station of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Her book records the constitutional debate around the creation of the commission and transcribes a number of testimonies, weaving them together with a poetic account of their effects on Krog herself, as a poet and an Afrikaner. The poet who has made it his business, however, to challenge a tendency towards amnesia in the euphoria of transition, is Jeremy Cronin. *Even the Dead* (1997) is Cronin's second collection; his first, *Inside* (1983), was produced during a seven-year prison term for his membership of the Communist Party and ANC-related activity.

As this quantity of work suggests, memory was the dominant issue in the first decade since the liberalization of South African political life. What escapes attention in this general emphasis is the far more problematic and elusive question of the present. Justifying their reputations as South Africa's leading novelists, it is indeed Gordimer and Coetzee who have risen to the challenge in recent fiction. The relation between subjectivity and history has always been Gordimer's forte, and this is no less true of the novels Gordimer has written about transitional South Africa: *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998), and *The Pickup* (2001). The first deals with the transformation of Vera Stark, who does legal work among the landless, into an independent activist assisting in the drafting of the postapartheid constitution. The second deals with the confusion brought about by a murder committed by the son of a white professional couple, the Lindgards; the novel thus extrapolates from the legacy of internalized violence. The third deals with transnational

migration in the context of a country newly opened up to the rest of the continent. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) deals with the humiliation and partial recovery of David Lurie, a university lecturer on the Romantics who is removed from his post for sexual harassment and who subsequently, with his daughter Lucy, falls victim to an attack on Lucy's smallholding by three black men in which Lurie is burned and Lucy gang-raped. Lurie seeks his regeneration by writing the libretto for an opera on Byron and doing charitable work in an animal welfare clinic; Lucy, lesbian but pregnant after the rape, begins making her peace with postapartheid South Africa by contemplating a polygamous marriage with her former farm-hand, Petrus. While the novel makes no reference to the postapartheid constitutional order, it presents a compelling, if bleak scenario of prospects for whites in the grip of an uncompromising historical justice.

Finally, there is an area of postapartheid writing that reflects on the role of representation itself in a society in transition. Following the success of his *Missing Persons* (1989) and *The Folly* (1993), Ivan Vladislavić has produced startling and refreshing stories on this theme in *Propaganda By Monuments* (1996) and *The Restless Supermarket* (2001). Vladislavić represents postapartheid South Africa as a zone of symbolic confusion with signs severed from their former social bases and entering new, shambolic but strangely transforming configurations. Sharing Vladislavić's concern with representation is Mike Nicol, whose postmodern historical allegories (*This Day and Age*, 1992) seek to locate the sources of violence in the country's mythic unconscious. A work less comic than Vladislavić's but equally inventive in its treatment of the symbolic landscape is Zakes Mda's novel, *Ways of Dying* (1995). Mda's account of township life in the last years of apartheid suggests that the most pervasive experience for black South Africans in this period is death. Like Ndebele, Mda is interested in the epistemological and spiritual deprivation that this oppression produces, and the possibility of transformation via the social imagination. Mda's writing comes close to being a South African magic realism, though his allies would be the Nigerians Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri before the Latin American writers with whom the term was first associated. Mda has followed *Ways of Dying* with *The Heart of Redness* (2000), a work of considerable historiographic range that draws parallels between the period of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement and the postapartheid settlement. The importance of Mda's writing, in local terms, is that it narrows an implied polarization between contemporary white postmodernists like Vladislavić and Nicol, writing in the tracks of J. M. Coetzee, and the black heirs of a journalistic tradition, reinventing realism in the wake of Njabulo Ndebele.

Notes

1. Van Wyk Smith 1996: 72–83. One minor aspect of this question which was not discussed by van Wyk Smith is the *collaboration* by South African writers across racial divisions as in, for instance, Alan Paton with Krishna Shah in *Sponono* (1983), Athol Fugard with John Kani and Winston Ntshona in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* (see Fugard 1974), Dugmore Boetie with Barney Simon in *Familiarity Is the Kingdom of the Lost* (1969), and Mopeli Paulus with Peter Lanham in *Blanket Boy's Moon* (1953).
2. See Helize van Vuuren's review article on Michael Chapman's *South African Literatures* in *Journal of Literary Studies* (1997a); also "Panel Discussion" in the same issue, which includes responses from Chapman to his critics (210–52).
3. In an early assessment of the prospects for a "classless and genre-fluid" literary history – exactly the kind of study Chapman has sought to bring off – Stephen Gray warned as early as 1983 that "it should not, at the same time, lose its bearings on a deviously complex sociopolitical matrix" (1983: 20).
4. The most comprehensive collaboration and analysis of *Drum* writing is Michael Chapman's *The "Drum" Decade: Stories from the 1950s* (1989).
5. Mbulelo Mzamane, *The Children of Soweto* (1982); Sipho Sepamla, *A Ride on the Whirlwind: A Novel of Soweto* (1981); Mongane Serote, *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981); Miriam Tlali, *Amandla* (1980). See also Chapman 1982.

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27

African literature in French: sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period

MILDRED MORTIMER

Francophone African literature is a product of the *fait colonial*, France's colonial conquest that brought French schools to her African colonies north and south of the Sahara, educational institutions whose *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) was to bring French civilization to the "dark continent." Examining the process of colonization in French Africa, we can trace the earliest beginnings of the civilizing mission to Abbé Grégoire, the former Bishop of Blois who, in 1808, published *De la littérature des nègres* (On Black African Literature), a text that affirms the ability of the African to master literature, the arts, and science (Blair 1976: 1–3). In his text, Abbé Grégoire comments on the literary talent of Phillis Wheatley, the Senegalese slave sold to a rich Boston merchant, John Wheatley, who educated her. As a result, she became a respected poet of her time. However, Wheatley's "enlightened" colonial attitude that encouraged the education of his African slave promoted the objective of disseminating European culture to Africans without appreciating African culture in return. The prevailing view throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and much of the twentieth centuries was, as Christopher Miller notes, to describe Africa as nothing more or less than a "blank darkness." In this vein, the critic adds: "The notion of a *nullity* is a key to understanding European conceptions of Black Africa" (1985: 17).

Beginning in the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries initiated, directed, and staffed many schools in the colonies, but secular schools were established as well. General Faidherbe, whose colonial army had conquered Senegal in the 1860s and 1870s, astutely understood that Muslims would be more apt to send their children to secular schools rather than those directed by Christian missionaries. Indeed, secular schools grew in number and by 1903 a complete educational system was in place in West Africa. Within two more decades, colonial schools were following the school program taught in France.[1] Although the outcome was largely positive, with African

children acquiring useful tools – the French language as well as some mathematics, history, and geography – their curriculum was Eurocentric. Colonial schools used textbooks sent from France that focused on French history, culture, and society and ignored Africa's cultural heritage; it was not part of the curriculum. It is important to note in this regard that as late as 1950 only 10 percent of African children in the French colonies were in school (Pageard 1966: 7). The privileged elite – the group from which francophone African writers would first emerge – was a small minority with one prestigious "école normale" or postsecondary school, William Ponty, training the eventual leaders of French West Africa and another, Edouard Renart, serving the same function in French Equatorial Africa. Gender discrimination was a factor as well; only boys would be admitted to these select institutions.

As General Faidherbe established schools that brought young Africans in contact with western culture, he formed West African soldiers, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* (Senegalese sharpshooters) who fought in units that served in Europe during both World Wars. It was the experience of serving France as a *tirailleur* that inspired Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonté* (1926) (Strength-Goodness), a text often cited as the first francophone African novel (Michelman 1971: 9).[2] In this autobiographical novel, Diallo expresses his gratitude for French culture and praises France's civilizing mission despite the fact that the war experience has left him seriously wounded in a Parisian hospital. Acknowledging his loyalty and devotion to France, he reveals his fascination with the French language and its written script. Despite its assimilationist message, *Force-Bonté* anticipates later African fiction as Diallo discovers the power of the pen, an instrument that future generations will transform into a subversive weapon against colonialism.

If francophone African literature owes its beginnings to an educational system that, despite its inability to bring indigenous culture into the colonial curriculum, succeeded in forming generations of African writers, it is equally indebted to the resistance on the part of educated Africans to conform to a colonialist ideology that viewed Africa as a continent without culture, a "blank darkness." Beginning in the 1920s, resistance takes two forms: the promotion of Africa's oral tradition and anti-colonial fiction. The first reaffirms traditional African culture and values; the second rejects France's *mission civilisatrice*. Resistance is further boosted in the 1930s by Negritude, a political and cultural movement providing the platform for a renewed sense of African cultural consciousness.

From orality to the written word: folktales, legends, theater

With the founding of the several journals, the *Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (1913) (The French West African Journal of Education), the *Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historique et Scientifique de l'AOF* (1916) (The Journal of the Committee for Historical and Scientific Studies of French West Africa), and later, the *Bulletin de l'IFAN* (1939) (The Journal of IFAN [the French Institute of Black Africa]) and *Notes Africaines* (1939) (African Notes), African schoolteachers and other members of the French-educated intellectual elite began contributing to African ethnographic research and the preservation of oral tradition. They published articles describing local customs and history and translated folktales and legends from African languages into French (Pageard 1966: 11; Michelman 1971: 7).[3] They were encouraged in this endeavor by enlightened French colonial administrators, educators, and travelers who had come to value African oral tradition. In this regard, two colonial governors of French West Africa, Baron Jacques-François Roger and François-Victor Equilbecq, added their own studies and translations to the corpus of published texts and commentary. The first published translation of African folktales, *Fables sénégalaises recueillies dans l'Ouolof* (1828), is attributed to Baron Roger who collected them while he was a colonial officer and, imitating La Fontaine, published the tales in verse form. Later, Equilbecq carried out a similar project during the ten years that he was colonial administrator in the French Soudan (Mali), Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger, and Guinea. Unlike Baron Roger, he did not transform his tales into verse, but accompanied them with a long analysis of African oral tradition. *Aux lueurs des feux de veillée, Essai sur la littérature merveilleuse des noirs, suivi de contes indigènes de l'ouest africain* (1913) (By the Light of the Watch-Fires, an Essay on the Wonderful Literature of Blacks, followed by Indigenous West African Tales) was followed by two later volumes published in 1915 and 1916, respectively, and regrouped in a new edition in 1972.

Significantly, European interest in preserving African oral tradition in writing was accompanied by European artists' predilection for West African masks and sculpture. Collaboration between Africans and Europeans resulted in Blaise Cendrar's *L'anthologie nègre* (1921) (*The African Saga*), the French surrealist poet's anthology of African poetry, and Marcel Griaule's ethnographic studies of the Dogon. Griaule's *Dieu d'eau: entretiens avec Ogotemmêli* (1948) (*Conversations with Ogotemmêli, an Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*) is an account of the French anthropologist's conversations with a remarkable Dogon village elder who introduced him to Dogon cosmology.

Beginning in the 1940s, African writers began publishing collections of indigenous folktales, fables, and legends. By translating into French the oral tales they had learned as children in villages, they hoped to promote and preserve oral tradition in French colonial Africa. These writers took to heart Amadou Hampaté Ba's remark concerning the risk of losing one's oral heritage: "Dans l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui, chaque vieillard qui meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle" "In Africa today, every old person who dies is a library that burns down" (Chévrier 1984: 5). Hence, they sought to preserve oral tradition for posterity, for Africans who had abandoned rural life and risked losing touch with oral tradition and for Europeans who, via travel, expatriation, or literary interest, found enjoyment in a new form of literature and a new cultural context. Birago Diop of Senegal and Bernard Dadié of Côte d'Ivoire were quite successful in this endeavor. Diop's first collection, *Les contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1947) (Tales of Amadou Koumba), was followed by *Nouveaux contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1953) (New Tales of Amadou Koumba) and *Contes et lavanes* (1963) (Tales and Fables). Dadié published *Légendes africaines* (1953) (African Legends), then *Le pagne noir* (1955) (*The Black Cloth*), and *Légendes et poèmes* (1966) (Legends and Poems). Other collections of folktales include the Senegalese Ousmane Socé's *Contes et légendes d'Afrique noire* (1938) (Tales and Legends of Black Africa) and the Dahomean Maximilien Quenum's *Légendes africaines: Côte d'Ivoire, Soudan, Dahomey* (1946) (African Legends; Ivory Coast, Soudan [Mali], Dahomey [Benin]), but these texts never reached as wide a public.

Interest in the folktale brought the *griot*, the West African storyteller, into the literary realm. The *griot*'s style – one of anecdotes, puns, digressions – is well depicted in Birago Diop's *Contes d'Amadou Koumba*. In his texts, Diop emerges as the intermediary between the Wolof-speaking *griot* whom he claims to have known as a child and the francophone reading public. A skilled translator, Diop introduces his readers to the *griot*'s love of digression as the latter explains why Kakatar the Chameleon is impervious to nasty rumors surrounding Golo the Monkey. Amadou Koumba uses common, everyday, ritualistic expressions. Thus, the monkey and the chameleon greet each other as two Muslims, "Assalamou aleykoum" – "Aleykoum salam" "Peace be with you!" It is also usual for the storyteller to depict an animal's psychological trait by making fun of a physical characteristic. In "Maman-Caiman" (Mother Crocodile), the *griot* tells us that Leuk the Hare has a conscience as mobile as the two bedroom slippers he wears clamped to his head! The *griot* also delights in puns. However, when Golo the Monkey considers crocodiles "les bêtes les plus bêtes des bêtes" "the most stupid of beasts," playing upon the dual meaning of *bête* in French – beast and stupid – the francophone writer is doing

more than translating the tale. Here Diop is not only "retelling" the tale but, as Abiola Irele aptly notes, he is putting his own signature on it (2001: 39). The tale has clearly become a collaborative project engaging both the francophone writer and the master of a rich oral tradition.

As interpreters of the *griot*'s tales, Diop of Senegal and Dadié of the Ivory Coast share a common West African oral tradition but delve into slightly different sources. Diop develops the Wolof cycle of Leuk-le-Lièvre (the hare) and Bouki-l'Hyène (the hyena) who behave like Renart and Isengrin, the fox and wolf of French folk tradition. Dadié depicts Kacou Ananzè, the crafty spider of the Agni-Ashanti. In contrast to Leuk who retains his floppy ears and mangy coat, Dadié's spider changes shape, size, limbs, at will. In "Le miroir de la disette" (The Mirror of Famine) for example, the reader finds him fishing with hook, line, and bobbing float, waiting patiently for his elusive prey.

If words bring the *griot*'s audience into the realm of enchantment, so does song. Woven through most oral narratives are songs that, when performed, are accompanied by musical instruments, with young and old voices joining in the refrain. There are songs of woe and misfortune (Dadié, "Le pagne noir" [The Black Cloth]), of warning (Diop, "Maman-Caiman" [Mother Crocodile]), of exile (Dadié, "La légende baoulé" [The Baoulé Legend]). The various poems set to music, with refrains that call for audience participation, reinforce the magical atmosphere created by the *griot*, heightening the poetic quality of each work. As reality and the imaginary blend in this art form so do poetry and prose.

Significantly, both Diop and Dadié introduce the universal theme of the quest narrative in their texts. In Diop's tale "L'héritage" (The Inheritance), three orphaned brothers set out to discover the meaning of the three sacks of rope, sand, and gold bequeathed to them by their dead father. In Dadié's "Le pagne noir" (The Black Cloth), the mistreated orphan is challenged by her wicked stepmother to perform an impossible task: to turn a black cloth pure white by washing it clean. Thus, both writers skillfully recreate the *griot*'s social function; the *griot* instructs while entertaining, preaching a code of conduct that includes moral virtue and respect for one's ancestors who, in times of crisis, intervene in the world of the living. Since the *griot*'s audience is a varied one, including the very young and very old, stories infused with cryptic proverbs will be accessible only to the initiated. Yet, pantomime and mimicry are appreciated by everyone; they are key elements of the *griot*'s art. Hence, the francophone writer uses *écriture*, writing in French, to recreate the *griot*'s verbal skills. Like the *griot*, the francophone writer must be community

moralist-philosopher and entertainer – artful manipulator of the word – no easy feat!

Philosopher, moralist, entertainer, the *griot* is also an able historian. Acknowledging the importance of African oral history, Guinean historian Djibril Tamsir Niane translated the Soundjata epic from Malinké into French, thereby making a major contribution to the project of preserving oral tradition. *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue* (1960) (*Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*) chronicles the life of Soundjata Keita, the thirteenth-century founder of the Mali Empire, and emphasizes the role of the *griot* in preserving and transmitting historical events. In the introduction to the work, Niane clearly explains that his book owes its existence to Mamadou Kouyate, a *djeli* (Malinké *griot*) for whom Niane, the European trained historian, claims to be the scribe. In addition, Niane criticizes European scholars for denigrating oral sources and refusing to recognize the validity of history that is not recorded in writing. He concludes his introduction by paying homage to the *griot*: "Puisse ce livre ouvrir les yeux à plus d'un Africain, l'inciter à venir s'asseoir humblement près des Anciens et écouter les paroles des griots qui enseignent la Sagesse et l'Histoire" (1960: 7) "May this book open the eyes of more than one African, encouraging him or her to sit humbly at the feet of the Elders and listen to the words of the *griots* who teach Wisdom and History." Further, as the *griot* Mamadou Kouyaté recounts the life history of Soundjata, the importance of the king's personal *griot*, Balla Fasséké, emerges as well. Without the complicity of his faithful *griot*, Soundjata would not have been able to defeat his enemy and regain his throne. In addition, were it not for the *griot*'s memory, Soundjata's deeds would be forgotten: "Il n'y aurait pas de héros si les actions étaient condamnées à l'oubli des hommes, car nous agissons pour soulever l'admiration de ceux qui vivent, et provoquer la vénération de ceux qui doivent venir" (1960: 108) "There would be no heroes if their deeds were condemned to be forgotten by men, for we act to win the admiration of the living and the veneration of future generations."

African theater, like folktales, legends, and history is also rooted in oral tradition. Originating as a religious ceremony – a preparation for hunting, a harvest celebration – it was always a community event; audience participation in the form of singing and dancing was an important part of the performance (Cornevin 1970: 11–41, Traoré 1958: 17–43). Originally performed outdoors with no stage, precolonial African theater used masks, a chorus, and interspersed dramatic scenes with music and dance to create the effect of pageantry (Blair 1976: 85). Although street theater still exists in Africa, plays are now usually staged in enclosed space.

The beginnings of francophone African theater can be traced back to the colonial educational venture, specifically to the 1930s, when African students at the various boarding schools in the colonies were requested by their French colonial teachers to collect legends, folktales, historical events from their home region, translate these oral pieces into French, then present them as dramatic works. Committed to this project, Charles Béart instituted theatrical productions at the Ecole primaire supérieure de Bingerville, Ivory Coast, where he taught from 1931 to 1935, and then at the Ecole normale William Ponty in Gorée, Senegal to which he was transferred in 1935. The list of plays he directed at William Ponty includes: "L'élection d'un roi au Dahomey" (The Election of a King in Dahomey), "Assémien roi du Sanwi"(Assemien, King of Sanwi), "L'entrevue du capitaine Péroz et de Samory à Bissandougou" (The Interview of Captain Péroz with Samory at Bissandougou), "Un mariage chez les Mandegni" (A Marriage among the Mandegni), "Sokamé" (The Virgin Sokamé), "Trois scènes sérères" (Three Serer Scenes), "La rue de Diégué" (The Street in Diégué), "Les prétendants rivaux" (The Rival Suitors). These plays were so successful that the Minister of the Colonies, Georges Mandel, brought thirty "pontins" to Paris to perform several of the plays at the Universal Exposition of 1937. Both "Sokamé," a Dahomean drama concerning the near sacrifice of a young virgin to a river god, and "Les prétendants rivaux," a Cameroonian social satire, were very successful (Cornevin 1970: 50–63).

Theater continued to thrive at William Ponty until 1946 when the statute of the school changed. Then, only Senegalese students remained at Ponty; students from other French West African colonies were sent to France to continue their studies; the collaboration – and competition – among the various groups of West African students came to an end. However, as Cornevin explains, the William Ponty theater inspired other troupes and productions. In the Ivory Coast, for example, François-Joseph Amon d'Aby, Coffi Gadeau, Fily Sissoko, and Bernard Dadié, the founders of the "Théâtre Indigène de la Côte d'Ivoire" (The Indigenous Theater of the Ivory Coast) in 1938, acknowledged their debt to the William Ponty Theater that had inspired them to continue working in theater (1970: 75–80).

Although most of these school plays were lost, those that were preserved are vivid testimonies to a vibrant theatrical culture that owes its existence to motivated teachers and their inspiring students. In this vein, Amadou Cissé Dia's historical drama, *La mort du damel* (The Death of the Damel), produced in the late 1930s was later published in the journal *Présence Africaine* (Nov.–Dec. 1947) and by the press in 1965. This historical drama deals with Senegalese resistance to Faidherbe's nineteenth-century military campaigns. In addition,

numerous published works were adapted for the stage. Hence, performances of Birago Diop's tales of Amadou Koumba – "Sarzan" (Sarzan, the Officer), "Les mamelles" (The Humps), "Le prétexte" (The Pretext), "L'os de Mor Lame" (Mor Lame's Bone) – reminded the public of the bonds between folktale and theater, traditional *griot* and modern actor.

As francophone African theater began to develop modern themes, it became more political. The rise and fall of the African leader became a significant theme. One example is Seydou Badian's *La mort de Chaka* (1961) (*The Death of Chaka*). Based on Thomas Mofolo's historical novel *Chaka*, it traces the Zulu's rise to power and reign. Rather than chart the reign of a despot, Badian depicts the Zulu chief as a hero willing to sacrifice his personal life to uplifting the African people. The play becomes a lesson in political commitment (Pageard 1966: 98–99).

Finally, comic theater thrived as well. Echoing "Les prétendants rivaux" of the earlier William Ponty repertoire, Guillaume Oyôno-Mbia's *Trois prétendants . . . un mari* (1964) (*Three Suitors, One Husband*) proved to be a very successful satire of daily life. Inspired by the plight of the playwright's cousin Juliette, the play presented the comic situation of three suitors haggling over a bride price while the young bride chooses her own husband. Written in 1956, the text was published in 1964, was rewritten, and received the El Hadj Ahmado Ahidjo prize in 1970.

Anticolonial fiction: poetry and prose

René Maran's *Batouala véritable roman nègre* (*Batouala, a True Black Novel*) prepared the way for anticolonial literature. Published in 1921 by a Caribbean writer (the Martinican-born son of Guyanese parents who served in the French colonial administration in French Equatorial Africa), the text harshly criticized French colonial exploitation of the region. When the novel received a prestigious French literary prize, the *Prix Goncourt* (Goncourt prize), it was immediately attacked by conservative elements in France. Maran paid dearly for his public condemnation of colonial injustices, losing his position in the colonial administration (Chevrier 1984: 26). Nevertheless, in a second preface, published sixteen years later, in 1937, the novelist reconfirmed his commitment to disclosing the injustices of colonialism and the moral satisfaction of having preceded later critics in this endeavor (Maran 1938: 18).

An important influence upon the development of the African novel, *Batouala* introduced the trend of African realism in literature that prevailed throughout the colonial period as novels recounted the hardships of African life. At the same

time, Negritude poets such as Senghor called Maran an important precursor of the Negritude movement (Kesteloot 1965: chapter 6).[4] By embracing the struggle of his African brothers and sisters, this writer of French-Caribbean origin foreshadowed the further collaboration between Africa and the Caribbean that would occur in the early 1930s as African and West Indian students in Paris discovered common cultural experiences and worked together to launch the Negritude movement.

Africans and Antillean students in Paris during the 1930s (those who had come to the capital with colonial scholarships as well as the children of the black Caribbean and African middle class who had sufficient funds to study abroad) were bound to meet, discuss, find common ground as they faced life in a new and often alienating environment. Common interests led to a series of short-lived journals that expressed their goal of redefining their cultural values in a European capital where African and Caribbean cultures were barely known and therefore not adequately recognized.

Several periodicals appeared in the 1930s and 1940s: *La Revue du Monde Noir* (1931) (The Journal of the Black World); *Légitime Défense* (1932) (Legitimate Defence), *L'Etudiant Noir* (1935) (The Black Student), and *Tropiques* (1942) (Tropics). The first, founded by Dr. Sarjous of Liberia and Paulette and Andrée Nardal of Martinique, focused primarily on Caribbean culture and issues of race as it promoted the connections between black American writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the circle of black intellectuals in Paris (Jack 1996: 39–44; Kesteloot 1965: 63–64). The second, *Légitime Défense*, took a harsher anticolonial position in its politics and adopted a more radical literary position, espousing Surrealist poetics. Directed by Etienne Léro of Martinique, the publication presented a manifesto denouncing black Caribbean writers who imitated European writers. The third, *L'Etudiant Noir*, contained articles by Léopold Sédar Senghor calling for a "black humanism" and Aimé Césaire expressing the need for authenticity: "Black youths do not want to play a role; they want to be themselves" (*L'Etudiant Noir* 2, cited in Jack 1996: 51). The three journals clearly promoted black culture and identity although *La Revue du Monde Noir* did not embrace Surrealism (Jack 1996: 44).

Young black writers such as Aimé Césaire were attracted to Surrealism, a French literary movement that began in the 1920s, because it called for liberation from traditional literary forms, and praised the intuitive and irrational elements of the creative process. They also appreciated Surrealism's antibourgeois nature and its celebration of African art and oral tradition. The fourth journal, *Tropiques*, launched by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, René Menil, and Aristide Maugée, during the Second World War, provided

a crucial platform for Negritude poets embracing Surrealism (Arnold 1981: chapter 3).

What was the meaning of Negritude for its founders and early members? For the founders of *L'Etudiant Noir*, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Léopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, and Léon Damas of French Guyana, it represented a political and cultural movement committed to expressing the values of black culture and civilization. Hence, their short-lived publication, *L'Etudiant Noir*, gave them a vehicle for presenting their cultural heritage in positive terms, thereby reacting against the colonial situation that stifled those values. As Marie Collins aptly notes in her introduction to *Black Poets in French*: "Negritude was essentially a revolt against the oppression of the black race by the white race, fused with the desire to restore human dignity to the Black man who had borne four centuries of servitude" (1972: xvii). The basic themes expressed were: pride and respect for their African heritage; bitterness towards those Europeans who had participated in the abomination of slavery; frustration with European colonialism; distrust of previous generations they saw embracing European culture and not valuing their own; faith in a future in which the earlier suffering of Africans would not be forgotten but would be transcended.

Anglophone Africans, however, always challenged the cultural movement. The Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka once expressed his lack of enthusiasm for the movement with the famous quip "The tiger doesn't proclaim his tigritude, he jumps on his prey" (Chevrier 1984: 42). For Soyinka and other anglophone African writers schooled in Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, Negritude seemed too idealistic and abstract a concept; it appeared too romantic, subjective, and manichean, posing the problematic distinction between African sensibility and European rationalism. Although Negritude introduced African arts – dance, music, masks – to Europeans who had previously been unaware of the rich cultural heritage, its emphasis upon Africa's past had to be balanced with a clear conception of modern Africa. In today's postcolonial world, the Negritude movement which lost momentum in the 1970s is viewed as an important element of bygone days. Africans and Europeans struggle today with political, economic, social problems grounded in present reality. For students of literature, however, the poetry and prose inspired by the Negritude movement remains important testimony to the anticolonial struggle that preoccupied several generations of colonized peoples. Thus, Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*) will probably always remain the great classic of anticolonial poetry.

Although Césaire, like Maran, is a Caribbean writer, not an African, and therefore both are omitted from encyclopedic works such as Ambroise

Kom's *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires négro-africaines de langue française* (1983) (Dictionary of Black African Literature in French) because of their Antillean origins, the literary production of Caribbean and African writers was clearly intertwined from the 1920s to the 1960s. Moreover, during this period both Caribbean and African writers were attuned to black voices emanating from the United States as well. As Dorothy Blair explains, poetry was the medium used to explore "All the dimensions of their Black personality and the expression of Black values" (1976: 143). The critic adds: "In the first place, poetry is the most economic value for subjective writing, for sublimating into dance, literary imagery, a whole range of personal experience, associations, emotions, and sentiment" (1976: 144). The young Caribbean and African poets found the earlier assimilationist Caribbean poets an easy target for ridicule. In their view, poets such as Gilbert de Chambertrand clearly did not represent the black experience as they knew it. As late as 1937, Chambertrand ignored the poverty of his native Guadeloupe and wrote: "L'azur est sans nuage et l'horizon sans brume" "The azure sky is cloudless and the horizon without haze" (cited in Kesteloot 1965: 37). Romantic descriptions such as these were weak derivatives of nineteenth-century French poetry and inappropriate to the concerns of young African and Caribbean writers embracing Marxism as a political ideology and Surrealism as a literary tool. At this time, Senghor, Césaire, Damas, and their cohort were adopting and promoting a political ideology and literary techniques that originated in Europe but they were fashioning both for their own cultural and ethnic specificity. Hence, unlike the assimilationist poets who preceded them, their poetry was meant to be authentic, meaningful, original, in form and content. Among the key texts we should cite: Damas, *Pigments* (1937) (Pigments); Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pay natal* (1939) (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*); Senghor, *Chants d'ombre* (1945) (Shadow Songs), and *Hosties noires* (1948) (Black Hosts).

The Negritude movement was influenced by additional significant factors: the Colonial Exposition and Djibouti-Dakar Mission (1931), Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Anthology of the New Black African and Madagascan Poetry in French) with Sartre's preface "Orphée noir" (1948) (Black Orpheus), and *Présence Africaine* (African Presence), the journal (1947) and publishing house (1949). When the Colonial Exposition opened in 1931, African and Caribbean students in Paris were keenly aware of its political and cultural impact on the French population; it brought Africans and their artifacts from the "dark continent" to the French capital. On the one hand, those French who had never seen Africans before could find them performing in Paris in native costume. On the other hand, the Colonial

Exposition presented the "native" African in the stereotypical role of exotic other, adorned with cowrie shells, raffia, beads and feathers. The colonial event coincided with Griaule's Dakar-Djibouti Mission whose purpose was to collect ethnographic objects in Africa in collaboration with African informants. As the Colonial Exposition confirmed a traditional view of Africans, Griaule opposed that position with a new radical stance; he proposed to transform Africans into "Constructors and experts of their own cultural systems," participants in a shared anthropology (Jules-Rosette 1998: 33).

In the immediate post-Second World War period, the Senegalese poet and political figure Alioune Diop launched *Présence Africaine*, a new cultural movement with its accompanying journal that carried the same name. Two years later, in 1949, Diop founded a publishing house, "Editions Présence Africaine," and opened a bookstore in Paris that sold the publications. The journal began as a joint geographical venture, the inaugural issue appearing simultaneously in Paris and Dakar. The first text published by the new press was Placide Tempels's *La philosophie bantoue* (Bantu Philosophy), a study of African philosophical concepts. The press later published Cheikh Anta Diop's *Nations nègres et culture* (1954) (Black Nations and Culture), a text that traced the African contribution to civilization in various domains – mathematics, science, architecture, medicine – but caused controversy as "an inspired documentation focused on Afrocentrism" (Jules-Rosette 1998: 244).

When the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists was held in Paris in 1956, it granted important visibility to Présence Africaine, both the Paris-based journal and the press. At this time Diop launched the "Société Africaine de Culture" (The African Cultural Society), thereby expanding the cultural activities of the initial ventures. Studying the evolution of Présence Africaine as a cultural movement, Benetta Jules-Rosette finds that the journal remained a vehicle for anticolonial resistance with a vision that embraced universal values, but that the movement became culturally restricted, espousing a worldview based exclusively on the dialectics of oppression and reaffirmation. Moreover, without a strategy for including younger members, it lost ground among the young who moved into new literary groups (1998: 7).

In 1948, the year following the inauguration of Présence Africaine, Léopold Sedar Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègres et malgache de langue française* appeared with Jean-Paul Sartre's preface, "Orphée noir." The publication of this anthology was an important event for francophone African and Caribbean poetry. Looking back on it today, scholars are keenly aware that Sartre's preface was a crucial element in the success of the anthology. Indeed, fellow Negritude poet Léon Damas had published an anthology one

year before, *Poètes d'expression française* (Francophone Poets), which has been largely forgotten. Senghor's choice of poets is surprising. All of Black Africa is represented by only three poets: Birago Diop of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, David Diop, the son of a Senegalese father and a Cameroonian mother. In contrast, the Caribbean – and South America – are represented by ten poets from French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti. In addition, all the poets are male.

In his preface, Sartre explains that he has chosen the title "Orphée noir" because the black poet's interior journey recalls Orpheus attempting to reclaim his beloved Eurydice from Pluto (1948: xvii). Sartre begins his essay with an attack upon the white colonizer. He asks: "Qu'est-ce donc vous espériez, quand vous ôtiez le bâillon qui fermait ces bouches noires? Qu'elles allaient entonner vos louanges" (1948: xix), "What did you expect when you removed the gag that silenced these black mouths? Were they supposed to sing your praises?" Accusing the white world of oppressing blacks, he emphasizes the importance of poetry to black liberation. More specifically, Sartre understands that this poetry is functional (1948: xv).

Examining the relationship between the black poet and the colonial language he has been forced to adopt, Sartre notes – rather erroneously – that the African writer cannot express his Negritude in prose (1948: xix). However, he does understand that the black writer will fashion the colonial language to meet his own needs. Sartre explains: "puisque l'oppresseur est présent jusque dans la langue qu'ils parlent, ils parleront cette langue pour la détruire" (1948: xx) "since the oppressor is present even in the language they speak, they will speak this language to destroy it." The black poet will "défranciser" ("defrenchify") the French language. Using French words, "il les concassera, rompra leurs associations coutumières, les accouplera par la violence" (1948: xx) "he will smash them together, break apart their usual connections, he will join them through force." Although Sartre was presumably contemplating the possibilities that Surrealism held for the black poet, it is interesting to interpret his words as a foreshadowing of the literary experimentation that would follow in the 1970s. Unfortunately, he was unable to grasp the entire reality, and excluded prose from his vision of revolutionary African literary production. He did not envisage postcolonial writers such as Amadou Kourouma or Calixthe Beyala entering francophone African fiction.

Finally, Sartre defines Negritude in poetic terms that echo Senghor and Césaire. He writes: "La Négritude, c'est ce tam-tam lointain dans les rues nocturnes de Dakar, ce sont les cris vaudous sortis d'un souperail haïtien et qui glissent au ras de la chaussée, c'est ce masque congolais mais c'est aussi

ce poème de Césaire, baveux, sanglant, plein de glaires, qui se tord dans la poussière comme un ver coupé (1948: xxviii–xxix) "Negritude, it is this distant tom-tom in the nocturnal streets of Dakar, it is the voodoo cries of a Haitian worshipper which slide to the edge of the precipice, it is the Congo mask. But it is also this poem of Césaire, slobbering, bleeding, filled with mucus, writhing in the dust like a worm cut in half." By pointing to the revolutionary character of black African poetry – "La poésie noire de langue française est, de nos jours, la seule grande poésie révolutionnaire"(1948: xii) "Black African poetry in the French language is, today, the only great revolutionary poetry" – Sartre shows his respect for the Negritude poets who must be heard far beyond the confines of African villages and Caribbean hamlets. Read today, the poems of Senghor's anthology have lost none of their passion and commitment as Césaire speaks for "ceux qui n'ont inventé ni la poudre ni la boussole" (1948: 58), "those who have invented neither gunpowder nor compass" (Collins 1972: 27), and Senghor immortalizes the African woman:

> Femme nue, femme noire
> vêtue de ta couleur qui est ta vie, de ta forme qui est beauté!
> (1948: 151)

> Naked woman, black woman
> clothed with your colour which is life, with your form which is beauty!
> (Collins 1972: 109)

Senghor emerged as the dominant voice in francophone African poetry in this period, from the 1920s through the 1960s. Beginning with "In Memoriam," the opening poem of *Chants d'ombre* (Shadow Songs), Senghor's earliest collection of poems, the Senegalese poet expressed the weight of exile he felt as an African in France. However, he balanced this sentiment of exile with clear memories of his African childhood, his "Royaume d'Enfance," or "Childhood Kingdom." Whereas Senghor's first volume of poetry emphasizes the beauty and harmony of African society, the second, *Hosties noires* (Black Hosts), foregrounds his growing political awareness of colonial oppression. Writing from a German internment camp, he reveals that he has confronted both the ephemeral nature of human existence and the pervading racism among some – but not all – Europeans. However, he is committed to transcending his individual experience of alienation and alterity. The poet expresses his intention to assume universal concerns: the struggle for social justice and the reconciliation between black and white communities.

Although Senghor is the poet whose voice dominates francophone African poetry in this period, by the mid-1950s the young poet Gérald Félix Tchicaya

(adopting the name Tchicaya U Tam'si), claims his space as well. Although the Congolese poet denies belonging to the Negritude movement, his work clearly reveals Surrealist techniques espoused by Césaire as well as Senghor's commitment to universal values. His first volume of poetry, *Le mauvais sang* (1955) (Bad Blood) explores universal themes of ennui, love, and solitude as the poet embarks upon an inner spiritual journey. The second, *Feu de brousse* (1957) (Brushfire), recounts a mythic African journey. The third volume, *A triche-coeur* (1958) (Deceiving the Heart) develops the theme of the poet in exile. Like Senghor, Tchicaya U Tam'si remains an important voice in postcolonial African poetry.

Given the importance of Negritude poetry from the 1930s through the immediate post-Second World War era, it is not surprising that the African novel appeared at first to be an insignificant genre. Sartre's belief that the African writer could only be a poet seemed to ring true. It is interesting to note in this regard that francophone African novels published prior to Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir* (1953) (*The African Child*) have been largely forgotten. Significantly, Blair's extensive history of African literature overlooks Félix Couchoro's *L'esclave* (1929) (The Slave), places Diallo's *Force-Bonté* in the category of autobiography, not fiction, and calls Ousmane Socé's *Karim* (1935) the first francophone African novel. In point of fact, both Couchoro's and Socé's novels deal with cultural conflict. Couchoro's text explores the precarious predicament of the ambitious individual born into a traditional society that offers no social mobility. Socé's *Karim* depicts the struggle of the individual caught between the demands of the Senegalese Wolof aristocracy of the period and the emerging African colonial bourgeoisie. Paul Hazoumé's *Doguicimi* (1938) introduces the historical novel, depicting the political intrigues at the court of King Ghézo, a nineteenth-century ruler of the kingdom of Abomey. Finally, a nearly forgotten novel that foreshadows the later postcolonial movement away from African realism is Paul Lomami-Tchibamba's *Ngando-le-Crocodile* (1948) (Ngando the Crocodile). In this text, the Congolese writer foregrounds the importance of the supernatural in African daily life, by fusing realistic and magical elements in a highly poetic text.[5]

When Camara Laye wrote his autobiographical novel, *L'enfant noir*, he was far removed in space and time from Kouroussa, Guinea, where he was born. In the early 1950s, the aspiring Guinean writer was in Paris, first studying at a technical engineering school and later working in an automobile factory. Laye, the son of the village blacksmith, had by then appropriated modern European technological skills as well as the French language.[6] Published in 1953, the text received considerable international attention in subsequent years for several

important reasons. First, it challenged the colonialist novelist's premise that Africa is uncivilized, a "blank darkness." Second, it proved that the indigenous oral culture had become a literate one, with the writer assuming the language of the colonizer. Third, it established the African writer as the authentic voice and scribe for a society known intimately from within. Finally, in contrast to the colonialist text (Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Pierre Loti's *Le roman d'un Spahi* [*The Story of a Spahi*]), written exclusively for Europeans, *L'enfant noir* was written for both Africans and Europeans. Indeed, the African reading public, quite small in 1953, has grown considerably in the past fifty years, as Africans throughout the continent have had greater access to schooling. A classic of African literature, Camara Laye's autobiographical novel has become part of the curriculum in African schools.

L'enfant noir is a Bildungsroman, a novel of education and initiation. It is the narrative of an African child's journey from village home to the larger world, an education that results in his journey to Paris, the French colonial capital. By depicting the village as a kind of magical kingdom – his mother and father appearing as larger than life figures with supernatural powers – Camara gives a new definition to exoticism. He is positing a different, but not inferior culture. As a novel of initiation into both traditional Malinké and French colonial realms, the text adds a third important form of initiation, the artist's. Following the path initiated by Birago Diop and other writers who transformed folktales, Camara embraces the art of the *griot*. Yet, rather than become a "maître de la parole" (master of the spoken word), he will be a master of the written word. When first published, *L'enfant noir* was sharply criticized by Cameroonian novelist Mongo Beti for presenting a nostalgic picture of bygone days and ignoring harsh colonial reality.[7] Later, critics discovered in the text an indirect response to colonialism (Olney 1973: 127; Lee 1984: 17; Mortimer 1990: 40). The novel has been given ethnographic readings as well (Bourgeacq 1984; Miller 1990). Five decades after publication, *L'enfant noir* remains an important work because it places an African on center stage as a thinking, speaking, feeling subject, not a projection of the colonizer's fantasy, and certainly not an inarticulate "savage" inhabiting a region of the world defined too long by Europe as a "blank darkness."

In contrast to Camara Laye's indirect criticism of colonialism, other francophone African writers such as Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, and Ousmane Sembène deal directly with the threat that colonialism posed to African culture. Beti's *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) (*The Poor Christ of Bomba*) depicts the missionary presence in Cameroon with satire and irony. Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë* (1961) (*Ambiguous Adventure*) depicts the conflict

between the secular French school and Islamic education among Muslim West African communities. Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (1956) (*Boy!*) uses the device of the naïve servant to reveal the injustices of the colonial system.

In an effort to depict African reality, Sembène turns to African history to depict the struggle of the colonized for equality, economic and political justice. Published in 1960, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (*God's Bits of Wood*) uses the Dakar-Niger railway strike of 1947 to show how a collective experience profoundly alters the lives of people who engage in it. In his text, Sembène balances the collective experience of commitment and political consciousness with the individual's maturation. With three coordinated centers of political activity on the railroad line – Bamako in Mali, Thiès and Dakar in Senegal – Sembène's protagonists are always on the move, particularly Bakayoko, the leader of the strike. In this text, physical journeys result in new experiences, vision, growth. The victory that concludes the novel occurs as the result of a collective journey. Armed with a vision as well as clear political objectives – higher wages, increased benefits – a group of women march from Thiès to Dakar. Their march opens the door to a new understanding of the role of women within the context of francophone African literature. It was particularly significant in 1960, when the novel was published, because francophone sub-Saharan African women's writing had not yet emerged.

Sembène's text presents a double dialectic: the individual hero versus the collective hero (Bakayoko, the strike organizer, versus the people) and realism versus epic. The novelist assumes the task of creating protagonists who conform to reality but reflect elements of the epic tradition. Thus, he depicts a blind prophetess leading the women's march, imbues Bakayoko, the strike leader, with the *griot*'s power of persuasive speech, and introduces the wisdom and deep religious conviction of an African elder. In this way, Sembène, a Marxist committed to social change, shows respect for tradition. Finally, in keeping with his effort to balance tradition with modernity, the Senegalese writer is both *griot* – witness, recorder, narrator of events – and cameraman, "filming" a society on the move, a world in positive transition.[8]

In conclusion, by looking back on the period that began with a francophone elite first writing about their experiences and preoccupations, and concluded with political independence in 1960, we can discern a commitment to realism and authenticity as well as a sense of optimism. It is true that as the early fiction emerged, writers were conscious of European models. The Negritude poets, for example, were influenced by a significant European literary movement, Surrealism. Similarly French West African students were guided through many theatrical productions by their French schoolteachers. Indeed, African writers

such as Camara Laye have clearly acknowledged their debt to French realists, particularly Flaubert (Gavronsky 1978: 843).

Over a period of five decades, new voices, new trends in fiction, and greater literary experimentation have appeared. Francophone African women writers have assumed an important place in African literature, expressing gender-related issues that do not always coincide with the preoccupations or perspectives of male writers. In addition, disillusionment with postcolonial African societies has become a pertinent literary theme. Finally, francophone Africans are writing from new geographic space, as African immigrants to Europe and elsewhere depict their experiences and express their preoccupations far from ancestral villages.

In the era of postcolonial fiction, it is fitting to cast a glance backward from time to time. In so doing, we acknowledge the struggle – and triumph – of the "pioneers," the previous generations responsible for replacing "Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois" "Our ancestors, the Gauls" with an authentic cultural tradition that reflects diversity of thought and expression anchored in a dynamic cultural context.

Notes

1. By 1930, the "Services des Affaires Musulmanes" went a step further in the direction of bringing African children into the fold as the first Franco-Arab schools, the *medersas,* were organized. For a detailed study of education in colonial West Africa, see Blair 1976: 8–12.
2. In point of fact, Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne's *Les trois volontés de Malic* (1920) precedes Diallo's text as does René Maran's *Batouala, véritable roman nègre* (1921). The Diagne text, however, is a very short work intended for elementary school classes and *Batouala*, although set in French Equatorial Africa, was written by a Caribbean novelist, not by an African. Michelman mentions *Le réprouvé roman d'une Sénégalaise* (The Outcast, a Senegalese Woman's Novel) by Massyla Diop but notes that only the first installment appeared in a cultural magazine in Dakar in 1925 and that the text never appeared in its entirety (1971: 9).
3. Pageard calls attention to the monographs by Mamby Sidibé who did extensive work on Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and Mali as well as to Dominique Traoré's studies of the Bambara (1966: 11).
4. Although Kesteloot calls Maran a precursor of Negritude, she curiously dismisses him from the group of African and Caribbean writers, stating: "Plus trace chez lui d'un 'tempérament nègre' ni de 'survivances ancestrales': sa manière de penser, de sentir, est française" (1965: 83) "He bears no trace of a 'black temperament' nor of 'ancestral vestiges': his way of thinking and feeling is French."
5. According to Blair, the text has been forgotten because of its apolitical nature: "Because Lomami-Tchibamba's novel has no political overtones, it has tended

to be neglected by Black as well as White readers caught up in the enthusiasm for the doctrine of Negritude. It deserves more attention, not only for its ethnological interest as a link with the traditional past of Central Africa which is rapidly disappearing but also for the inherent poetic qualities of the writing" (1976: 69).

6. Although all of the leading works refer to Camara Laye, the novelist inverted his first and last name. Laye is the shortened form of Abdoulaye, the novelist's first name. As Miller notes, the Camara clan is the second largest in the Upper Niger Valley and the clan's identity comes from Fran Camara, the faithful ally of Soundjata (1990: 141). Miller has begun a trend of reversal, referring to the author by his *jamu* (patronymic and praise name). I will do the same.
7. Criticizing Camara for a political position he views as neutral, and unacceptable, Beti writes: "la première réalité de l'Afrique Noire, je dirais même sa seule réalité profonde, c'est la colonisation et ce qui s'ensuit" "the primary reality of Black Africa, I would even say, the only profound reality, is colonization and what follows from it" (1955: 137–38).
8. James A. Jones has examined the strike in the light of archival documents, interviews with Sembène and the strike participants and new scholarship by historians of French West Africa. The historian finds that Sembène's narrative conforms to the official record in most important aspects, but that most probably the women's march did not take place. See Jones 2000: 117–31.

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28

North African literature in French

PATRICIA GEESEY

The three arabophone and francophone nations of North Africa – Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia – came under French colonial rule in the nineteenth century. Along with military, political, and economic domination, the French instituted a cultural and linguistic supremacy whose effects are still felt in the region today, even after forty years of independence. These three countries of North Africa are also collectively called the Maghreb (meaning "The west" in Arabic). Whereas Morocco and Tunisia had the administrative status of protectorates, Algeria was a colony. Before the end of the nineteenth century, Algeria was divided into three *départements* and declared an extension of French continental territory. Invaded by the French in 1830, Algerian independence was granted only at the conclusion of a violent conflict (1954–62), referred to as "the Algerian Revolution" by Algerians. Morocco and Tunisia received their independence from France in 1956, after several years of conflict that was often violent, but did not reach the same level of warfare as the Algerian Revolution.

The three countries of the Maghreb are distinct in terms of their political and cultural history, yet the shared experience of French colonization makes it possible to discuss them together, particularly concerning the development of French-language literature in the region. When the French conquered North Africa, they found a well-established Arabic literary tradition that had existed since the time of the Arab expansion into North Africa during the seventh century. But the French colonial endeavor depended upon a bureaucracy and an administrative mission in which French was the dominant means of communication. Traditional Arabic schools and universities suffered under French rule and gradually French became the key that granted access to higher status within the colonial hierarchy. France's self-declared "civilizing mission" did not result in the widespread public education of indigenous North Africans. Instead, access to French public schools, particularly beyond the elementary level, was limited. John Ruedy notes that by 1944, fewer than 9 percent of

Algerian children between the ages of seven and fourteen were enrolled in primary schools operated by the French authorities (1992: 126). Ruedy points out that some effort was made after 1944 to increase spending on schools for Muslim Algerians, even though European settlers opposed educating indigenous Algerians in a French fashion. However, under colonial rule, many Algerian families lacked the economic means to send their children to the French schools. When the Algerian Revolution began in 1954, as Ruedy observes, "86% of Algerian men, and 95% of Algerian women were still illiterate, a monumental indictment of a system that for more than a century had claimed to be civilizing the uncivilized" (1992: 126). In spite of the obstacles faced by indigenous North Africans in obtaining schooling in French, by the 1940s, a western-educated elite made its presence felt in artistic, literary, and cultural circles in the capitals of the Maghreb.

More so than Tunisia and Morocco, Algeria was a settler colony, and citizens of European origin also greatly contributed to the rise of an indigenous literature written in French. Called the "School of Algiers" (existing from 1935 to 1955), this group helped pave the way for the development of a literary movement among indigenous Muslim Algerians. Born in the city of Mondovi (now called Deraan) in 1913, Albert Camus is the most famous member of the School of Algiers. Other French writers born in the colony of Algeria, such as Gabriel Audisio, Jules Roy, Jean Pélégri, and Emmanuel Roblès, are also members of this literary circle. It may be argued that while not quite a formal "school," the members of this group shared what Jean Déjeux terms "a shared North African sensitivity" (1973: 18). The members of the School of Algiers gathered together at the bookstore in Algiers owned by Edmond Charlot. After the mid-1940s, this circle expanded its membership to include several Arab and Kabyle (Berber) Algerians who would soon become renowned French-language writers in their own right: Jean Amrouche, Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, and Mouloud Mammeri. Writers such as Audisio and Roblès did whatever they could to encourage and assist in the publication of works by indigenous Algerians. But in 1955, political differences and the tide of historic events disrupted the unity of the School of Algiers. Novelists of European and French ethnic heritage and those Algerian writers who henceforth would identify their concerns as primarily working toward the creation of an "Algerian nation" would soon part company.

According to the Tunisian novelist Albert Memmi, the legacy of the School of Algiers and its contributions to the creation of a viable literary production in French must not be underestimated. Today, writers like Camus, Roblès, and Pélégri find their place in the continental French literary canon, while

authors whose ethnic origins are Arab or Berber are now seen as the only true heirs to the title of "North African writers." For Memmi, it is a sad and inescapable fact of the trauma of colonialism that today, literary and critical traditions tend to separate Albert Camus from the region in which he was born. Memmi cites two primary trends in the writings of French citizens born in North Africa and those indigenous North Africans who use French as a means of expression: the hallmark of Maghrebian writers was "revolt," and that of French writers was "separation" (1969: 16). Hence, it is not surprising, notes Memmi, that Camus's masterpiece *L'étranger* (*The Stranger*) is marked by the untenable situation of being a *colon*, a stranger, or an outsider in a land that is not one's own (1969: 17). Posthumously published in 1994, Camus's *Le premier homme* (*The First Man*) is the author's unfinished semi-autobiographical novel that traces the life of a man who grew up in poverty in colonial Algeria. The protagonist of this haunting work returns to Algiers as acts of violence against the French administration and colonial establishment are on the rise. The relationship between Albert Camus, Algeria, the land of his birth, and the representation of colonialism and Arab Algerians in his works has been a subject of endless debate. Since the start of sectarian violence in Algeria in 1992, and with the publication of Camus's last unfinished work in 1994, there has been a renewed interest in Camus's life and work. In Olivier Todd's biography of Albert Camus, he cites Mohammed Dib – Algeria's great indigenous writer – as stating that unquestionably, "Camus is an Algerian writer" (1996: 765). No doubt Camus would have felt this sign of acceptance to be a great homage, as it recognizes his attachment to the land of his birth that he himself never ceased to express.

If French writers of North Africa are irremediably marked by separation and difference, the indigenous North Africans who first began to publish their works in French after the mid-1940s, suffered no less from a personal sense of alienation and an identity crisis. It is perhaps most accurate to credit the poet and essayist Jean Amrouche with being the first North African voice to speak out in French against the injustices of colonial rule. In his essay "L'éternel Jugurtha," published in the cultural and literary review *L'Arche,* founded by Amrouche in 1944, he resurrects the historical and legendary warrior-king of the Numidians (the ancestors of today's Berbers) who fought against Roman occupation in the first century BCE. In Amrouche's essay, Jugurtha represents the citizen of North Africa, colonized by other groups and races since Roman times. Jugurtha's talent and strength lies in his ability to adapt to the constraints of colonization, while at the same time assimilating the positive elements of intercultural contact. Jugurtha is depicted as an astute cultural and linguistic

mimic and chameleon. But now, in the modern era, and in Amrouche's mythological portrait of Jugurtha, he will assume his destiny and return to his origins by proclaiming his right to self-determination. In 1946 colonial Algeria, Amrouche's essay provided inspiration for the next wave of North African writers for whom Jugurtha's quest for personal and collective liberation will serve as a model.

The decade of the 1950s is usually considered to be the starting point for French-language, Algerian national fiction. But this is not to say that texts published in French did not exist before this period. As Zahia Smail Salhi notes, important works of fiction by indigenous Algerian writers appeared as early as 1908 (1991: 1). Regardless of the accepted starting date, francophone Maghrebian literary history continues to the present day, and even the political and economic vicissitudes of the end of the twentieth century have not brought about the end of French-language writing in the Maghreb. Indeed, even more than forty years after independence, the continued existence of French-language writing in North Africa has defied all expectations of an early demise. In all three nations of francophone North Africa, the early 1950s saw the development of French-language fiction and poetry that today is also considered to be the start of the national literatures of these countries. In reviewing the historical circumstances surrounding the birth of this literature, it is not surprising that the rise of nationalist feelings in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia after the end of the Second World War also influenced the development of literary trends. The novels that appeared in the 1950s were largely of two differing types. The first group presents ethnographic portraits of daily life for the colonial subjects of the French in North Africa. Works in this group include Mouloud Feraoun's *Le fils du pauvre* (1950) (Son of a Poor Man) (Algeria), and Ahmed Sefrioui's *La boîte à merveilles* (1954) (The Box of Marvels) (Morocco), in which the joys and hardships of everyday life are depicted without recourse to protest against the colonial status quo. Today, works of this type have largely fallen out of favor with critics and readers. However, in the early 1950s, ethnographic literature written by indigenous North Africans opened a dialogue with French (colonial and continental) readers and at the very least, sought to make the cultural and linguistic Other aware of the human dignity of a colonized people.

In the second group, fictional works of a more militant, anticolonial tone established the trend that North African French-language fiction would follow for the next several decades. The works of the second group are today considered to be those having the most critical and historical value. The authors associated with this group are hailed as the true founders of North African

French literature. For Algeria, Mohammed Dib remains even today the foremost literary giant of that nation. With the publication of his "Algeria" trilogy, Dib became the voice of Algeria's spirit, longing to be free of French domination. The three novels of this set are: *La grande maison* (1952) (The Big House), *L'incendie* (1954) (The Fire), and *Le métier à tisser* (1957) (The Loom), and they span the period from the eve of the Algerian Revolution to the peak of its most violent episodes. Dib is representative of many North African writers in that his commitment to his nation's independence did not blind him to the errors of the postcolonial regime. Living in France since 1964, Dib has remained Algeria's most iconoclastic novelist. The style and themes of his fiction constantly evolve, sometimes taking him in directions that no other North African writer to date has followed. A recipient of the French Academy's "Grand Prix de la Francophonie," Mohammed Dib has published more than twenty works of fiction (novels and short-story collections). From the start of his career as one of Algeria's leading voices against colonial injustice, Dib has in no way lessened his commitment to engaged writing. His two most recent works, *La nuit sauvage* (1995) (Savage Night), and *Si diable veut* (1998) (The Devil Willing), examine the brutality of the Algerian Revolution, juxtaposed with the senseless killings and barbarism of Algeria's civil war of the 1990s. Dib is recognized as the greatest Algerian French-language writer because of his immense literary talent and his unfailing humanism.

In Morocco and Tunisia, the 1950s were also a fertile period for literary development and several authors who began their careers at this time continue to make their mark on the North African literary scene. In Morocco, Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* (1954) (Simple Past) was published at a time when the Moroccan struggle against the French protectorate was at its peak. Chraïbi's autobiographical novel was controversial because it did not stop at relaying an anticolonial message. In addition, the author attacked what he considered to be the fossilized remnants of an absurdly patriarchal society. Chraïbi negatively portrays the father-patriarch, whose life-or-death authority over women, children, and members of the poorest classes of Moroccan society shares equal blame with the French colonizers for having suffocated true social and cultural progress in Moroccan society. To date, Chraïbi has continued his literary career with twelve novels and several short-story collections. He is recognized as one of Morocco's greatest French-language writers, whose iconoclastic style has influenced subsequent generations of Moroccan novelists.

In Tunisia, Albert Memmi's first, autobiographical novel, *La statue de sel* (1953) (*Pillar of Salt*), examines life in Tunis's poor Jewish community on the eve of independence through the eyes of an alienated, bitter, and restless hero.

Both Chraïbi's and Memmi's young protagonists share a common bond: they rebel against their second-class status as colonial subjects and reject the weight of tradition that attempts to dictate the role young men in their religious and cultural circumstances must play. For these two rebellious characters, exile and a refusal of both the colonizer's and the colonized's society starts them off on a quest for a "third" way.

In Algeria, in 1956, the publication of Kateb Yacine's novel *Nedjma* changed and challenged all future expectations of North African French literature. Published at the height of the Algerian Revolution, Kateb's novel was not exclusively a work of political protest or sociological commentary. Instead, this haunting work of fiction, practically the only major publication in Kateb's career, caused a sensation and influenced successive generations of Maghrebian writers because of its fusion of current historical events, mythical evocations of the author's tribal past, and even a satirical look at Islamic mysticism. Given the novel's nonlinear narration and polyphony of narrating voices, Charles Bonn has described *Nedjma* as the most resolutely modern of all North African fiction, since it defies the standard way in which textual meanings are generated and it rejects the traditional narrative models of French, nineteenth-century realist fiction (1992: 66). In North Africa, the novels of the 1950s, then, announced the development of engaged writing. Political and social concerns merged with literary energy and experimentation in order to produce works of fiction (and to a lesser extent, poetry as well), that challenge French and European readers in their assumptions about the future of France's colonial empire. The question for succeeding decades would be what role, if any, could French-language fiction play in postcolonial North Africa?

North African French literature of the 1950s and 60s is inextricably linked to its historical and sociological context. As Hafid Gafaïti points out, especially in the case of Algeria, the trajectory of literary production fuses with the historic progression of this nation (1996:14). Many of the most well-known writers who came of age during the Algerian Revolution found the tragedies and triumphs of this conflict to be a great source of inspiration. The Kabyle (Berber) literary giant Mouloud Mammeri (1917–89) won critical acclaim for his trilogy about the Algerian struggle for freedom. The novels of Mammeri's war cycle include: *La colline oubliée* (1952) (The Forgotten Hill), *Le sommeil du juste* (1955) (The Sleep of the Righteous), and *L'opium et le bâton* (1962) (Opium and the Stick). Not only required reading in post-independence Algerian schools, the third novel was even made into a successful film by Algeria's burgeoning cinematic industry. Mammeri's contributions to the development of the Algerian French-language literary canon must not be underestimated. Associated

with the early developments of Algerian writing, he later became prominent in the struggle to preserve Algerian oral literature (especially that of the Kabyle Berbers) and to gain recognition for oral cultures in Algerian university programs.

Along with Mammeri, several Algerian women authors established their reputations during the period of the Algerian Revolution. The most widely recognized North African woman author is Assia Djebar. Her first two novels, *La soif* (1957) (Thirst) and *Les impatients* (1958), did not, however, deal with events of the war. Instead, these two works may be read as an assertion of a female voice and presence in a literary realm that, up to this point, had been almost exclusively dominated by male authors. With the publication of *Les enfants du nouveau monde* (1962) (Children of the New World) and *Les alouettes naïves* (1967) (The Naïve Larks), Djebar established her reputation as a committed writer who sought to portray the experiences and contributions of Algerian women during the revolution. Djebar's two war novels, along with Yamina Mechakra's later *La grotte éclatée* (1979) (The Exploded Grotto), represent a quest to establish an authentic female voice and *parole féminine* concerning the Algerian Revolution.

By the 1960s, Morocco and Tunisia were already independent nations. This era saw the continued importance of writers such as Driss Chraïbi and Albert Memmi, but it was not until the following decade that a new generation of French-language writers and intellectuals in the Maghreb came to the attention of readers and scholars. From 1966 to 1972, a literary and cultural journal published in Rabat, Morocco, entitled *Souffles,* breathed new life and a renewed sense of urgency into French-language writing in the Maghreb. Founded by the poet Abdellatif Laâbi, *Souffles* announced its objectives to be a mouthpiece for national debates on the role of culture, bilingualism, and literature in a newly independent nation. In *Souffles,* theoretical and critical pieces appeared with examples of creative writing by individuals who would soon become respected novelists and poets in their own right, including Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Mostafa Nissaboury, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Tahar Ben Jelloun. The journal's militant editorials regarding freedom of expression and a call for a truly "decolonized" Maghrebian writing of French expression earned the wrath of political authorities in Morocco and the review was banned. Arrested in 1972, after *Souffles* was censored, Laâbi would spend the next eight years in a Moroccan prison for his political opinions before being allowed to emigrate to France. While Khaïr-Eddine and later Ben Jelloun also left Morocco for the more open political and social climate of France, Khatibi remained in Rabat and published his watershed text *La mémoire tatouée* (Tattooed Memory)

in 1971. This work was followed by the publication of two other evocative, sophisticated, and transcendent narratives: *Le livre du sang* (1979) (The Book of Blood) and *Amour bilingue* (1983) (*Love in Two Languages*). Khatibi is not only a novelist and poet; his essay *Maghreb pluriel* (1983) (Maghreb in the Plural), is a fundamental text that prefigures the direction postcolonial studies would take some ten years later. Khatibi is concerned with exploring the locus and the very notion of the Maghreb as a crossroads of cultures and identities. In this essay, he calls for the creation of a "pensée autre," that is, "a third way of thinking" that will move beyond manichean distinctions between east and west, Self and Other, colonized and colonizer.

Morocco of the 1970s also saw the start of the prolific literary career of Tahar Ben Jelloun, Morocco's most widely known author. His first semi-autobiographical novel, *Harrouda* (1973), gained critical acclaim for its originality and sophistication. In this early work, Ben Jelloun established himself as a writer of immense talent whose literary concerns focus on themes of exile, gender relations within an Arab-Islamic cultural context, mysticism, and madness. In the 1970s, Ben Jelloun published several novels and several volumes of poetry. In 1977, he published *La plus haute des solitudes* (The Highest of Solitudes) the first of several essays on racism and the status of North African immigrant workers in France. Ben Jelloun continued his inquiry into racism, immigration, and French society with his work *Le racisme expliqué à ma fille* (1998) (Racism Explained to My Daughter), which became a best seller in France.

The 1970s and 80s proved to be a less fertile period for fictional works in Tunisia than was the case for Morocco and Algeria. Albert Memmi's *Le scorpion* (1969), *Le désert* (1977), and his masterpiece *Le pharaon* (1988) (The Pharaoh) continued to demonstrate that this author's talent lay in his ability to fuse autobiographical, historical, and mythological narratives in a most arresting and original fashion. The novelists Mustapha Tlili (*La rage aux tripes*, 1975) (Rage in the Gut), Salah Garmadi (*Nos ancêtres les Bédouins*, 1975) (Our Ancestors the Bedouin), and Abdelwahab Meddeb (*Talismano,* 1979, and *Phantasia*, 1987) proved that although Tunisian French-language literature may constitute a smaller corpus, the literary quality of these works assures Tunisian French literature a secure place in the North African canon.

In Algeria in the 1970s, themes dealing with establishing the postcolonial order, memorializing the martyrs of the revolution, and promoting the aspirations of the socialist National Liberation Front regime take precedence in officially sanctioned literature. This is especially true, at least until the late 1980s, of the works published by the national publishing houses of the Algerian

government: the "Entreprise nationale du livre" (ENAL) and the "Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion" (SNED). Algerian writers who wished to publish in a more politically neutral climate sought to have their works published in France. Indeed, in the 1970s, a growing disillusionment with the Algerian Revolution's aftermath, including the introduction of drastic Arabization language programs in public schools, spurred many French-language writers and intellectuals to choose exile in France.

In 1969, Algerian French-language literature was rejuvenated when Rachid Boudjedra published *La répudiation,* a work that provoked a scandal by its violent and obsessive theme of rebellion against the traditional family patriarch and its brutal and frank portrayal of a young man's sexual suffocation. This novel set the tone for much of Boudjedra's iconoclastic work that would follow. *L'insolation* (1972) (Sunstroke) continues Boudjedra's project and is comparable to his first novel; this work also focuses on the figure of the sacrificial and victimized mother. The narrative is recounted through the first-person voice of the protagonist who is interned in a mental hospital. Four more novels follow and then, in 1982, with *Le démantèlement* (The Demolition), Boudjedra began to write fiction in Arabic, a shift that received a great deal of critical attention in Algeria. During this ten-year phase of Boudjedra's career, a French translation by Antoine Moussali, with the author listed as collaborator, would follow the Arabic-language publication. In response to the rise of Islamic militancy and a growing hostility to francophone intellectuals in Algeria after 1991, Boudjedra returned to writing in French with the publication of an anti-Islamic fundamentalist treatise entitled *FIS de la haine* (1992) (Son/Party of Hate). The tragic events of the Algerian civil war inspired Boudjedra's more recent fictional works, beginning with the narrative *Timimoun* (1994). This novel depicts an embittered and nearly asexual protagonist who seeks respite in a desert oasis from the cycle of violence that torments Algeria's urban areas. *La vie à l'endroit* (1997) (Life on the Spot) also focuses on life in Algeria under siege from sectarian violence. Written in the third-person singular, the novel presents itself as a journal that recounts the events of three separate days in three Algerian cities over a span of three summer months. Like Boudjedra himself, the protagonist of *La vie à l'endroit* lives clandestinely since he has been threatened by Islamic militants.

Also in the 1970s, the Algerian novelist Nabile Farès (who resides and teaches in France) published *Yahia, pas de chance* (1970) (Yahia, Out of Luck), *Un passager de l'Occident* (1971) (A Passenger to the West), and *Le champ des oliviers* (1972) (The Field of Olive Trees), *Mémoire de l'absent* (1974) (Memory of the Missing), and *L'exil et le désarroi* (1976) (Exile and Confusion) (all works published in France).

Farès has received critical recognition for his modernist, eclectic, innovative, and fragmented narrative style. Farès's originality lies in his exploration of marginality and cultural origins, as well as the construction of pluralistic identities.

The 1970s in Algeria saw an increase in the number of women writers. Although Assia Djebar did not publish any works of fiction in this decade, she did, however, write, produce, and direct a film, *La nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* (The Celebration of the Mount Chenoua Women) in 1979. Aïcha Lemsine (a pseudonym), published two well-received novels: *La chrysalide* (1976) (The Chrysalis) and *Le ciel de porphyre* (1978) (Purple Sky). Lemsine's work is characterized by a sociorealist narration and her objective is to draw attention to her female protagonists' suffering in a post-independence era that still has not guaranteed basic human rights for women.

Since the decade of the 1970s, North African literature in French has inspired a parallel development of outstanding critical studies devoted to analyzing these texts and bringing them to the attention of a wider audience in Europe, in North America, and in the Maghreb itself. The true pioneers in the field of Maghrebi literary criticism are Jean Déjeux and Jacqueline Arnaud, both of whom had lived and worked in North Africa. Déjeux's *Littérature maghrébine de la langue française* (1973) presented synopses and biographical notices on all of the major novelists and poets in the Maghreb up to that date. A careful bibliographer, Déjeux readily offered the use of his personal library to students and scholars of North African literature. Jacqueline Arnaud, as Charles Bonn notes, was the first scholar to write a *doctorat d'état* thesis on Maghrebi French-language writing (1990: 5). Arnaud is especially recognized for her critical studies of Kateb Yacine's fiction and theater. Continuing the work of Arnaud and Déjeux, numerous scholars in Europe, North Africa, and North America, such as Charles Bonn, Mildred Mortimer, Bernard Aresu, and Hafid Gafaïti, have contributed in significant ways to the expanding field of Maghrebi literary studies.

For all nations of the Maghreb, the decade of the 1980s brought new political and social challenges, as well as a great deal of disillusionment, and French-language writing throughout this period mirrors these developments. Algerian French literature in this period is characterized by a desire to re-evaluate and challenge the political and social myths of sacrifice, martyrdom, and revolution handed down by the previous generation. In Algeria, two authors are synonymous with this project of questioning old models through committed and original fiction: Rachid Mimouni and Tahar Djaout. Tragically, neither of these novelists lived to see the end of the Algerian civil war: Djaout

was assassinated in May 1993 during the campaign of terror against journalists and intellectuals. Mimouni, forced to flee Algeria under death threats from Islamic militants, died in exile from liver disease in February 1995. Both men died young, but not without having established themselves as two of Algeria's most important new writers. Mimouni's first novel, *Le fleuve détourné* (1982) (The Altered River), announced a thematic concern that would be present in all of his subsequent fiction: the betrayal of the Algerian Revolution's ideals by leaders too easily corrupted by power. Before his death, Mimouni would publish four more novels, including his critically acclaimed *Tombéza* (1984). In this novel, Mimouni offers blunt criticism of his society for its oppression of women and the poor.

Although an accomplished poet, Djaout's literary legacy will no doubt be honored more for his novels, which, like those of Mimouni, explore the New Order of post-independent Algeria with a cynical and critical eye, as is the case in his *Les chercheurs d'os* (The Bone Seekers). Author of five novels (including the posthumously published *Le dernier été de la raison,* 1999) (The Last Summer of Reason), Djaout will perhaps be best remembered for his subtle fable *Les vigiles* (1991) (The Watchmen). In this Kafkaesque tale of a society sinking under its own corrupt bureaucracy, the author evokes a climate of fear and persecution where the basic rights of the individual are abandoned. The atmosphere of petty tyranny and calculating authorities who gamble with and manipulate the lives of their citizens evokes the nightmare of civil war that will become a tragic reality for Algeria just one year later.

The novelist Assia Djebar came back to the literary forefront of Algeria in 1980 with the publication of her widely acclaimed collection of short stories, *Les femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement.* This work marked a turning point in Djebar's narrative style; elliptical, polyphonic, and nonlinear, Djebar's post-1980 narratives are concerned with evoking the female voice. In 1985, Djebar published *L'amour, la fantasia* (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*), the first of a projected four-volume series on Algerian women and their relationship to autobiography, memory, desire, history, and language. The second and third volumes of the quartet have also been published: *Ombre sultane* (1987) (*A Sister to Sheherzade*), and *Vaste est la prison* (1995) (*So Vast the Prison*).

In Morocco, French-language writing in the 1980s was marked by the presence of a small group of talented writers: Driss Chraïbi, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Abdelhak Serhane, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Edmond Amran El Maleh. Chraïbi, Khatibi, and Ben Jelloun continued literary careers begun in the previous decades, but El Maleh, already known for his work at the prestigious Paris newspaper *Le Monde,* published his first work of fiction, *Parcours immobile*

(1980) (Fixed Journey), at the age of sixty-three. His three subsequent novels continue to trace the destiny of the Moroccan Jewish community in a narrative style marked by ellipses, myth, and historical discourse. Sharing thematic concerns expressed in the early works of Ben Jelloun and Rachid Boudjedra, Abdelhak Serhane published *Messaouda* in 1983. Serhane's fiction is characterized by an exploration of his own psyche, as well as a critique of the evils facing Moroccan society: political corruption, religious hypocrisy, the unequal status of women, and the abuse of children. Serhane has since published several more works of fiction that examine Moroccan society with a critical eye: *Les enfants des rues étroites* (1986) (Children of the Narrow Streets), *Le soleil des obscurs* (1992) (The Sun of the Hidden Ones), and most recently, *Les temps noirs* (2002) (Dark Times). The novelist, poet, and sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi published *Amour bilingue* in 1983. This dense yet lyrical meditation on bilingualism and intercultural communication in the postcolonial context has won much critical acclaim for the author.

Moroccan French literature in the 1980s was dominated by Tahar Ben Jelloun. During this period he published four novels and a collection of poetry. Ben Jelloun's efforts were crowned in 1987 by a Prix Goncourt, France's highest literary prize, for his novel *La nuit sacrée* (*The Sacred Night*), the first time ever that this prestigious prize was awarded to a writer from the African continent. For Valérie Orlando, both *La nuit sacrée* and the work that preceded it, *L'enfant du sable* (*The Sand Child*), are significant because these novels also offer an analysis about the position of the French-language writer from the Maghreb. For Orlando, Ben Jelloun 'projects himself through his [female] protagonist to call attention to his agenda. Her confusion, lack of status as a woman in a phallocratic society, vulnerability, and fear all allude to the author's own confused, complicated, unstable universe" (1999: 75). However, critical reaction to the literary prize on both sides of the Mediterranean was varied. Some felt that this award was a sign that the French, metropolitan literary establishment had finally accepted North African French literature on equal terms. Other critics felt that since the novel in question presented a negative view of women's status in an Arab-Islamic cultural context, the French establishment was actually rewarding Ben Jelloun for having denigrated his own cultural origins (see for example, Kaye and Zoubir 1990, and Marrouchi 1990). The Prix Goncourt for Ben Jelloun in 1987 most definitely demonstrated that some forty years after the development of North African French literature, there were still no easy answers as to the status and critical reception of this genre, particularly at a time in which political and economic matters were rapidly reaching a boiling point, raising new and urgent issues regarding cultural authenticity and the

role of Islam and the Arabic language in the three former French colonies of North Africa.

In December 1991, the Algerian government canceled elections that the Islamic party (the Front Islamique du Salut [FIS]) had been predicted to win. This action led to more than six years of violence in which civilian deaths equaled those of the army, security forces, and rebels. Estimates of the number of Algerians who lost their lives in the sectarian violence reached beyond 75,000. Frequently called a civil war in western media, the violence in Algeria, with its endless spiral of deaths, blame, and political posturing, has intimately affected the development of French-language literature in this nation. Novelists whose careers date back to an earlier period (for example, Mohammed Dib, Assia Djebar, Rachid Boudjedra, and Rachid Mimouni) once again rose to the challenge of defying injustice and violence in order to publish works that condemn the senseless killings. In *Oran, langue morte* (1997) (Oran, Dead Language), Assia Djebar presents a collection of short stories, including a novella, that examine the intertwining links between Algerian women, history, and violence of the past and the present. Djebar's immense creative talent evokes a climate of violence that touches the lives of so many citizens of Algeria without trivializing or sensationalizing their sufferings. The novelist Mohammed Dib's *Si diable veut* recounts the return to the family village of a young man who grew up in the Paris region. The clash between tradition and modernity, politics and religion in 1990s Algeria is masterfully portrayed in Dib's novel. Other, younger novelists, including several previously unknown women authors, published their first works during these bitter years to widespread critical acclaim both in Europe and North Africa. Similar to the period of the Algerian Revolution, the civil war of the 1990s sparked the creation of luminous works of fiction whose importance will surely transcend this violent period.

The most noteworthy narratives that appeared during the Algerian civil crisis are characterized by a desire to bear dignified and sensitive witness to the suffering of the Algerian people, with political and religious questions as a secondary concern. Many of these narratives present Kafkaesque tales of ordinary people caught up in a confusing nightmare of violence. These recent novels condemn the abdication of humanity by all forces responsible for so much national trauma. Works in this category include Malika Mokeddem's *L'interdite* (1993) (*The Forbidden Woman*), Abdelkader Djemaï's *Un été de cendres* (1995) (A Summer of Ashes), Fériel Assima's *Une femme à Alger* (1995) (A Woman in Algiers), and Latifa Ben Mansour's *La prière de la peur* (1997) (Prayer of Fear), Leila Marouane's *Ravisseur* (1998) (*The Abductor*), and Yasmina Khadra's (the

pseudonym of Mohammed Moulessehoul) *Les agneaux du seigneur* (1998) (The Lord's Lambs).

In the 1980s, all of the Maghreb faced the specter of political violence brought about by increasing demands for greater political freedom and economic improvement. In Tunisia and Morocco, the threats posed by radical Islamic groups did not present the same difficulties as was the case for Algeria. For all three francophone nations of North Africa, the decade of the 1990s brought some degree of improvement in material conditions, but other social and political factors (for example, inflation, housing shortages, press censorship, high unemployment, overcrowded schools, and the desire of many young people to emigrate) continued to challenge the governments of the Maghreb in their quest to provide a better life for all citizens. Francophone literature during this period of expansion and new expectations, continued to serve as a mouthpiece for the aspirations of many North African citizens. Morocco, for example, in the 1990s enjoyed an increase in economic prosperity and the government of King Hassan II moved toward expanding the role of the opposition in the government and liberalizing certain restrictions on the press. With the death of Hassan II in 1999, many Moroccans hoped for continued economic growth and an increase in personal liberties under the reign of the new king, Mohammed VI. For the French-language novelists Fouad Laroui, author of *Les dents du topographe* (1996) (The Teeth of the Topographer), *De quel amour blessé* (1998) (Wounded from Which Love), and *Méfiez-vous des parachutistes* (1999) (Watch Out for the Parachutists), Rachid O., author of *L'enfant ébloui* (1995) (The Dazzled Child) and *Plusieurs vies* (1996) (Several Lives), and Lotfi Akalay, author of *Les nuits d'Azed* (1996) (The Nights of Azed), French is the language of choice for literary creation and freedom of expression. For these contemporary Moroccan novelists, issues related to identity and the individual's relationship to his or her own culture and that of the west remain a central focus.

North African French literature still fosters a meaningful literary and cultural dialogue on both sides of the Mediterranean. North African immigration to Europe has led to the development of an exciting corpus of texts and films by "Beur" authors (Parisian back-slang for "Arab"), that is, second- and third-generation Franco-Maghrebians. The continued growth of French-language literature from North Africa enriches the literary canon of metropolitan France. While the issue of whether or not francophone literature from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia may truly be considered "national literature" is still debated, there are few doubts among its critics and proponents that French literature from North Africa has played, and continues to play, a vital role in shaping the national consciousness for all citizens of the Maghreb.

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29

Francophone literatures of the Indian Ocean

BÉNÉDICTE MAUGUIÈRE

Off the southeast coast of the African continent and beneath the Equator lie a rather large number of islands that comprise the Comoros, Madagascar, the Mascarenes (Mauritius, Réunion, and Rodrigues), and the Seychelles. The Indian Ocean was created when the original continent of Gondwana split apart, giving birth to Africa, India, Australia, and Antarctica, around 140 million years ago. Geologically, these islands differ greatly. Whereas most of them are vestiges of the driftage from that original continent, others like Réunion and the Comoros are, on the other hand, the result of more recent volcanic eruptions. Their origins explain why these islands, which are relatively close to one another, reveal such great natural diversity, from the "Great Island" of Madagascar which is almost a continent itself (measuring 1,580 km from north to south and only 580 km at its greatest width for an area of 587,041 km^2), to the numerous small coral islands of the Seychelles, to Mauritius with its flattened plains (2,100 km^2), Réunion (2,512 km^2) with the spectacular contours of its volcano and mountains, and Rodrigues (110 km^2) which is but a mass of lava. There is nevertheless a similar tropical-variety "island climate" that along with the monsoon has historically allowed for movement between the islands.

Cultural diversity is yet another factor for the islands, each having its own originality even though they have only recently figured in human history. The presence of humans on Madagascar dates back approximately fifteen centuries. The Seychelles have been inhabited since the eighteenth century. Migrations from all shores of the Indian Ocean have shaped each island: the Malagasy people are believed to have originated from successive migrations from Indonesia and Africa (from the first through the sixteenth centuries); the expansion of Islam allowed exchanges with the Arab world; and, from the sixteenth century, European travelers settled in the islands. The slave trade operated out of Africa and the Malay world; then, following the abolition of slavery, hired laborers recruited from India settled for the most part in Mauritius. The Chinese diaspora

scattered throughout most of the islands, as well as adventurers, exiles, pirates, and castaways. These population movements resulted in a great diversity of cultures, languages, customs, and religions that each island integrated in an original and distinct fashion. There are, however, points of convergence and factors of cohesion, including entering the sphere of French influence at a given period of time and maintaining use of the French language. French is in effect a privileged means of access to the islands because it is widely spoken and because it has been and remains in use as a literary language (Joubert 1993).

The Island of Bourbon, today's Réunion, has been under French sovereignty since 1638; in 1946 it became an Overseas Department. The Island of Mauritius (formerly Ile de France) and the Seychelles (named after the Intendant, Moreau de Séchelles) were French colonies before coming under British dominion following the Treaty of Paris in 1814. Mauritius achieved independence in 1968, and the Seychelles in 1976. Madagascar was colonized by the French from 1895 to 1960, after several prior attempts under Richelieu and Louis XIV. The archipelago of the Comoros was under French administration from 1841 until 1975 (except for Mayotte, which decided by referendum to retain its association with France).

If today the French language enjoys a special status in this vast area, it is everywhere in close contact with one or more other languages employed at various levels (mother tongue, administrative, community, religious): Malagasy, Creole, Comoran, English, Indian languages, Chinese, Arabic, etc. This "linguistic polyphony" constitutes one of the essential traits of civilization of the Indian Ocean and is recognized today for influencing the varieties of regional French throughout the Indian Ocean that are demonstrating such vitality.

Jean-Louis Joubert, who is single-handedly responsible for the consideration of francophone literatures of the Indian Ocean as a field of research, distinguishes three main types of literary activity found on all of the islands in some degree: an oral literature, a literature written in French, which remains the dominant literary language of the Indian Ocean, and a modern literature in vernacular languages, notably in Madagascar for texts in Malagasy and in the Mascarenes for texts in Creole. This literature contributes to the consciousness of a national identity but also knows only a limited diffusion.

In Madagascar, the three literary modes are all present: a traditional oral literature in Malagasy, exceptionally rich and still alive outside the urban centers; a modern literature written in Malagasy whose first texts date from the second half of the nineteenth century; and a modern literature written in French. On Mauritius, where French remains the favored literary language, we also

find a great variety of modern languages: English, Creole, Hindu, Urdu. On Réunion, literature written in French is largely dominant. Literature written in Creole is recent and of quite limited diffusion. In the Seychelles and Comoros, the three forms can be found in a rather restricted corpus.

Each literature has its distinctive traits, for as Joubert says:

> Une littérature se noue dans le dialogue des textes, des lieux et des hommes qui les lisent et les habitent. Dans l'océan Indien . . . la production des textes, leur diffusion, leur lecture participent à l'invention des îles. La littérature d'une île comprend l'ensemble des textes qui la font exister dans l'imaginaire et la sensibilité des hommes, qui en révèlent la vérité, à ses habitants comme aux étrangers. Ainsi conçue, la littérature est constitutive de l'identité insulaire. (1991: 10)

> A literature takes shape from the dialogue of texts, places, and people who read them and inhabit them. In the Indian Ocean . . . the production of texts, their diffusion, and their reading all participate in the invention of the islands. The literature of an island is composed of all the texts that bring it to life in the people's imaginary and sensibility, that reveal its truth, to its inhabitants as well as to foreigners. Thus conceived, literature is constitutive of the island identity.

Likewise, a national literature is not a closed and unified ensemble, and the texts' origin must be taken into account in order to understand them. Joubert distinguishes the following literary forms:

– Travel Literature, written by foreigners and based on their travel to the islands. In this category can be found travel accounts, novels, poems written for the European public. The first in this category was quite obviously Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, which, having assumed mythic proportions, nourishes the Mauritian imaginary.
– Literature by Colonists, itself inscribed as a prolongation of travel literature, with the small difference that colonists settled and wrote from the land in which they had settled. There was an abundant literature in Mauritius and Réunion in the nineteenth century, which remained marked by the characteristics of exoticism even though it was printed, circulated, and read on the islands.
– Literature by Islanders, which seeks to cut the umbilical cord that ties it to the Metropolitan centers of culture. It is defined by its claim as the site of origin for the literary project. Thematic links can thus be found in the Mascarenes and in Madagascar through the elaboration of myths of creation: Robert-Edward Hart and Malcolm de Chazal's lemurian myth, Jacques Rabemananjara's geological apocalypse, etc.

– Finally, Literature by Exiles – islanders who ally themselves with French literature: Leconte de Lisle, who was born in Réunion and was the successor of Victor Hugo in the French Academy, or Loys Masson, the Mauritian who was Secretary-General of the Comité National des Lettres in Paris. The exile, furthermore, writes about the country of origin where he often encounters the warm reception meant for those who prove themselves in the "Métropole." In this category we can place travelers such as J. M. G. Le Clézio, for whom "le voyage aux îles n'est pas découverte d'un pays neuf, mais un retour à une origine fondatrice" "travel to the islands is not the discovery of a new land, but a return to a foundational origin."

(quoted in Joubert 1991: 12)

Madagascar

The Malagasy had a written literature well before the Negritude movement of the 1930s, which marked the beginnings of francophone literatures in Africa. Prior to the nineteenth century, manuscripts written upon bark, *sorabe*, conserved in Arabic writing Malagasy texts that were for the most part magical formulas, religious texts, and genealogies whose use was nevertheless limited and not widely practiced. The Merina Kingdom emerged in the nineteenth century and affirmed its desire to unify the entire island under its direction while Franco-British colonial rivalry was developing. The most notable initiative of Radama I, concerned about better rule for the island, was having missionaries transcribe the Malagasy language into writing with Latin characters. In 1828 a printing house was established and the translation of the Bible into Malagasy was undertaken.

Cultural and linguistic interaction between France and Madagascar has a long history, beginning well before colonization. In the seventeenth century, Etienne de Flacourt produced *Histoire de la Grande Isle* (1661) (History of the Great Island) and the *Dictionnaire de la langue de Madagascar* (1658) (Dictionary of the Language of Madagascar), while in the eighteenth century France maintained commercial posts on the eastern coast of Madagascar. There were relatively constant exchanges with the French established in the Mascarenes, such that the French and the Creole of the Mascarenes became the lingua franca for external trade and international interactions.

During the first part of the twentieth century, Madagascar experienced an active literary life. This cultural life, centered around Pierre Camo's literary circles, was the determining factor in the emergence of a francophone literature in Madagascar. Jean Paulhan, professor of letters at Tananarive, was the first to carry out a serious study and translation of the Malagasy *hain-teny* into

French in 1913, with the subtitle "Poésies populaires malgaches recueillies et traduites par Jean Paulhan" (Popular Malagasy Poetry Collected and Translated by Jean Paulhan). With that publication, he initiated "le genre cardinal de la littérature malgache francophone: l'adaptation aux inflexions françaises du hain-teny traditionnel" "the cardinal genre in francophone Malagasy literature: adaptation with French inflections of the traditional *hain-teny*" (Joubert 1977: 319). The *hain-teny*, meaning "science and power of words," is a poetic sparring on the theme of love that chooses the enigma or the riddle as a means of expression. Jean Paulhan's edition and French translation brilliantly restores the polysemy of the original poetry.

Literary reviews developed at that time with publications such as *18° latitude sud*, *Capricorne*, *Océanides*, and *Revue de Madagascar*. Journals, created by French intellectuals interested in Malagasy culture (Pierre Camo, Robert Boudry, Camille de Rauville) also witnessed a great period of expansion before 1945. Camo and Boudry in particular promoted the literary career of young Malagasy writers, including Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, the most famous poet of the first half of the century. Rabearivelo (*Vieilles chansons des pays d'Imerina*, 1939) (Ancient Songs from the Lands of Imerina) and Flavien Ranaivo (from *L'ombre et le vent,* 1947 [1968], Shadow and Wind, to *Hainteny*, 1975) were the most successful in transcribing the *hain teny* into French. Although self-taught, Rabearivelo was a passionate reader who maintained correspondence with writers such as André Gide and Paul Valéry. Turning his back on his first, Symbolist models, he developed an original poetics with *Presque-songes* (1934) (Near-Dreams) and *Traduit de la nuit* (1935) (*Translations from the Night*, 1975). Nevertheless, not able to escape his marginal situation, and hobbled by debts, he ended his life on 22 June 1937, thus becoming a legend for the Malagasy people and achieving the status of national poet.

J. J. Rabearivelo, Jacques Rabemananjara, and Flavien Ranaivo are the three literary figures who dominate the period before independence. These authors were revealed to the public through the publication of the *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948), edited by Senghor, a work that devotes a good deal of attention to the Malagasy poets. Designated by Rabearivelo as his natural heir, Jacques Rabemananjara began his literary career in earnest following the Malagasy uprising of 1947. His implication through his role of parliamentarian led to his imprisonment, a turn of events that transformed him into "un des grands poètes de la lutte anti-coloniale" "one of the great poets of the anticolonial struggle" (Joubert 1992: 19). His is primarily a poetry of national liberation tied to the Negritude movement (*Antsa*, 1948; *Lamba*, 1956) that evolves by turning toward an interrogation of

the mysteries of origins (*Rien qu'encens et filigrane*, 1987, Nothing but Incense and Filigree). He returned to Madagascar in 1960 to participate in the new government formed by the first president, Philibert Tsiranana, then was again in exile after the revolution of 1972.

Beginning in 1975 under the Marxist regime of Didier Ratsiraka, Madagascar engaged in a policy of "Malgachisation" that was to result in the slow decline of francophone literature. Paradoxically, the social drift of the country and the disarray that followed the events of 1972 encouraged a literary renewal in the 1980s and 1990s with Michèle Rakotoson, the winner of the Literary Prize of Madagascar (*Dadabe*, 1984; *Le bain des reliques*, 1988, Relic Bath; *Henoy – Fragments en écorce*, 1998, Henoy – Fragments on Bark). Other women came to writing too, such as Charlotte Rafenomanjato (*Le pétale écarlate*, 1990, The Scarlet Petal; *Le cinquième sceau*, 1993, The Fifth Seal), or pursued it, such as Esther Nirina (*Lente spirale*, 1990, A Slow Spiral). Rakotoson and Rafenomanjato have both also contributed to the renewal of theater. As Liliane Ramarosa has said, this "reprise" has benefited numerous writers of the preceding generation who have been able to have their works reprinted after a period of silence of more than twenty years, and to become once again involved in literary creation in French (1991: 78); nevertheless it remains difficult for younger authors to find publishers. The short story is privileged by this generation as a kind of syncopated writing that speaks of the break-up of values and of social unrest, such as Jean-Luc Raharimanana (*Le lépreux*, 1992, The Leper). In conclusion, each writer has his or her particular technique, and contrary to African production of a certain era, it is impossible to place the Malagasy novel in the scheme of an internal dynamic, since the future of the francophone Malagasy novel "se démarque pertinemment de la ligne globale du roman africain d'expression française" "marks a significant break from the global direction of the francophone African novel" (Ramangason 1992: 63).

Mauritius

Mauritius, the island in the Indian Ocean that neighbors Réunion in the archipelago of the Mascarenes, remains profoundly original as is seen in its historical heritage, its ethnic composition, and its cultural traditions. Its uniqueness is due first of all to the fact that it was deserted when first discovered and was then colonized by the Dutch and occupied in 1715 by the French, who baptized it "Ile de France." The fact that, like Réunion, it never had an indigenous population makes it an exceptional phenomenon in the history of colonization. The French were therefore the first to populate the island, where they

introduced Bourbon Creole. French culture was thus adopted naturally as a factor of cultural cohesion following British invasion in 1810, the date from which Mauritius has kept its definitive name. A significant labor force was then brought in to cultivate tropical plants – first, slaves who were imported from Africa, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, then hired laborers recruited from the Indies (close to 450,000 in one century, whereas the total population of Mauritius was 370,000 in 1901). This considerable influx completely changed the linguistic situation of the island of Mauritius, which has since become extremely complex: seventeen languages have been counted in use, of which seven play an important role: French, English, Creole, Chinese, and three Indian languages. Nevertheless, French remains the most prestigious literary language.

Le voyage à l'île de France (1773) (Voyage to the Ile de France) and especially *Paul et Virginie* (1788) by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre confirmed the myth of the paradisical island and profoundly marked Mauritian literature. That is why Joubert can speak rightly of a "decentered literature" that oscillates between two groups: those of an island birth and those of continental ancestry (1983: 118).

The French Revolution introduced the taste for debates and favored the foundation of clubs and literary societies, especially the "Oval Table" and the "Société d'émulation intellectuelle" for the promotion of colored intellectuals. Between the Oval Table and the Mauritian Academy founded by Camille de Rauville in 1964, several literary associations were created in Mauritius, but the British conquest of 1810 was to orient literary activity of the Franco-Mauritians against English colonial administration. In the face of the massive influx of Indian immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, the Creole population (African, Malagasy, or *métis* in origin) was afraid of being overwhelmed, and joined the Franco-Mauritians in claiming their attachment to French culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, many Mauritian writers were colored, such as Léoville L'Homme (1857–1928), who is called the "father of Mauritian poetry." This literature is aligned with French literary models in what is called the movement of "francotropism" (Prosper 1978). To speak of a literature of the island of Mauritius, we must first "break the lying mirror of exoticism," according to Jean-Louis Joubert (1977: 339), given the great difficulty in escaping the influence of the French model. Only Loys Masson, who went into exile in 1939, was able to enjoy an international reputation, with his novel *Le notaire des noirs* (1961) (The Black Man's Notary) presenting the social and political revolution provoked by segregation, as well as the theme of childhood.

Robert-Edward Hart dominated the first half of the twentieth century. At the crossroads of western and eastern influences, his work (*L'ombre étoilée*, 1924,

Starry Darkness; *Poèmes: Portique oriental*, 1927, Poems: Oriental Gate) (see Hart 1930) explores the plurality of the Mauritian heritage through the island mystique. This quest joins one of the great constants in the Creole imaginary, the "desire of autochthony" of which Joubert speaks. Malcolm de Chazal, greeted as a "genius" by Jean Paulhan and André Breton in 1947 and hailed by the French public, pursued Hart's work by entering into the tradition of the lemurian reveries of Jules Hermann of Réunion. He constructs a grandiose Mauritian cosmogony (*Petrusmok*, 1951; *L'île Maurice proto-historique, folklorique et légendaire*, 1973, The Mauritius of Protohistory, Folklore, and Legend) in which the island of Mauritius is presented as the cradle of humanity. In *Sens plastique* (1948) (The Esthetic Sense), he reveals that the entire universe is a play of correspondences.

Beginning with the Second World War, literature was to cease being the domain of Franco-Mauritians and Creoles, and Mauritian cultural plurality was to expand. Many Mauritians went into exile, and writing literature became a way of returning to the island. Marcel Cabon's novel *Namasté* (1956), by describing heroes of Indian origin, turns a page in favor of the recognition of Mauritius's plurality. Marcelle Lagesse, of Breton ancestry, superbly brings back to life the history of colonial Mauritius in *La diligence s'éloigne à l'aube* (1958) (The Stagecoach Departs at Dawn). Several authors write their Chinese or Indian origins into their poems, such as Joseph Tsang Mang Kin and Hassam Wachill, who won the French Academy's "Grand Prix" for poetry with *Jour après jour* (1987) (Day after Day). More recently, Ananda Devi has explored the social and cultural universes of Mauritius and the weight of prejudice through the condition of women in *Rue de la poudrière* (1989) (Powderkeg Street), *Le voile de Draupadi* (1993) (Draupadi's Veil), *Moi, l'interdite* (2000) (I, the Banned One), and *Pagli* (2001). Shakuntala Boolell likewise denounces the situation of women among the Indo-Mauritian population in her collection of short stories *La femme enveloppée* (1996) (The Shrouded Woman). As for Carl de Souza, in *La maison qui marchait vers le large* (1996) (The House That Strode toward the Deep) he reveals all the diversity of Mauritius in a microcosm.

No poet is better at expressing the search for identity within the sphere of Negritude and *métissage* than Edouard Maunick in his *Anthologie personnelle* (1989), which brings together twelve collections of poems that he published between 1954 and 1988. His poetry thus seeks to give expression to "la complexité du sang, les mélanges de la race, les échanges de l'île et de la mer" "the complexity of blood, the mixings of race, the exchanges between island and sea" (Joubert 1993: 179). Marie-Thérèse Humbert, like Loys Masson, settled in France but returns to the island through her writing. Her first novel, *A l'autre*

bout de moi (1979) (The Other End of Myself), which received the *Elle* Prize, does not turn a blind eye to the construction of the Mauritian social imaginary in her representation of intercommunity relations. She has pursued her exploration of culture shock on the island of Mauritius with *La montagne des signaux* (1994) (The Mountain of Signals). J. M. G. Le Clézio has a slightly different status, since because of his Franco-Mauritian origins, he claims a double belonging and is nourished by the Mauritian imaginary in particular with *Le chercheur d'or* (1985) (*The Prospector*, 1993), *Voyage à Rodrigues* (1986) (Journey to Rodrigues), *Sirandanes* (1990), and *La quarantaine* (1995) (The Quarantine).

Réunion

Réunion became a possession of France in 1638, and in 1946 an Overseas Department. From its first permanent occupation in the seventeenth century, its population grew rapidly through the arrival of new colonists of European origin and through the displacement of slaves who were principally from Africa. The suppression of slavery in 1848 led to the appeal for the immigration of free workers, the hired laborers, the majority of whom came from India. As their work language, these laborers adopted Creole, which was already solidly established. Today's Réunion is therefore composed of a population of diverse origins, but in essence two languages are in use: Creole and French.

The island of Bourbon entered literature through travel accounts. Texts from the period 1611–1725, which have recently been reprinted, *Voyages anciens à l'île Bourbon* (Ancient Travels to the Island of Bourbon), had already created an island imaginary. The "Creole" poetic mode was launched at the end of the eighteenth century by Bertin and Parny (*Chansons madécasses*, 1787) (Madagascan Songs), both of whom were born on Bourbon, along with the help of André Chénier, who was part of their circle. The first literary work printed on the island was *Fables créoles* (1828) by Louis Héry, but we have to wait until the middle of the nineteenth century for a body of writing enabled by a return to the island of a group of young people who left to study in France: Auguste Lacaussade, Charles Leconte de Lisle, Léon Dierx. Lacaussade and Leconte de Lisle had both ardently militated before 1848 for the abolition of slavery, but they chose to make their careers in the literary world of Paris and thus cannot be entirely considered Réunionnais poets.

The passion for the "colonial novel" was launched with the work of Marius-Ary Leblond in 1909 with *En France* (Prix Goncourt), in which Paris is described through the eyes of a Réunionnais. Several texts were to continue in this vein, such as Marguerite-Hélène Mahé's *Sortilèges créoles, Eudora ou l'île enchantée*

(1955) (Creole Spells, Eudora or The Enchanted Island). The "Réunionnais novel" begins to assert itself starting in the 1970s – for example, *Les muselés* (1977) (The Muzzled Ones) by Anne Cheynet, *Quartier trois lettres* (1980) (Three-Letter District) by Axel Gauvin – with heroes who are often impoverished and disinherited. The characters of the most recent novels by Axel Gauvin, Jean-François Sam-Long, *La nuit cyclone* (1992) (Cyclone Night), or Jean Lods, *La morte saison* (1980) (Dead Season) are struggling with the difficulties of their identity. Axel Gauvin employs a writing that combines French and Creole in *Faims d'enfance* (1987) (Childhood Hungers), *L'aimé* (1990) (The Loved One), and *Cravate et fils* (1996) (Cravate and Sons) to explain sociocultural conflicts as well as tenderness and complicity.

For his part, Jean Albany, an exile, has since 1950 oriented Réunionnais poetry toward poetic modernity. He forged the word *créolie* that was to become an emblem for the young poets who gathered around the poet-bishop Gilbert Aubry who coined the word at City Hall in Saint-Denis with his *Hymne à la créolie* (Hymn to Creoleness) – "the prejudice of a Réunionnais culture that has been taken on and bestowed, wanting to reconcile creolity and francophony, Creolie, like Negritude, is, for all that, a word first and foremost, a sign of recognition and an exorcism" (translated; Joubert 1993: 245). Basically literary, the major representatives of Creolie are Gilbert Aubry, Jean-François Sam-Long, and Jean-Henri Azéma, who since going into exile in Argentina has joined this political Creolie (*Olographe*, 1988). Gilbert Aubry and Jean-François Sam-Long have published yearly anthologies under the title *Créolie*. Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimotou distinguishes the notion of "creolité" as defined by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant in *Eloge de la créolité* (1989) from that of "creolie." According to him, the former is applied more particularly to the situation of the French Antilles, whereas the latter more specifically suits the situation of Réunion (1991: 95).

Other poets who claim a more committed creoleness and a greater place for Creole have remained more or less on the sidelines of *créolie*: Alain Lorraine with his collection *Tienbo le rein* (1975); Boris Gamaleya (*Vali pour une reine morte*, 1973) (Vali for a Dead Queen), the son of a White Russian exile who has himself been published in exile in Europe; and Axel Gauvin, who through his essay *Du créole opprimé au créole libéré* (1977) (From Oppressed Creole to Liberated Creole) preaches a reasoned bilingualism. Nevertheless, the 1980s witness a decline in written work in Creole because of the difficulty of writing and being read in a language of orality.

Some of today's poetry in Réunion leans toward the expression of a double rootedness, as in the work of J.-C. Carpanin Marimotou with Indianity, or

Carmen Thue-Tune with *Poésie eurasienne* (1981). As Michel Beniamo emphasizes, this generation is linked together by not having known the hopes of the "model" of Africa's decolonization and by being children of departmentalization (1991: 111).

In conclusion, the literature of Réunion developed and diversified remarkably at the end of the 1980s with increased support from political institutions and the university, factors that favor the publication of texts that have in turn been written into educational programs.

The archipelago

The geographic situation of the four small islands in the middle of the Mozambique Channel that form the archipelago of the Comoros – Grande Comore, Anjouan, Mayotte, and Mohéli – has made it a place of encounter for Africa and the Arabo-Persian world as well as for influence from Madagascar and more remotely India, Indonesia, and Europe. Islam constitutes the primary link among the Comoros. The Comoran language, which is close to Swahili, is the mother tongue (with the exception of Mayotte, where a dialectal variety of Malagasy is spoken); Arabic is the language of religion, and French is the language of communication with the outside world. The Qur'anic school constituted, up until independence, the main form of the Comoran educational system. The delay in offering western education has had an impact on the cultural life and explains why a true, modern literature written in Comoran or in French has not yet really developed. The publication of the first novel written by a Comoran author, *La république des imberbes* (The Republic of the Beardless) by Mohamed Toihiri in 1985, followed by *Le kafir du Karthala* (1992) (The Pagan of Karthala), was significant because it marked the beginning of literary activity.

In the Seychelles, it was only in the eighteenth century that the archipelago was inhabited by colonists from Ile de France. Those colonists brought their languages, which are still used today: French and Creole. English was added in 1814 after the island passed into British control. The population is composed essentially of the descendants of African slaves who were saved from slave ships by the English Navy and brought to the archipelago. Since independence in 1976, a system of official trilingualism has been established, and the use of Creole, the mother tongue of the entire population, was promoted in rank to the language of instruction. The oldest attempt at literature written in Seychelles Creole is a translation of the fables of *La Fontaine* by Rodolphine Young (1860–1932?). A modern literature written in Creole asserted itself with

Contes et poèmes des Seychelles (1977) (Tales and Poems of the Seychelles) and *Montann en leokri* (1981) by Antoine Abel, and then *Fler Fletri* (1985) by Leu Mancienne, the first Seychelles novel, in a bilingual Creole and French version.

Despite great cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, a sense of Indian-Oceanness can be detected as emerging increasingly in the collective consciousness. Proof of this is provided by the numerous colloquia and meetings that have taken place in the region during the last few years. The recent creation of the Association Internationale d'Etudes Francophones et Comparées sur l'Océan Indien (International Association for Francophone and Comparative Studies on the Indian Ocean) has allowed the establishment of a forum for discussion as well as for meetings and publishing endeavors (including the latest collection on the Indian Ocean in francophone literatures). Further proof is in the stability and even, in the case of Mauritius, the ongoing development of a French-language literature. Reflecting the pressure of demographics, this literature is being written in large part by Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist writers, who come from either the Indian subcontinent or Asia. In this regard, the continuity of Ananda Devi's literary career, or even the emergence of new Indian voices in Mauritius with authors such as Barlen Pyamootoo, for example, are very encouraging signs for the future. The island of Mauritius is thus the only country in the world in which the French language is gaining over English, which nevertheless has the status of official language. That is one of the many paradoxes of this region of the world, which can only continue to affirm itself in diversity, if only for geopolitical reasons. Its privileged position at the crossroads of Africa, India, and Asia makes it a living laboratory for tomorrow's Humanity.

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30
African literature in Spanish

M'BARE N'GOM

African literature in Spanish is a cultural project that has received very little critical and theoretical attention, compared to francophone, anglophone, or lusophone African literature. Beyond certain limited circles in Madrid and Euskadi (Basque territory) in Spain, African literature in Spanish may be considered the most conspicuous absentee in the literary debate on Hispanic and/or African literatures. On that basis, Guinean poet Ciriaco Bokesa Napo observed:

> Pero lo Español, en tierras africanas y de plumas estrictamente africanas, queda en la memoria de una cita apenas esbozada.
>
> But the Spanish language in African lands, issuing from strictly African pens, lives on only as a trace. (1989: 11)

This chapter proposes to explore the circumstances of the gestation, birth, and development of African literature written in Spanish between 1947 and the 1990s. It will examine the sociohistorical trajectory and the diverse forms of literary expression specifically in the cultural project of Equatorial Guinea. The former "Spanish Territories of the Gulf of Guinea," which subsequently became "Spanish Guinea," were a Spanish possession for almost two centuries. The sole Spanish colony in sub-Saharan Africa,[1] Equatorial Guinea is thus the only African country south of the Sahara whose official language is Spanish and therefore producing a literature written in the language of Cervantes. As a production at the junction of two different literary experiences – the first, Bantu and black African, marked by the stamp of orality with its pragmatic and supple rules, and the other, European, characterized by the more rigid rules of writing – the writing of Equatorial Guinea, like most texts of African literature written in foreign, European tongues, inherited this double cultural tradition that endows it with a very specific character.[2] This cultural experience can therefore be situated within the framework of what

can be called Hispano-Black African literature. Journalist and writer Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo for his part, preferred the term Hispano-African, for, as he observed:

> Guinea es un país a la vez hispánico y africano, y en esa identidad simbiótica radica su originalidad, su esencia y la garantía de su autonomía. Al fundirse los valores de la cultura adquirida, los hispánicos, con los valores de la cultura heredada, los bantúes – pues todos los pueblos que componen nuestro Estado pertenecen a la cultura bantú, lo cual no conviene que se olvide–, se operó en el espíritu del guideano una transformacíon importante, y a nuestro juicio (pues son esas, y no otras), nuestras señas de identidad, que se ha ido estructurando en una nueva cosmogonía (. . .). . . . Hay guineanos que escriben, que pintan, que esculpen; que trabajan, en definitive, desde su perspectiva hispanoafricana, para dotar a su país de ese dinamismo sin el cual el progreso sería imposible. (1985: 23)

> Guinea is a country that is both Hispanic and African, and it is in this symbiotic identity that can be found its originality, its essence, and the guarantee of its autonomy. In uniting the values of its acquired, Hispanic, culture, with those of its inherited, Bantu, culture – it must be remembered that all the peoples who make up our State belong to the Bantu culture – it has brought about an important transformation in the mind of the Guinean, and in our opinion, it is precisely these signs of our identity, and not any others, that have been shaped into a new cosmogony. There are Guineans who write, who paint, sculpt, who work, when all is said and done, from an Hispano-African perspective to endow their country with this dynamism without which progress would not be possible.

The first texts of Guinean literature written in Spanish began to appear after the Second World War, around 1947, following the example of francophone or anglophone African literature, whose first literary manifestations in European languages date to an earlier period.

Guinean literature written in Spanish is the work of individuals whose intellectual development is strongly linked to the educational initiative and evangelization of the Catholic missions. The arrival of the missionaries of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Santa Isabel on the island of Fernando Po in November 1883, followed in 1885 by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, marks the beginning of what Swiss historian Max Liniger-Goumaz (1988) calls the "Hispanization" of the territory. The mission of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, also known as the Claretian Brothers, was to "ganar para Jesucristo las almas de aquellos indígenas, haciéndolos Buenos católicos y a la par Buenos españles útiles a la Madre Patria" "win for Jesus

Christ the souls of these indigenes by converting them into good Catholics and into good Spaniards who would be useful to the Mother country" (*El Misionero* 1929).

It was only in 1904 that the Spanish colonial administration instituted a system of education that was public and secular. Yet far from being an alternative to the education offered through the Catholic missions, the colonial public school was instead a complement to the former. The Catholic missions thus played a primary role in the development of the first Equatorial Guinean intellectuals, for up until the twentieth century, the entire educational system in the "Spanish Territories of the Gulf of Guinea" was under the direction of the Catholic missions.

During the colonial period, intellectual life was centered on the island of Fernando Po, and revolved around the missionary publication *La Guinea Española* (Spanish Guinea), published by the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the printing house of the seminary in Banapá.[3] The first issue of the publication appeared on 1 April 1903. A bi-monthly publication, *La Guinea Española* became one of the most important platforms and most active avenues for Spanish colonial discourse in sub-Saharan Africa. The legend appearing under the title on the first inside page indicated "Defender and Promoter of the interests of the colony." Nevertheless, it was also, perhaps unwittingly, the cradle of Guinean literature written in the Spanish language. During this initial period, *La Guinea Española* published a wide variety of texts reflecting on the diverse aspects of the colonizing enterprise. Beyond articles on the progress and "success" of the "evangelization" efforts, there are, side-by-side, articles on anthropology, the history of Spain, African linguistics, and the colony's natural resources, as well as other texts of a utilitarian bent dealing with agriculture and methods for improving agricultural production. Despite the two columns on culture – "Literary Page" and "About Our Africanist Library" – the rare literary contributions were primarily poems with a religious or patriotic content dedicated to the mother country. Their authors were almost all members of the religious orders. From time to time there also appeared traditional stories, especially those of the Bubi, collected, transcribed, and translated by the missionaries as they made their rounds of evangelizing.

Number 1165 of *La Guinea Española*, dated 10 January 1944, announced the organization of a literary contest open to those identified as "*plumas coloniales*" – colonial pens. As might be expected, no Guinean figured among these "pens," for all the writings submitted to the contest were the work of Spanish colonists, whether government workers, plantation directors, or teachers. Several years

later, however, in number 1236, dated 10 January 1947, *La Guinea Española* inaugurated a new section entitled "Stories and Tales" that was open to "natives":

> Esta nueva seccíon que hoy comenzamos, un exponente del pensamiento de nuestros indígenas recogido tradicionalmente en cuentos, historias, narraciones, refranes y cantos, contribuyendo de esta suerte a perpetuarlos y a divulgarlos. Además de nuestra labor personal y la colaboración de ls misioneros, confiamos en los alumnos del Seminario, maestros, colegiales de la misión, de la Escuela Superior Indígena y catequistas de nuestras reducciones que nos enviarán el mayor número posible de "historias" sobre cualquier tema. (p. 13)

> This section that we are inaugurating today, the expression of the thoughts of our indigenes traditionally collected in tales, stories, narratives, proverbs, and songs, will contribute to their perpetuation and diffusion. Beyond our personal work and the collaboration of missionaries, we have the hope that the seminarists, teachers, and students of the missions, of the High School for Natives, and the catechetists on our staff, will send us the greatest possible number of "stories" on any topic.

The response was overwhelming and, as might be expected, participation was limited to the pupils at the Catholic missions, seminary students, and indigenous teachers. On the other hand, all the texts that were published were catalogued according to the ethnic origin of the "author." Thus, the titles of the tales were always followed by the mention "historieta pamue" (Bantu story), "leyenda bubi" (Bubi legend), or "cuento ndowe" (Ndowe tale), to cite just a few examples. In fact, it was a matter, purely and simply, at least during this initial phase, of a process of collecting, transcribing, and translating into Spanish the traditional literary production of the peoples inhabiting this Spanish colony – so much so that in this context one could affirm that these occasional "authors" were but simple devices of transmission, intermediaries between the traditional literature and the European reader in the colony or the metropole.

In time, this process of committing to writing the texts of traditional literature experienced a change in character. In effect, exercising the privilege of inspiration and creative freedom enjoyed by writers in general, these "authors" of those first days began to manipulate the texts they drew from the rich corpus of traditional literature. Still, it must be acknowledged that translation as an act of linguistic, semantic, esthetic, and cultural transfer from one language to another is in itself an act of manipulation. Also, the dialogue employed

by these authors of two different cultural and literary traditions provoked what Fernando Lambert (1988) has described as a "phenomenon of friction between texts," according to which the African texts end up "devouring" the European text, in this case Spanish. The authors henceforth began to place a more personal mark upon their texts by introducing certain narrative and stylistic elements that are proper to the European text.

That process culminated in an autonomous text which, even though it was enriched by certain structural norms of the European tale, nevertheless continued to employ a narrative technique that was proper to the oral text, all the while drawing upon certain themes and characters from the rich Bantu cultural tradition. Most of the Guinean authors of the colonial period, as well as certain writers from the first days of post-independence, were to follow the paths laid out by these pioneers. Thus, the texts of Constantino Ocháa Nve, Rafael María Nzé, Francisco Obiang, José Esono, and Andrés Ikuga Ebombebombe, to mention just a few, can be situated in this context. And closer to our time, we can cite the late Antimo Esono Ndongo. It must be emphasized, nevertheless, that, without losing sight of the ethnic and cultural realities particular to each region of sub-Saharan Africa, we find in Spanish-language Guinean writing certain thematic and structural constants that characterized the birth of francophone literature south of the Sahara.

The year 1953 saw the appearance of the first novel in the Spanish language written by an Equatorial Guinean, *Cuando los combes luchaban. Novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española* (When the Ndowe Used to Fight. Novel of Customs from Spanish Guinea) by Leoncio Evita Enoy. As the author acknowledges, it is "una novella etnológica de las costumbres de la tribu combe en cuyo medio se desarrolla la acción novelesca en el país del Muní de una época pre-colonial" "an ethnological novel on the customs of the Ndowe people among whom the novel's action takes place in the country of the Muní in a precolonial era" (cited in N'gom 1996a: 33). Evita Enoy's novel was published in Madrid "bajo los auspicios del Instituto de Estudios Africanos" "under the auspices of the Institute of African Studies," one of the divisions under the Ministry of the Colonies and Morocco. The text was used, it might be mentioned, as a powerful instrument of propaganda by the government of General Francisco Franco to justify Spain's colonizing activity and the "civilizing" effort in Africa. The novel's topic, the abduction of Vilangua, the son of the village chief of Ndyebengo, by a secret society, is but a pretext for the narrator to present a highly detailed explanation and descriptive look at Ndowe customs and rites. Furthermore, the novel's main hero is a white American Protestant missionary.

Then, the ambiguous narrative perspective utilized by the author, that is, one based on the binary structure of white-civilized European colonial discourse and black-savage, gives the impression that, wittingly or not, he rejects his ethnic identity.

Nevertheless, several years later, in 1996, Leoncio Evita Enoy was to explain his earlier attitude by declaring that "sentí gran satisfacción por abrir aquella pequeña brecha en el <dique> del monopolio de la discriminación" intellectual" "I feel a great sense of satisfaction in having poked a hole in the dike of the monopoly of intellectual discrimination" (quoted in N'gom 1996a: 32). In the final analysis, it should be emphasized that *Cuando los combes luchaban* represents an indisputable milestone in the history of Guinean literature written in Spanish.

It would be nearly another ten years before the second novel written by a Guinean saw the light of day. In 1962, Daniel Jones Mathama published *Una lanza por el boabí* (A Spear for the Boabí) in Barcelona. Very little is known about the life of the author, except that he was the nephew of Maximiliano C. Jones, the owner of several plantations and a member of the local black aristocracy, as well as a collaborator with Spanish authorities. An autobiographical novel, *Una lanza por el boabí* offers the author's praise-filled vision of the colonial situation, whose benefits he describes in Spanish Guinea. Nor does he miss any opportunity to cast a critical eye upon the indigenous populations and to denounce them as "savages." Jones Mathama's text is inscribed in what some have called the "literature of consent."

Between 1962 and the country's independence in 1968, cultural production slowed considerably. During this period of great and feverish nationalist activity for the territory's independence, mouthpieces of the press such as *La Guinea Española, Poto-Poto,* and *Bantu* continued to publish contributions by Guinean authors. Quite varied, these texts covered diverse intellectual interests ranging from ethnography to African linguistics, as well as literature and other topics. Constantino Ocháa's "Las aventuras de Biom" (1962) (Biom's Adventures), Eloy Eló's "La legenda del arco iris" (1962) (The Legend of the Rainbow), Esteban Bualo Bokamba's "Mosodue, el solitario" (1965) (Mosodue, the Lonely Man), and Benigno Boricó's "Los tres niños desobedientes" (1968) (The Three Ill-Bred Children), to cite only a few, can be placed within this context. It was also during this period that new names made their appearance in the area of cultural creation. These authors, new and unknown for the most part, introduced a genre that had until then been absent from Guinean literature: poetry. Africa and Guinea are the main themes of these poets, as seen in the titles "El león de Africa" (1964) (The Lion of Africa) by Juan Chema Mijero,

"Isla Verda" (1968) (Green Island) by Ciriaco Bokesa Napo, "Brindis final para siempre" (1968) (Last Cheers and Farewell) by Marcelo Ensema, and "Lamento sobre Annobón, belleza y soledad" (1967) (Lament for Annobon, Beauty and Solitude) by Francisco Zamora.

On 12 October 1968, the former Spanish Guinea attained sovereignty as the Republic of Equatorial Guinea under the presidency of Francisco Macías Nguéma. A few months after his election as Head of State, President Francisco Macías, alleging an attempted *coup d'état*, suspended constitutional rights, assumed control of the armed forces, instituted the single party, and established one of the bloodiest dictatorships that the African continent has known. He instituted what Max Liniger-Goumaz denounced as "Afrofascism" and, in its Guinean variant, "Nguémism," because of its strong ethnic orientation. The backbone of Francisco Macías's regime was the Fang ethnic group, and more specifically the Fang-Esangui in the region of Mongomo, his natal village; an ethnico-paramilitary militia better known under the name of "Youth on the Move with Macías"; and the National Guard, whose members were primarily Fang. Nguémism worked to stifle and repress by violent means any rebellious impulses, and engaged in a systematic strategy of persecution, marginalization, and exclusion of any members of society who were not Fang-Esangui. Nepotism, a controlled press, political assassinations disguised as accidents, tribalism, and encouragement to inform all became a form of government. Nguémism thus established a cult of personality that was wildly and skillfully orchestrated by Francisco Macías himself.

In this context, those working on the cultural scene were in most cases mercilessly persecuted and eliminated, and the word "intellectual" was banished from public discourse. Thus, beginning in 1969, a cloak of silence fell over Equatorial Guinea. And during a period of ten years, 1969–79, no text came off the Guinean presses, except, of course, pamphlets in praise and favor of the regime. Those were "los años del silencio" "the years of silence," as Ndongo-Bidyogo calls this period during which

> no hubo ninguna manifestación literaria dentro de Guinea Ecuatorial, por la sencilla razón de que se perseguía a todo el mundo, fundamentalmente a aquellos que pudiármos llamar intelectuales, y el simple hecho de hablar español era castigado con la cárcel. No digamos escribir: muchos guineanos murieron porque en cualquier registro domiciliario se les encontró apuntes en español. De modo que las únicas manifestaciónes litearias de Guinea Ecuatorial durante aquel período se produjeron en el exilio.
>
> (Personal communication, 22 October 1990)

> There was no literary expression in Equatorial Guinea for the simple reason that everyone was persecuted, and most particularly those who might be called intellectuals; the simple fact of speaking Spanish was punishable by imprisonment. Not to mention the act of writing: many Guineans died because notes written in Spanish had been found among their belongings during searches of their homes. Thus, the only literary manifestations in Equatorial Guinea during this period took place in exile.

By 1970, one-third of the population had fled the country. The Nguémist regime institutionalized repression by establishing what Ngugi wa Thiong'o called "The Culture of Silence and Fear." Despite the cultural aridity that was rampant in Equatorial Guinea during that period, the discourse of political and cultural resistance to Nguémism began to take shape thousands of miles from the nation's territory. Thus, it was a transnational discourse, because its field of genesis and activity was Spain, where a large community of Guinean refugees had become established. Nevertheless, that discourse was born marginal and marginalized, for in 1971, a Spanish presidential decree declared "material reservada" "restricted information" anything related to Equatorial Guinea. Authorities in Madrid set up a system of censure for any type of information touching upon Spain's former colony, and thereby restrained any opposition movement organized against the regime of Francisco Macías. Henceforth, marginality was transformed into a platform of resistance, giving birth to a subculture operating from a space marked by constraint and precariousness. Thus, the counterdiscourse of the Guinean diaspora felt obliged to use a circuit of distribution and dissemination that was peripheral and clandestine. Produced under these conditions, the discourse of resistance to Nguémism reached neither the great mass of the diaspora, Spanish public opinion, nor, especially, Guineans of the interior.

Poetry was the first choice for a means of expression in the cultural practice of the Guinean diaspora for speaking of the national reality that had been sequestered, confiscated, and fragmented. Thus, lyrical discourse was in this particular case a way to express with intensity and through associations an entire range of sentiments, emotion, and personal and collective experiences. It was in fact the expression of a double memory: individual, on the one hand, that of individual Guinean cultural creators separated from their land against their will; and collective, on the other hand, that of a society (oppressed) from which these individuals came and to which they were united through commitment. The anonymous poem "El cinco de marzo" (The Fifth of March), published in the section "Recuerdo y Poesía" (Memory and Poetry) of the review *El*

Molifuge Informa (Molifuge Informs) on 7 September 1977,[4] commemorates the appropriation of Guinean reality by Nguémism:

Cual primer llanto al nacer
las primeras lágrimas por mi tierra
EL CINCO DE MARZO

Las primeras muertes injustas,
el aborto de mia alegría,
EL CINCO DE MARZO

El desprecio por mi pueblo
y un dictador sanguinario
los crímenes y horrores,
EL CINCO DE MARZO

Los huérfamps de ima [atroa
murió la ley y la justicia
el hombre perdió valor,
EL CINCO DE MARZO.

Like the first cries at birth
The first tears shed for my land
The fifth of March

The first unjust deaths
The destruction of my joy
The fifth of March

The contempt for my people
And a bloodthirsty dictator
Crimes and horrors
The fifth of March

The orphans of a country
Law and justice are dead
Mankind has lost its worth
The fifth of March

The counterdiscourse of the Equatorial Guinean diaspora is articulated around two great thematic axes. The first, marked by nostalgia and what the poet Juan Balboa Boneke characterizes as "orfandad de tierra" "missing the homeland," is characterized by lyrical evocations of Equatorial Guinea, its geography, its countrysides, and its people. The texts that form this corpus express melancholy and the sorrowful separation from a land that now exists only in memory. The poems of Juan Balboa Boneke in the collection

O'Boriba (*El exiliado*) (O'Boriba, the Exiled) reflect and express this sentiment of separation, as can be seen in "Nostalgia (Playa de Boloko)" (Nostalgia [Boloko Beach]):

> Playa de Boloko,
> coquetona y africana,
> playa de arena negra,
> bastion de Lubba,
> de Ria-abba y Rilaja;
> en tu regazo rinden riaje
> las blancas espumas
> de tus olas en fragor (19)

> Boloko Beach
> African and flirtatious
> Shore of black sand
> Bastion of Lubba,
> Ria-abba, and Rilaja
> Within your embrace comes to die
> The white foam
> Of your roaring waves

The same evocations are found in "Nostalgia de mi tierra" (Nostalgia for my Homeland) by Pedro Cristino Bueriberi Bokesa, in "Quiero vivir" (I Want to Live) by Juan Balboa Boneke, and "La tierra mía" (My Homeland) by Raquel Ilonbé, the sole woman writer of this period.

The discourse of cultural resistance also approaches exile as an experience of dislocation and traumatic uprooting – an experience marked by the anguish of deterritorialization for the individual, and by the absence of interpersonal communication. In *¿Dónde estás Guinea?* (Where Are You, Guinea?), Juan Balboa Boneke writes:

> ¿Quién soy yo? Se me ha arrancado de lo que era mi realidad, mi existencia, mi cultura . . . Ni soy de aquí, ni soy de allá. Y cuando me descubro a mí mismo resulta que para mis hermanos (mi pueblo), soy un extraño. Sigo sintiéndome extraño en esta sociedad porque no acabo de sentirme comprendido, porque no acabo de comprender. (1978: 11)

> Who am I? I have been uprooted from what was my reality, my existence, my culture . . . I am neither from here nor there. And when I reveal myself, for my brothers (my people), I am a stranger. I feel strange in this society because I do not succeed in making myself understood and because I do not succeed in understanding, either.

That sentiment is repeated by Francisco Zamora in "El prisionero de la Gran Via" (1984) (The Prisoner of La Gran Via).

The second facet of the project of cultural resistance is articulated around exile as a space of tension and solitary, sorrowful, and tragic experiences. Aggression against the Guinean body, its mutilation and destruction are a constant in this discourse: "Epitafio" (Epitaph) by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo:

> Un tiro certero . . .
> Ya nada,
> Nada más
> Que un cadáver
> Muerto. Tierra
> Fue un hombre
> (1984: 92)

> A shot that hits its mark
> Nothing other
> Than a cadaver,
> Dead. Earth
> It was a man.

"A un joven fusilado en Santa Isabel" (1984) (To a Young Man Executed in Santa Isabel) by Anacleto Oló Mibuy:

> Voy con esta luz de rimas
> dejando flores estériles
> en las burbujas de sangre,
> y poniendo, piadoso
> en cada carne de tu cuerpo destrozado
> las letras muertas de tu libertad.

> With this light of rhymes
> I will leaves sterile flowers
> In bubbles of blood
> And I will place, piously,
> On each part of your destroyed body
> The dead letters of your freedom.

Thus, "Vencedores y vencidos" (1982) (Victors and Vanquished) by Juan Balboa Boneke and "Libertas" (1984) (Freedom) by Constantino Ocháa Nve, to cite but two examples, are inscribed in this scriptural process.

Anti-Nguémist discourse also utilized prose in its crusade against the dictatorship of Francisco Macías. But with the exception of *Nueva narrativa guineana* (New Guinean Narrative) – the sole work of fiction from this period – all other

publications were essays. *Nueva narrativa guineana*, published by the Union Revolucionaria de Guinea Ecuatorial is a collection of four short tales, "El sueño" (The Dream) by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo; "La travesía" (The Crossing) by Francisco Abeso; "La última carta del Padre Fulgencio Abad, CMF" (Father Fulgencio Abad's Last Letter) by Mapal Loboch; and "Bea" by Francisco Zamora. The dominant themes are physical and cultural exile and traumatic separation from one's land of birth.

In 1977, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published a book with the quite explicit title *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (History and Tragedy of Equatorial Guinea), in which he proceeds to a profound analysis of the history of Equatorial Guinea from the arrival of the Europeans in the fifteenth century up to the period of the "first independence," to use the expression of French journalist Gilbert Wasserman. The half of the work entitled "los años de silencio" (silent years) is devoted to the immediate political and historical context, namely, Guinea under the Nguémist dictatorship.

A year later, in 1978, Juan Balboa Boneke published *¿Dónde estás Guinea?* at Palma de Mallorca where he was living in exile. On the heels of Donato Ndongo's book, Balboa undertook a sociopolitical and economic analysis of Equatorial Guinea from the colonial period to the advent of Nguémism and its disastrous consequences. The texts by Donato Ndongo and Juan Balboa are part of the attempt at recuperation of the Equatorial Guinean reality that had been confiscated and fragmented. Their efforts aspire to national reconciliation as the first step toward the articulation of a common and plural national project.[5]

In this sense, it can be said that, unlike Nguémism, the discourse of cultural resistance was a practice of inclusion and of mobilization aimed ultimately at the recuperation of the Guinean totality as a multiethnic and therefore multinational entity. Thus, Anacleto Oló Mibuy's verses tragically express this thought in "Morir en el exilio" (Death in Exile):

Padre:

Ha muerto un guineano más
No importa sexo, tribu,
Circunstancias, lugar.
Ha muerto. Guineano,
hermano, paisano

Father:

Another Guinean has died
It matters little, the gender, the clan,
The circumstances, the place.

He has died, a Guinean,
Brother, compatriot.

and by Juan Balboa Boneke, in "Cazador ecuatoguineano" (1987) (Hunter of Equatorial Guinea):

Cazador ecuatorguineano
cazador bubi, fang, annobonés, ndowé, bishió . . .
Habéis de saber
que aguardo con ansiedad
que vosotros, mis hermanos,
leáis mis poemas
y los viváis
y, gozosos en ellos
entre todos busquemos nuevos senderos
y nuevas formas.

Hunter of Equatorial Guinea
Bubi, Fang, Annobonais, Ndowé, Bishio hunter . . .
You must know
That I am anxiously expecting
That you, my brothers,
Read my poems
And live them,
And while enjoying them
That all of us seek new paths
and new forms.

On 3 August 1979, the regime of Francisco Macías Nguéma was overthrown in a military *coup d'état* by his nephew, Captain Teodoro Obiang Nguéma. The change in regime was hailed with enthusiasm and optimism by the poet Juan Balboa Boneke in his poem "Tres de agosto 1979" (3 August 1979):

Y florecieron las sonrisas
y la brisa de esperanza
que refrescó los hogares
camino de un futuro
aun por imaginar.
(1987: 49)

And smile flower
And the breeze of hope
That refreshes dwellings
The road to a future
That can be imagined.

Preaching national reconciliation, the new regime called upon the exiles to participate in the effort of national reconstruction. In the same manner as this sociopolitical process, Equatorial Guinea experienced a period of cultural renaissance thanks to the foundation in 1982 of the Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano of Malabo, the capital. This center was charged, among other things, with reactivating cultural life, promoting African and Hispanic culture in general and Guinean culture in particular. The Cultural Center established the "Ediciones del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano," and circulated two voices of the press: *Africa 2000*, a quarterly review, and the monthly *El Patio*.

Nevertheless, it bears repeating that the Guinean authors who had sought refuge in Spain can be considered to have spearheaded the cultural renewal. Profiting from the arrival of democracy in the peninsula and from the lifting of restrictions that had been imposed by the Spanish government of General Francisco Franco, they began to publish diverse works from the 1980s onward.

This process began with *Leyendas guineanas* (1981) (Guinean Legends), by Raquel Ilonbé, a collection of traditional stories for children, followed by *O' Boriba (El exiliado)* (1982) and *Susurros y pensamientos comemtados: Desde mi vidriera* (1983) (Commented Whispers and Thoughts from My Window) by Juan Balboa Boneke, two collections of poems in which the author explores the hard and bitter experience of exile in Spain. In 1984, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published *Antología de la literature guineana* (Anthology of Guinean Literature), a book that brings together all the texts of Guinean authors that have been published since the birth of Equatorial Guinean literature in the Spanish language during the colonial period, up to 1984. It is a compulsory work for those devoted to the study of Spanish-language Guinean literature.

In 1985, two novels appeared: *El reencuentro. El retorno del exiliado* (Meeting Again: The Return of the Exiled) by Juan Balboa Boneke, and *Ekomo* by María Nsue Angüe. *El reencuentro* is the story of a Guinean who returns to his country after a long exile. The novel is a profound reflection upon the process of reconstruction of national culture in Equatorial Guinea, which, according to the narrator, must first experience reconciliation and democratization of the country. *Ekomo* is the first novel of Hispano-African literature written by a woman, and also the first novel of post-independence Equatorial Guinea. María Nsue Angüe's novel broaches a topic that is absent from all previous literature: the plight of the woman in a Guinean society in the midst of change.

In 1987, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (The Darkness of Your Black Memory), the first part of a trilogy whose second volume, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (The Power of the Storm), was published in Madrid in 1997. *Las tinieblas . . .* is an incursion into the colonial past of

Equatorial Guinea in order to understand present-day Guinea. As for *Los poderes de la tempestad*, it explores the horror of Nguémist dictatorship and its aftermath. Ndongo-Bidyogo's two novels are part of the process that the author calls "búsqueda de las señas de identidad del guineano" "search for identity" (quoted in Castillo 1997: 41).

Toward the end of the 1980s, the Cultural Center became an important forum for cultural activities and a platform that favored the growth of an entire generation of authors. Some, who had already established a reputation outside the national territory, had the opportunity to present their works to the Guinean public thanks to the regular publication of extracts of their texts and readings of their works in *Africa 2000* and *El Patio*. On the other hand, another group, who were younger and for the most part unknown, we dare say, fervently welcomed the opportunity offered to them by the Hispano-Guinean Cultural Center. Stories by authors such as Antimo Esono, with "Afén, la cabrita reina" (Afen, the Queen Goat) and "La última lección del venerable Emaga Ela" (The Last Lesson of Venerable Emaga Ela); Cristino Bueriberi, with "Boote-Chiba"; Desiderio Mbomio Nchama, with "Kidumu, el aventurero" (Kidumu, the Adventurer) appeared for the first time in the pages of *Africa 2000* and *El Patio*. The poems of Anacleto Oló Mibuy – "Gritos de libertad y esperanza I & II" (Shouts of Liberty and Hope), of Carlos Nsue Otong – "Salud" (Health), of Jerónimo Rope Bomabá – "Al maestro Bokesa" (To Bokesa, the Master), of Apollonio Buele Bisele – "La conquista premature" (Premature Conquest), of Gerardo Behori Sipi – "Devastación" (Devastation), "Corazón acribillado" (Riddled Heart), "Ansias de paz y sosiego" (Anxiety for Peace and Tranquility), and of María Nsue Angüe – "Delirios" (Delirium), to cite just a few names, are also within this framework.

At the beginning of the 1990s, a new generation of Guinean writers made its appearance on the cultural scene in Equatorial Guinea thanks to fortuitous initiatives taken by the Cultural Center. These new authors belong for the most part to what some have called the "new Guinean literature." Their writings lean toward an immediate and transnational topic, namely, the African reality of the 90s, marked by economic and social crisis, endemic unemployment, the foundering of many levels of the population in poverty, corruption, and identity crisis. Texts such as *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* (1994) (Adjá-Adjá and Other Stories) by Maximiliano Ncogo, *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) (The Priest of Niefang) by Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, the short tales "Exilio" (1997) (Exile), "Gusano" (1997) (Worm) by María Caridad Riloha, and *Rusia se va a Asamse* (1998) (Rusia Goes to Asamse)[6] by Juan-Tomás Avila Laurel scrutinize a post-independence that has failed to meet the aspirations of its Guinean citizens.

Although Guinea and Africa continue to inspire writers, through poetry these writers are beginning to explore new lyrical paths while distancing themselves from the traditional norms that have heretofore guided them. *Poemas* (1994) (Poems) by Juan-Tomás Avila Laurel, *Album Poético* (1995) (Poetic Album) by Jerónima Rope Bomabá, "Caza de brujos" (1993) (Witch Hunt) by María Caridad Riloha, as well as "Homenaje a Guinea" (Tribute to Guinea), "Annobón," and "Autorretrato" (Self-Portrait) (1990), "Mi tierra inocente" (1990) (My Innocent Homeland) by Carlos Nsue Otong reflect this tendency.

Finally, it is important to point out the appearance of a genre that had been absent until recently: theater. While it is the rare author who has ventured into dramaturgy, "El hombre y las costumbres" (Man and Customs) by Pancracio Etogo Mitogo, "Los hombres domésticos" (Domestic Men) by Juan-Tomás Avila Laurel, and "Antigone" by Trinidad Morgades Besari can all be mentioned.

In Equatorial Guinea, the nature of post-independence is always characterized by tension at different levels. Yet, despite all these adversities and the precariousness of the Equatorial Guinean writer's working conditions, it can be said, as Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo has affirmed, that "la literature guineana puede codearse sin complejos con el resto de las literaturas de nuestro entorno geográfico y empieza a ser apreciada en nuestro ambit lingüistico" "Guinean literature can rub shoulders without any kind of complex with the rest of literatures produced in our geographic region; furthermore, it is beginning to be read and appreciated in our linguistic area" (1998: 31).

Notes

1. I emphasize this sub-Saharan character because Spain had other colonies in North Africa. In addition to the protectorate of Ifni in Morocco, Le Saguiet el Manra and Rio de Oro, better known under the name of Western Sahara, was also a Spanish colony.
2. In this work the adjectives "Guineo-Equatorian" and "Guinean" are used without discrimination to describe anything related to Equatorial Guinea.
3. Even though in 1889 there was already a printing press in Fernando Po, the property of Governor General Don José Rodríguez Varela, who had it sent from the Peninsula, it was only used for administrative purposes. In 1900, Governor General Don José de Ibarra y Autran used this machine to print and publish the journal, *El Eco de Fernando Po* (The Echo of Fernando Po), which had an ephemeral existence, for only seven numbers saw the light of day.
4. *MOLIFUGE* means Movement for Liberty and the Future of Equatorial Guinea. Its mouthpiece is the monthly *El Molifuge Informa*.

5. See also *El problema humano* (1985) (The Human Problem), by Eugenio Nkogo Ondó, a collection of twenty-three essays written between 1973 and 1977, when the author lived in exile in Madrid.
6. This story opens the new collection "Literatura popular" from Ediciones del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano.

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31

African literature in Portuguese

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Portuguese was the first European language to reach sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, by the middle of the fifteenth century many Africans spoke Portuguese-based pidgins and creoles. As a consequence of this early presence, African writing in Portuguese appeared before anything comparable in English, French, and other European languages.

Literary precursors in the colonial period

With a few exceptions, documented as far back as the nineteenth century, precursors of a representative lusophone African literature did not come into being until the 1930s and 1940s. Joaquim Dias Cordeiro da Matta (1857–94) perhaps stands as Angolan literature's most important nineteenth-century precursor. A native of Icolo-e-Bengo, Cordeiro da Matta was a poet, the author of an unpublished novel, and the organizer of a Kimbundu–Portuguese dictionary.

António de Assis Júnior (1887–1960), a later precursor, was an "assimilated" African, according to the colonial Indigenous Law enacted by the Portuguese New State in the early twentieth century. In spite of his official social status of *assimilado*, Assis Júnior was transcultural, and he paid tribute to his Kimbundu ethnic origins. Like his predecessor Cordeiro da Matta, he compiled a Kimbundu–Portuguese dictionary. He established himself as a direct precursor of modern Angolan literature with *O segredo da morta* (1934) (The Dead Woman's Secret), subtitled *Romance de costumes angolenses* (A Romance of Angolan Customs). Although written in the style of Victor Hugo, Assis Júnior's early romance is a forerunner of the ethnographic Angolan prose fiction of the 1950s and 1960s.

Fernando Castro Soromenho (1910–68) is a unique precursor of Angolan prose fiction. Born to Portuguese parents in Mozambique and raised in

Angola, Soromenho held an administrative position with the colonial diamond company. While living in eastern Angola, Soromenho launched his writing career in the tradition of colonial literature. After publishing two collections of short stores and two novels that depict Africans as uncivilized and exotic, Soromenho experienced a *prise de conscience*. Coupled with a growing benevolence toward Africans and their culture, Soromenho's social consciousness led him to write *Terra morta* (1949) (Dead Earth), *Viragem* (1957) (The Turning), and the posthumously published *A chaga* (1970) (The Plague). So palpable was the social protest in these novels that the colonial authorities banned them, and Soromenho eventually went into exile in France and Brazil. Some see Soromenho not as a precursor, but as the father of Angolan prose fiction.

With the publication of *Sonetos* (1943) (Sonnets), Rui de Noronha (1909–43), of African and East Indian parentage, became a precursor with respect to Mozambican poetry. And when João Dias's (1926–49) *Godido e outros contos* (1950) (Godido and Other Stories) was issued posthumously, Dias became the first black Mozambican writer of prose fiction.

Foremost among Guinea-Bissau's precursors is Fausto Duarte (1903–53), a Cape Verdean who lived many years in then Portuguese Guinea, the setting of his four novels. All of Duarte's novels, including *Auá, novela negra* (1934) (Aua, a Black Novella), his best-known work, constitute what is an essentially benevolent, less exotic mode of colonial writing.

Caetano da Costa Alegre (1864–90) is one of the earliest precursors of modern São Tomense literature. At the age of ten this black "native son," or *filho da terra*, was sent to Portugal, where he spent the rest of his life. *Versos* (1916) (Verses), Costa Alegre's collected poems, was published in Lisbon sixteen years after his death. A number of Costa Alegre's poems invoke the land of his birth; others constitute sardonic glosses of the experiences of an African living in Europe.

The earliest prose fiction of note to be produced by a native São Tomense is *O preto do Charlestone* (1930) (The Black Man from Charlestone), a novella by Mário Domingues (1899–1977). Domingues, who, like Costa Alegre, lived most of his life in Portugal, is best remembered for *O menino entre gigantes* (1960) (The Boy among Giants), a novel of manners about an African boy coming of age in Lisbon. A prolific São Tomense novelist is Sum Marky, the creole pen name of José Ferreira Marques (b. 1921). A resident of Lisbon since 1960, Marky has written eight novels, five of which depict life in São Tomé.

Representative works and the emergence of literary-cultural movements in colonial times

For a number of historical reasons Cape Verde's colonial society gave rise to lusophone Africa's first indigenous intelligentsia or creole elite. Thus, during the 1930s and 1940s, when most writers in the other Portuguese-African colonies can be considered precursors, their Cape-Verdean counterparts were consciously establishing an autochthonous literary-cultural movement. Throughout Cape Verde's colonial history, a kind of national homogeneity was being forged in a crucible of biological, linguistic, and cultural hybridity. By the time of independence this legacy had coalesced into a sense of socially unifying Cape Verdeanness.

Although Portuguese continues to be independent Cape Verde's official language, virtually all Cape Verdeans, whatever their social status, also speak creole. Baltasar Lopes (da Silva) (1907–89), one of the founders, in 1936, of *Claridade* (Clarity), a landmark cultural/literary journal, declared Cape-Verdean creole to be a dialect of Portuguese. Along with other intellectuals of his generation, Baltasar Lopes, who authored *O dialecto crioulo de Cabo Verde* (1957) (The Creole Dialect of Cape Verde), sought to erase creole's pidgin stigma and to validate it as a literary language. Most linguists, of course, define a creole as a pidgin with native speakers, and a dialect is defined as a regional or social variation of a given language.

A Lisbon-educated philologist and lawyer, Baltasar Lopes was also a pioneering fiction writer. Many consider his *Chiquinho* (1947) to be the first authentically Cape-Verdean novel. Moreover, using the pen name Osvaldo Alcântara, Lopes also wrote poetry in a Portuguese sprinkled with creole expressions.

Baltasar Lopes belongs to a trio of *Claridade* poets, the others being Jorge Barbosa (1902–71) and Manuel Lopes (b. 1907). Barbosa set a durable standard for Cape-Verdean poets of his generation and beyond. And Manuel Lopes, although an admired poet, is best known for his prose fiction, especially *Chuva braba* (1956) (Wild Rain), a classic novel about the drought-stricken islands.

In the city of Mindelo, during colonial times the center of Cape Verde's literary-cultural activity, several other fiction writers of the *Claridade* and later the *Certeza* (Certainty) groups emerged in the 1940s. Two highly regarded writers of that era are António Aurélio Gonçalves (1902–84) and Henrique Teixeira de Sousa (b. 1918).

Younger writers respected and even admired their *Claridade* and *Certeza* predecessors. But unlike their elders, these younger writers focused more

sharply on Cape Verde's endemic socioeconomic ills and they reclaimed what they saw as the islands' neglected African heritage. Chief among such writers are Ovídio Martins (b. 1928), Gabriel Mariano (b. 1928), Onésimo Silveira (b. 1935), and Kaoberdiano Dambara, pseudonym of Felisberto Vieira Lopes (b. 1937).

The advent of a literature of cultural revindication, social protest, and combativeness

In the 1950s and 1960s as the winds of change began to blow across Africa, socially conscious writers in the Portuguese colonies turned to modes of cultural expression that directly or indirectly challenged colonial rule. Growing anticolonialism led to liberation movements and, by the early 1960s, armed rebellion in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique. Writers from all five colonies increasingly produced works of cultural revindication, social protest, and combativeness. The colonial authorities reacted with censorship and repression. Dozens of militant writers went underground or into exile and not a few were arrested by the secret police. A number wrote clandestinely in their prison cells. Others succeeded in publishing their works abroad, including in Portugal, where, ironically, until the 1960s censorship was less strictly enforced than in the colonies.

By the early 1950s, Luanda had become the center of defiant cultural activity by the New Intellectuals of Angola. In 1951 this socially aware group launched *Mensagem* (Message), a literary journal, which the authorities banned within a year of its founding. Meanwhile, the House of Students from the Empire, a social and cultural association founded in Portugal in 1944, had published, between 1948 and 1964 (the year in which the authorities closed it down), a journal also called *Mensagem*. In October of 1952, numbers 2, 3, and 4 of the Luanda-based journal appeared in a combined and final issue. As did *Cultura* (Culture), another historic, short-lived Angolan journal, *Mensagem* brought together poems, short stories, and essays by aspiring writers, many of whom would become activists in the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), founded in Luanda in 1956.

Agostinho Neto (1922–80), Aires de Almeida Santos (1922–92), Alexandre Dáskalos (1924–61), António Jacinto (1924–91), Viriato da Cruz (1928–73), Mário Pinto de Andrade (1928–90), Alda Lara (1930–62), Ernesto Lara Filho (1932–75), António Cardoso (b. 1933), Mário António (1934–89), Manuel dos Santos Lima (b. 1935), Fernando Costa Andrade (b. 1936), Arnaldo Santos (b. 1936), and the brothers Henrique (b. 1937), and Mário Guerra (b. 1939) are some of the

principal writers among the multiracial New Intellectuals, who pledged to "Discover Angola."

As one of many examples of the interrelationship between cultural expression and political militancy, Agostinho Neto, who in 1975 would become Angola's first president, established himself in colonial times as a formidable poet. Neto, whose first arrest for political activism occurred in 1951, spent more than three years in Portuguese prisons. While interned in Lisbon's Caxias prison, Neto wrote the stirringly defiant "Havemos de voltar" ("We Must Return"), which after independence became an Angolan anthem of nationalist resolve. A selection of Neto's poems in English translation was published in a volume entitled *Sacred Hope* (1974).

José Luandino Vieira (b. 1935) also paid dearly for his political activism. Born José Mateus Vieira da Graça in rural Portugal, when he was two years old he accompanied his settler parents to Angola, to the city of Luanda. Luandino, the sobriquet by which he is best known, was imprisoned for eleven years because of his opposition to colonial rule. Nine of those years were spent in the infamous Tarrafal, a prison located on the Cape-Verde island of Santiago. *Luuanda* (1964) (*Luuanda: Short Stories of Angola*, 1980) was published in the Angolan capital while Luandino was serving the third year of his sentence. The collection's three tales established Luandino as a quintessential Angolan writer. Moreover, Luandino's unique literary style influenced a generation of Angolan writers who also sought to validate the language, social norms, and culture of the white central city's black shanty towns. Luandino contributed to raising the creolized black Portuguese of the city's *musseques* (shanty towns) to the level of a literary language. All of Luandino's works, most written while he was interned, have influence such significant Luanda-based story-tellers as Jofre Rocha (b. 1941), Jorge Macedo (b. 1941), Manuel Rui (b. 1941), and Boaventura Cardoso (b. 1944).

In Portugal's East African colony of Mozambique, the 1950s and 1960s also witnessed increased literary activity. José Craveirinha (b. 1922), born in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) to a Ronga mother and a Portuguese father, began his illustrious career as a poet in the 1950s. Craveirinha has the distinction of being the first African to receive, in 1991, the prestigious Camões prize, awarded annually since 1989, to a writer from one of the seven Portuguese-speaking countries.

A contemporary of Craveirinha is Noémia de Sousa (b.1927), whom Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier identify, in the 1968 edition of their *Modern Poetry from Africa*, as "The first African woman to achieve a genuine reputation as a modern poet" (p. 253). Sousa is certainly the first black or mixed-race Mozambican

woman to publish poems in Portuguese. Malangatana Ngwenya (b. 1936), although first and foremost a painter of international reputation, is probably the first Mozambican to have poems published in English translation. Two of Malangatana's poems appeared, in 1960, in the Nigerian journal *Black Orpheus*. Along with Craveirinha and Noémia de Sousa, Malangatana also has poems in the 1968 edition of *Modern Poetry from Africa*. The artist's first book, entitled *Malangatana: vinte e quatro poemas* (1996) (Malangatana: Twenty-Four Poems), appeared nearly twenty-one years after Mozambique's independence.

Among socially conscious poets of pre-independence Mozambique the best known are Marcelino dos Santos (b. 1929), Rui Nogar (1932–93), Armando Guebuza (b. 1935), Fernando Ganhão (b. 1937), Jorge Rebelo (b. 1940), and Sérgio Vieira (b. 1941). These engagé writers composed many of the poems in *Poesia de combatte* (1971) (Poetry of Combat), issued in Lusaka, Zambia by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO).

Orlando Mendes (1916–90) is a pioneering novelist of pre-independence Mozambique. Born to Portuguese parents in the northern city of Ilha de Moçambique, Mendes's *Portagem* (1965) (The Tollgate) is a novel in the tradition of South African Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). A literary revelation indeed was Luís Bernardo Honwana (b. 1942), whose *Nós matamos o cão tinhoso* (1964) (*We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Mozambique Stories*, 1969) is the first lusophone African book to appear in English translation in the prestigious Heinemann's African Writers Series.

The predominantly white Association of Native Sons of Mozambique, founded in 1935 by Portuguese intellectuals, most born in the colony, assumed, by the 1960s, a nativistic cultural posture and a reformist, if not overtly liberationist, political agenda. A founding member of the Association, Rui Knopfli (1933–97) is arguably the best poet writing from what some call a Luso-Mozambican perspective. During the early 1970s Knopfli helped revitalize Lourenço Marques's quiescent literary scene with his poetry and as the editor of *Caliban*, a provocative literary journal.

One of *Caliban*'s principal collaborators was António Quadros (1933–94), a Portuguese-born poet who lived in Mozambique between 1968 and the early 1980s. Using the *nom de guerre* Mutemati Bernabé João, Quadros made an aesthetico-ideological impact with the poems of *Eu, o povo* (1975) (I, The People), issued shortly after independence by Mozambique's newly installed revolutionary government.

Few plays were written and even fewer staged in any of the Portuguese colonies. The authorities aggressively banned theatrical performances that might convey seditious messages, to which even the illiterate might have access.

In late colonial Mozambique two exceptions were *Os noivos ou conferência dramática sobre o lobolo* (The Betrothed, or a Dramatic Lecture about the Bride Price) and *As trinta mulheres de Muzeleni* (The Thirty Wives of Muzeleni), by Lindo Nlhongo (1939–96). These plays, based on traditional African customs, apparently deemed to be harmless by the authorities, were allowed to be staged in Lourenço Marques in 1971 and 1974, respectively. (Neither play was published in its entirety until 1995.)

After Caetano da Costa Alegre's death in 1890, nearly fifty years would elapse before a comparable poet appeared. Francisco José Tenreiro (1921–63), the son of a Portuguese administrator and an African mother, like Costa Alegre, spent most of his short life in Portugal. In Lisbon he rose to unprecedented heights as a professor of geography and the first African to serve in the Portuguese National Assembly. He co-organized, with Mário Pinto de Andrade, the well-known Angolan poet, scholar, and militant, *Poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* (1953) (Black Poetry of Portuguese Expression), the first anthology of its kind. It should be noted parenthetically that Andrade lived in Paris from 1954 until 1959. During this self-imposed exile, the Angolan militant was private secretary to Alioune Diop, the Senegalese founder of the journal *Présence Africaine*, for which Andrade served as editor in chief. It was during his years in Paris, which Andrade called his "great intellectual adventure," that he came to know such Negritude writers as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor. It was in fact Senghor's anthology of francophone African poetry that served as a model for Andrade's and Tenreiro's historic collection of lusophone African poetry. As for Tenreiro, who maintained contact with his Angolan collaborator, the São Tomense's own poems, characterized by some as early examples of a lusophone Negritude, were brought together in a posthumously issued volume titled *Coração em Africa* (1965) (With My Heart in Africa).

After Tenreiro's death, Alda Espírito Santo (b. 1926), Maria Manuela Margarido (b. 1926), and Tomaz Medeiros (b. 1931) breathed new life into São Tomense literary expression. Like Costa Alegre and Tenreiro before them, this trio of poets lived and wrote in Portugal. All three were active in the clandestinely anticolonialist, Lisbon-based House of Students from the Empire, which anthologized selections of their verse in *Poetas de São Tomé e Príncipe* (1963) (Poets of São Tomé and Príncipe).

Literature after independence

Anticolonialist forms and contents set the stage for the first years of post-independence literature in lusophone Africa. As revolutionary fervor abated,

a body of less circumstantial literary expression began to appear in the former colonies.

From 1976 until 1985, Manuel Rui annually published a volume entitled *11 poemas em novembro* (11 Poems in November) to commemorate 11 November 1975, the date of Angolan independence. His patriotic poems notwithstanding, Rui has maintained that in order to be effective, a political poem first has to be good poetry. In the 1970s and beyond, among those poets who place as much emphasis on form as they do on content are Arlindo Barbeitos (b. 1941), Ruy Duarte de Carvalho (b. 1941), Jorge Macedo (b. 1941), and David Mestre (1948–97). Barbeitos's *Angola, Angolé, Angolema: Poemas* (1976) (Angola, Hail Angola, Angola the Word: Poems) was an especially significant esthetic breakthrough in post-independence cultural revindication.

In the late 1970s and beyond, younger writers with an eye to craft also produced intimist poetry. Especially notable among members of the Angolan Writers Union's Young Literary Brigade are poets João Luís Mendonça, João Mainoma, João Melo, and E. Bonavena, all born in 1955. Two other younger poets worthy of mention are Luís Kandjimbo (b. 1960), from the southern city of Benguela, and Lopito Feijóo K. (b. 1963). Post-independence Angola also gave rise to several talented female poets: Ana Paula Tavares (b. 1952), Maria Alexandre Dáskalos (b. 1957), and Ana de Santana (b. 1960). Each has at least one book of poetry to her credit.

Starting in the 1970s, Luandino published several works written in prison. He finished *João Vêncio: os seus amores* in 1968, but this engaging tale, written in the Kimbundu-influenced Portuguese of Luanda, did not appear in print until 1979 (an English translation, *The Loves of João Vêncio*, was published in 1991).

One of lusophone Africa's most prolific and celebrated writers is Artur Pestana dos Santos (b. 1941), the Angolan novelist, short-story writer, and dramatist better known as Pepetela. In 1973, as the guerrilla war raged in the Angolan bush, the MPLA issued several hundred mimeographed copies of Pepetela's *As aventuras de Ngunga* (1976) (*Ngunga's Adventures*). And *Mayombe*, Pepetela's first novel, is a gripping story about the war of Angolan liberation. Although completed in 1972, *Mayombe* was not published until 1980 (an English translation appeared in 1983).

By 2001 Pepetela had published ten novels, including *A geração da utopia* (1992) (The Generation from Utopia). Set in Portugal and Angola, the novel is a provocative account of black, white, and mixed-race Angolans who come of age during the period of political militancy and armed struggle. In 1997 Pepetela became the second lusophone African author to win the coveted Camões Prize. And with the publication of *Jaime Bunda, agente secreto* (2001) (Jaime

Bunda, Secret Agent), Pepetela became the first writer of lusophone Africa to author a mystery novel. Beginning with the main character's name this novel opens up an audacious area of social satire, with a humorous international twist, in postcolonial Angolan letters. Not only is Jaime Bunda, the Angolan secret agent's name, a parody of James Bond, in Portuguese *bunda*, a word of Kimbundu origin, means "buttocks," or, colloquially, "butt."

Manuel Rui is another prodigious, award-winning short-story writer and novelist. His *Sim camarada* (1977) (*Yes, Comrade!*, 1993) is a collection of stories, set in Luanda on the eve of and just after independence, stories that recreate the discourse and events surrounding Angola's transition from a colony to a nation. Rui's *Quem me dera ser onda* (1982) (Oh that I Were a Wave in the Ocean!), can be characterized as social satire, tinged with political parody, which was audacious for those times of implicit, if not official, socialist realism. The story, also set in Luanda just after independence, not only escaped censure by the Marxist–Leninist government, it was awarded the "Comrade President Agostinho Neto" prize for literature. Rui's most monumental work is the epic novel *Rioseco* (1997) (Dry Riverbed), which he followed the next year with a whimsical novella entitled *Da palma da mão: estórias infantis para adultos* (1998) (From the Palm of the Hand: Children's Stories for Adults).

Uanhenga Xitu, the Kimbundu name of Agostinho Mendes de Carvalho (b. 1924) is yet another Angolan militant to initiate his writing career while a political prisoner. Written in the Tarrafal prison, *Manana* (1974), Xitu's first novel, was published in Lisbon just after the coup that toppled Portugal's fascist regime. Xitu, who sprinkles his works with Kimbundu phrases and, as he puts it, "the Portuguese you don't learn in school," has written nine works of prose fiction, including *Os discursos do "Mestre" Tamoda* (1984) (*The World of "Mestre" Tamoda*, 1988) and *O ministro* (1990) (The Minister), a novel based in part on the author's own experiences as Angola's Minister of Health and ambassador to the former East Germany.

The 1980s and 1990s were especially fertile decades for Angolan prose fiction. Arnaldo Santos published his *A boneca de Quilengues* (1992) (Dolly from Quilengues) and *A casa velha das margens* (1999) (The Old House on the Margins), novels that enhance the author's reputation as an imaginative chronicler of Angola's lived history. And poet Ana Paula Tavares made her debut as a prose writer with the lyrical chronicles of her *O sangue da buganvília* (1998) (The Blood of the Bougainvillea). Another noteworthy event is the publication of *Totonya* (1998), by Rosária da Silva (b. 1959), probably Angola's first black female novelist (several mixed-race and white women novelists, of colonial Angola, preceded her).

Manuel Lima, who began his career as a poet while an MPLA militant, has lived abroad for decades, in France, Canada, and Portugal. Lima's *Os anões e os mendigos* (1984) (Dwarfs and Beggars) is a novel that parodies the leadership of a fictitious African state, presumably modeled on Angola in its first decade of independence. In a similar vein are two novels by Sousa Jamba (b. 1966). From central Angola, Jamba has lived most of his life in Zambia and England. In fact, he wrote his two novels in English. *Patriotas* (1991) was originally published, in England, as *Patriots* (1990), and *Confissão tropical* (1995), literally, "tropical confession," appeared first in English as *A Lonely Devil* (1994).

During the late colonial period, ethnographic stories by socially conscious writers served to revindicate lusophone Africa's indigenous peoples and cultures. A corollary to ethnographic fiction was the historical novel. One pre-independence practitioner of the art is Manuel Pacavira (b. 1939). While interned in the Tarrafal concentration camp, Pacavira wrote *Nzinga Mbandi* (1975). This historical novel recounts the life of Nzinga (Zinga, Ginga) Mbandi, the legendary seventeenth-century queen of Matamba who fought against European dominance and during the modern liberation struggle became a symbol of resistance to colonial rule.

Henrique Abranches (b. 1932) came to the fore in the early post-independence years as an author of historical novels. At the age of fourteen the Lisbon-born Abranches emigrated with his parents to Angola. In 1961, because of his support of the liberation movement, he was arrested and deported. While exiled in Lisbon in the early 1960s, Abranches published short stories with the House of Students from the Empire. It was after independence, however, with his return to Angola that Abranches published the first of his six novels based on historical themes. The most powerful of these novels is *Misericórdia para o Reino do Kongo!* (1996) (Have Mercy on the Kingdom of the Congo), set in the early eighteenth century. Pacavira's and Abranches's works anticipated fictional recreations of Angola's early colonial history by several post-independence writers. José Eduardo Agualusa (b. 1960) wrote *A conjura* (1989) (The Conspiracy), an historical novel that earned its author a major literary prize. Similarly, Pepetela's *A gloriosa família* (1997) (The Glorious Family) is a rigorously researched fictional account of an extended Kimbundu family descended from one Baltazar Van Dum (Van-Dúnem), a Flemish adventurer in seventeenth-century Angola. Fragata de Morais (b. 1940) is a writer who has continued the ethnographic tradition of Angolan fiction. This relative newcomer among Angolan writers spent many years working in theater and film in the Netherlands and Germany. After independence the mixed-race Fragata de Morais returned to his native Angola where he published *Como iam as velhas*

saber disso? (1980) (How Could the Old Women Know of This?) and *A seiva: contos angolanos* (1995) (Tree Sap: Angolan Short Stories). Henrique Abranches, in his preface to Morais's *Inkuna, minha terra* (1997) (Inkuna, My Homeland), welcomes the author to the ranks of those fiction writers who recreate and re-mythify aspects of Angola's traditional cultures.

As in Mozambique, there were few theatrical productions in colonial Angola. A notable exception is *Auto de Natal* (Christmas Play), by Domingos Van-Dúnem (b. 1925), which was published and staged in Luanda in 1972. With the end of colonial rule the theater scene became quite active in Luanda. Pepetela's *A corda* (1978) (The Tug of War) and *A revolta da casa dos ídolos* (1980) (The Revolt of the House of Idols) played to packed houses. Subsequently, Van-Dúnem staged his play *O panfleto* (1988) (The Pamphlet). The most prolific contemporary Angolan playwright is, however, Mena Abrantes (b. 1945). By the mid-1990s Abrantes had written six dramas, including the award-winning *Ana, Zé e os escravos* (1988) (Ana, Joe, and the Slaves).

Since independence Mozambique's José Craveirinha has published three volumes of poetry, including *Maria* (1988), dedicated to his late wife, and *Babalaze das hienas* (1997) (Hangover of the Hyenas). Moreover, Craveirinha has been one of the greatest influences on young poets. Like Craveirinha, Luis Carlos Patraquim (b. 1953) has molded Portuguese into a uniquely Mozambican poetic discourse in works such as *Monção* (1980) (Monsoon) and four subsequent volumes of poetry. Similarly, Eduardo White (b. 1963), one of Mozambique's most talented young poets, has cultivated, under Craveirinha's aegis, a discourse of tropical sensuality in such collections as *Os materiais do amor seguido de o desafio à tristeza* (1996) (The Substance of Love Followed by the Denial of Sadness). This fifth volume of White's verse consists of two sonorous prose poems.

Other important contributors to Mozambique's *Charrua* (Plow) poetry movement are Juvenal Bucuane (b. 1951), Hélder Muteia (b. 1960), Filimone Meigos (b. 1960), Armando Artur (b. 1962), and Nélson Saúte (b. 1967). The hybrid title of Meigos's first book of poetry, *Poema and Kalash in Love* (1995), may well have resulted from the author's year in the United States, at the University of Iowa's International Writers Program.

Two fiction writers who have caught the attention of the Portuguese- speaking world in general are Mia Couto, the pen name by which António Emílio L. Couto (b. 1955) is generally known, and Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa (b. 1957). Mia Couto, born to Portuguese parents in the Mozambican port city of Beira, and Ba Ka Khosa, of Tsonga ethnicity, have produced works that transcribe

indigenous oral expression into a creolized discourse. Both writers employ something akin to Latin-American magic realism, and they create neologisms in the manner of João Guimarães Rosa (1908–67), the preeminent Brazilian novelist.

Couto, one of the most prolific of lusophone African writers, uses neologisms, innovative phrasing, and surrealistic situations in his compelling stories. He has attracted an international readership with such works as *Vozes anoitecidas* (1986), *Cada homem é uma raça* (1990), and *Na varanda do Frangipani* (1996), which have been translated into English as, respectively, *Voices Made Night* (1990), *Everyman is a Race* (1994), and *Under the Frangipani* (2001). Khosa established his reputation as a highly imaginative writer with the stories in *Ualalapi* (1987) and *Orgia dos loucos* (1990) (Orgy of the Mad).

The civil war that raged in Mozambique between 1980 and 1992 inspired a number of compelling literary works. A work that attracted wide readership, both at home and abroad, is *Dumba–nengue: histórias trágicas do banditismo* (1987) (*Run for Your Life! Peasant Tales of Tragedy in Mozambique*, 1988), by Lina Magaia (b. 1945). At the age of fifty-three Lília Momplé (b. 1935) debuted as a writer whose works revisit the colonial era. Her first work was *Ninguém matou Suhura* (1988) (No One Killed Suhura), a collection of short stories, whose title plays cleverly and poignantly on the aforementioned Honwana's *Nós matámos o cão tinhoso* (*We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Mozambique Stories*). Momplé went on to publish *Neighbours* (1996), a novel, which despite its English-language title, is written in Portuguese and portrays aspects of Mozambique's historical relationship with South Africa. After a term, in 1997, at the University of Iowa's International Writers Program, Momplé returned home to publish *Os olhos da cobra verde* (1997) (The Green Snake's Eyes), a volume that includes some of her best stories.

For a country with a population of about 450,000, the archipelago of Cape Verde has a disproportionately large number of writers. Two poets who define and celebrate Cape Verdes's national ethos are Corsino Fortes (b. 1933), with his *Pão e fonema* (1974, Bread and Phoneme) and João Varela (b. 1937), who, under the creole pseudonym Timóteo Tio Tiofe, wrote *O primeiro livro de Notcha* (1975) (Notcha's First Book), an epic.

Oswaldo Osório (b. 1937) and Arménio Vieira (b. 1941) are also standard-bearers of contemporary Cape-Verdean poetry. Both began their literary careers as members of the Generation of 1960, but their first books of poetry did not appear until after independence. Osório's first book-length work is the exuberantly patriotic *Caboverdeamadamente construção meu amor – poemas de luta* (1975) (Cape Verdelovingly, Nation Building, My Love – Poems of Struggle).

By the late 1980s Osório had toned down his patriotic fervor to fashion more intimist, if no less exuberant verse, as evidenced by his *Clar(a)idade assombrada* (1987) (Clouded Clarity), a volume whose title is a play on the *Claridade* generation's designation.

Arménio Vieira, with his metaphysical verse, is unique among members of his generation. Many of Vieira's poems, both those written during the colonial period and those composed just after independence, are contained in a volume with the unpretentious title of *Poemas* (1981).

In 1987, in Cape Verde's capital city of Praia, a group of young, aspiring writers launched the Pro-Culture Movement. José L. Hoppfer Almada (b. 1960), a co-founder of the Cape-Verdean Writers Association, was Pro-Culture's moving force. Almada is the first editor of *Fragmentos* (Fragments [of a continent]), the official journal of Pro-Culture. He also organized an anthology of verse by members of the "youngest generation," and is himself the author of two volumes of poetry.

A powerful female voice is that of Mindelo-born Vera Duarte (b. 1952). *Amanhã amadrugada* (1993) (Tomorrow Dawning), Duarte's first volume of poetry, was issued in Portugal by Vega Publishers's "Palavra Africana" (African Word) Series, organized by Ana Mafalda Leite (b. 1956), a professor at the University of Lisbon and an established critic of lusophone African literature.

Between 1978 and 1994, Teixeira de Sousa, a short-story writer of the 1940s *Certeza* group, published six novels. Of these works, all set on the volcanic island of Fogo, *Xaguate* (1987) (The Xaguate Hotel) has achieved the most critical acclaim.

Orlanda Amarílis (b.1924), the widow of Manuel Ferreira (1917–94) – an illustrious Portuguese fiction writer and pioneering Africanist scholar – is a post-independence revelation. From the age of twenty-three, Amarilis, from the island of Santiago, has lived in Lisbon. Like Mozambique's Lília Momplé, this Cape Verdean began her career as a published writer after turning fifty. Amarílis's first book of short stories is *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa* (1974) (From the Wharf-of-Sodré to the Port of Salamansa). She followed these short stories about members of the Cape-Verdean diaspora living between the islands and Lisbon with *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (1983) (Isle of the Birds) and *A Casa dos mastros* (1989) (The House of Masts). Amarílis is one of several Cape Verdean contemporary fiction writers to produce experimental and in some cases satirical works.

A striking literary venture was *Odju d'agu* (1987) (The Wellspring), by Manuel Veiga (b. 1948). This populist, nativistic, and telluric work is the first Cape-Verdean novel written in an unadulterated creole. No less audacious, albeit

written in Portuguese with a Cape-Verdean flavor, is poet Arménio Vieira's allegorical first novel, *O eleito do sol* (1989) (The Sun's Chosen One). Set in ancient Egypt, the novel is a political satire of postcolonial Cape Verde. Another first is a novel by another woman writer. The pioneering work is Dina Salústio's (b. 1941) *A louca de Serrano* (1998) (The Mad Woman from Serrano).

The most prolific and perhaps most widely read contemporary Cape Verdean novelist is Germano Almeida (b. 1945). By 1996 Almeida had authored three novels and two collections of short stories. His first and best-known novel is *O testamento do Sr. Napumoceno da Silva Araújo* (1989) (The Last Will and Testament of Mr. Napumoceno da Silva Araújo), upon which is based a film that has delighted audiences at home and abroad.

Unlike what had occurred in Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique, a literary-cultural movement did not get under way in Guinea-Bissau until after independence. Two postcolonial anthologies, *Mantenhas para quem luta!* (1977) (Hail to Those Engaged in the Struggle!) and *Antologia dos jovens poetas* (1978) (The Young Poets' Anthology), brought together anticolonialist poems, most written before independence. As another indication that the time had finally arrived for an authentic literature of Guinea-Bissau to manifest itself, Hélder Proença (b. 1956) published a collection of his poems under the title *Não posso adiar a palavra* (1982) (I Can No Longer Postpone the Word).

There was, however, a postcolonial discovery in the form of poetry written by Amílcar Cabral (1924–73), the father of Guinean and Cape-Verdean independence. Although a number of Cabral's poems had first appeared in print, during the 1950s and 1960s, in newspapers and magazines in mainland Portugal and the Azores, it was only in the mid-1970s, when a researcher brought them together in a single volume, that these poems became available to readers and literary critics in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau.

Vasco Cabral (b. 1926), unrelated to Amílcar Cabral, but like him a freedom fighter, was likewise revealed to have written a number of poems during colonial times. Starting in the 1950s, Vasco Cabral wrote socially conscious and combative poems, none of which appeared in print before 1979. Subsequently, most of these poems were published under the title *A luta é a minha primavera* (1981) (The Struggle Is My Springtime).

Antologia poética da Guiné-Bissau (1991) (An Anthology of Poetry from Guinea-Bissau) introduced the work of a group of post-independence poets. Two of the best known are José Carlos Schwartz (1949–77) and Tony Tcheka, pen name of António Soares Lopes Junior (b. 1951). Schwartz, who perished in an airplane accident, was posthumously honored as National Poet of the Post-independence Period.

Eterna paixão (1994) (Everlasting Passion), by Abdulai Sila (b. 1958), qualifies as the first novel by a native-born Guinean. Daniel Baldwin, the novel's protagonist, is a black American foreign service officer who becomes a folk hero in a fictitious African country. The hero's name apparently derives from the fact that Sila, while a student at the University of Dresden, read German-language translations of works by James Baldwin. Sila's other novels, *A última tragédia* (1995) (The Final Tragedy) and *Mistida* (1997) (A Business Matter), are social fictions, the former about the final years of colonial rule and the latter a portrayal of the intricacies of power and political corruption in post-independence Africa. Sila is an electronics engineer and an entrepreneur. He is the principal co-founder of Ku Si Mon (creole for "with their own hands"), Guinea- Bissau's first privately owned publishing house.

Another pioneering Guinean writer is Domingas Samy (b. 1955). She has the distinction of being Guinea-Bissau's first female author of a work of prose fiction. *A escola* (1993) (The School), Samy's collection of short stories, is, in fact, independent Guinea-Bissau's first published work of fiction.

In Guinea-Bissau the immediate post-independence period witnessed a resurgence of interest in creole-language writing, first in the transcription of traditional stories and then in "art" poetry. In the latter category, *Entre o ser e o amar* (1996) (Between Being and Loving), by Odete Costa Semedo (b. 1959), is a collection of creole-language poems accompanied by versions in Portuguese.

Since its independence the small two-island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe, with fewer than 200,000 inhabitants, has had a correspondingly small number of writers. During the latter years of colonial rule the lack of a critical mass of writers precluded a coordinated literary movement. Indeed, nearly all of the islands' major writers lived abroad, mainly in France and Portugal. Alda Espírito Santo did return to São Tomé, where she wrote many of the poems that appear in her *É nosso o solo sagrado da terra* (1978) (The Sacred Earth of This Land Is Ours). In that same year, *Poesia do colonialismo* (1978) (Poetry of Colonialism), by Carlos do Espírito Santo (b. 1952), was also published. Both collections contain political and communal poems, all of which set the stage for a surge in literary production in the 1980s.

In 1986 the newly founded Association of São-Tomense Writers and Artists had a membership of over sixty. The decade of the eighties also produced two anthologies featuring the works of both established and aspiring poets. *A descoberta das descobertas ou as descobertas da descoberta* (1984) (The Discovery of the Discoveries or the Discoveries of the Discovery), the first of the anthologies, includes poems by Alda Espírito Santo, along with those written by five poets

of a younger generation. Two of the most promising of these younger poets are Frederico Gustavo dos Anjos (b. 1954), the anthology's organizer, and Conceição Lima (b. 1962). Few of the younger São Tomense poets represented in the anthologies have published books. One of those few is Francisco Costa Alegre (b. 1953), the author of three books of poetry and two collections of short stories. The poems in his *Madala* (1990) qualify as some of the most esthetically pleasing intimist and public literature of the post-independence period.

In a country with relatively few writers of prose fiction, Albertino Bragança (b. 1944), Manu Barreto (c. 1950), and the above-mentioned Gustavo dos Anjos are the first post-independence São Tomense novelists. Bragança's *Rosa do Riboque e outros contos* (1985) (Rose from Riboque and Other Stories) and Barreto's *Sam Genté!* (1985) signal, in form and content, the coming of age of São Tomense literature. *Sam Gentí!* is an especially powerful retrospective account of the experiences of a typical "daughter of the land" facing the vagaries of life under colonial rule.

Literary criticism in lusophone Africa

Although foreign academics have written the majority of the book-length studies of lusophone African literature, there is a tradition of literary criticism in the five former colonies. And most lusophone African intellectuals agree that a more extensive body of criticism, produced by nationals, is an indispensable corollary to their respective countries' literary production and intellectual activity.

The first major historian of Angolan literature is Luanda-born Carlos Ervedosa (1932–92). He followed his *A literatura angolana: resenha histórica* (1962) (Angolan Literature: A Historical Review) with four similar overviews published between 1970 and 1980. An especially perceptive pre-independence critic is the celebrated Angolan poet Mário António (Fernandes de Oliveira), who earned his doctorate in African literature at the New University of Lisbon. His most influential scholarly work is *Luanda, "ilha" crioula* (1968) (Luanda, Creole "Island").

David Mestre, Portuguese born but raised in Luanda and after independence an Angolan citizen, in a way continued what Ervedosa and M. António had initiated. Reminiscent of the title of Ervedosa's 1962 work, Mestre wrote *Crítica literária em Angola: resenha histórica e situação actual* (1971) (Literary Criticism in Angola: A Historical Overview and the Current Situation). About a year before his premature death in 1998, Mestre published *Lusografias crioulas* (1997)

(Creole Lusographs). This informative, if somewhat impressionistic, work brings together essays about prominent Mozambican, Brazilian, as well as Angolan literary figures.

Notwithstanding the contributions of Ervedosa, M. António, and, more recently, Mestre, postcolonial literary scholars have been few and far between in Angola. Starting in the late 1980s, however, there have been some encouraging initiatives on the part of native-born Angolans. Luís Kandjimbo, whose *Apuros de vigília: ensaios de meditação genérica* (1988) (Afflictions of Vigil; Essays of Generic Meditation) ushered in a postmodernist era of literary criticism. In *Apologia de Kalitangi: ensaio e crítica* (1997) (Kalitangi's Apology: Essay and Criticism), his second critical work, Kandjimbo demonstrates a familiarity with the writings of a broad range of foreign scholars, from Kwame Anthony Appiah and V. Y. Mudimbe to Antonio Gramsci and Lucien Goldman.

In Mozambique since independence, the establishment of an undergraduate major in African literature at Eduardo Mondlane University has fostered the publication of critical works by a small but productive group of academics. Fátima Mendonça (b. 1950), a professor of African literature at Eduardo Mondlane, has published several critical studies. Her most comprehensive work is *Literatura moçambicana: a história e as escritas* (1989) (Mozambican Literature: Its History and the Writings). Francisco Noa (b. 1965), an instructor in the comparative literature program at the Pedagogical University in Maputo, is another literary scholar trained in Portugal and steeped in the writings of European and American theorists. Noa authored *Literatura moçambicana: memória e conflito* (1997) (Mozambican Literature: Memory and Conflict) and *A escrita infinita* (1998) (Infinite Writing).

Cape Verde has a tradition of critical essays and cultural studies dating back to the *Claridade* and *Certeza* generations. Notable among post-independence critics are the novelist and linguist Manuel Veiga, author of *A sementeira* (1994) (The Sowing), a volume of essays on literature, language, and culture, and Manuel Brito Semedo (b. 1952), whose two-volume study *Caboverdianamente ensaiando* (1995 and 1997) (Essays from a Cape Verdean Perspective) make him one of the archipelago's most promising critics.

As for São Tomé and Príncipe, Inocência Mata (b. 1959), who teaches at the University of Lisbon, has three books of criticism to her credit. She ranks as the most professional of contemporary native-born São Tomense critics. Her most important work to date is *Diálogo com as ilhas: sobre cultura e literature de São Tomé e Príncipe* (1998) (Dialogue with the Islands: The Culture and Literature of São Tomé and Príncipe).

Due to the virtual absence of an indigenous middle class, such as existed in the other Portuguese colonies in Africa, pre-independence Guinea-Bissau had very little in the area of a home-grown literary criticism. What gave a significant impetus to the establishment of a literary culture in the early postcolonial period was the aforementioned Mário Pinto de Andrade. In 1974, the year of Guinea-Bissau's independence, the Angolan militant, statesman, writer, anthologist, and literary critic emigrated to that new country where he served first as the Coordinator of the National Council of Culture and from 1978 until 1980 as Minister of Information and Culture. The coup that overthrew the Luís Cabral government in November of 1980 and resulted in Andrade's departure from Bissau had a negative effect on literary-cultural activity. By the early 1990s Guinea-Bissau experienced a resurgence in literary activities, including the appearance of a number of works that helped inspire an indigenous corpus of critical essays. In April 1994 the newly formed Cultural Expression Group (known by the Portuguese acronym GREC) published the first issue of *Tcholona: revista de letras, artes e cultura* (To Send the Message: A Journal of Literature, Arts, and Culture). This innovative journal became the outlet for a number of young literary scholars, most notably Leopoldo Amado (c. 1960), whose "Breve panorama das letras guineenses" (Brief Panorama of Guinean Letters), published in the premier issue of *Tcholona*, is a landmark essay in the annals of an incipient literary criticism in that young lusophone African country.

Conclusions

Despite serious social, economic, and political problems, including civil wars in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, these young African nations, each drawing on rich traditions, have a promising future with respect to the quantity and quality of their literary production. Because writers are held in such high esteem in these developing countries, many young people aspire to be poets, novelists, and playwrights.

Since independence there has been considerable debate as to who qualifies as an "authentic" Angolan, Mozambican, Cape-Verdean, Guinean, or São Tomense writer and which works authentically belong to the corpus of five emerging national literatures. Aldónio Gomes and Fernanda Cavacas offer a tentative answer in their *Dicionário de autores de literaturas Africanas de língua Portuguesa* (1997) (Dictionary of Authors of African Literature in Portuguese), which lists 1,700 writers. Gomes and Cavacas use the categories "colonial writers," "national writers," and "intimist writers," all being "Portuguese-language

writers who are in some way linked to Africa" (1997: 10–11). Needless to say, Angolans, Cape Verdeans, Guineans, Mozambicans, and São Tomenses themselves will eventually determine, by means of their own institutions, who their writers are and which works belong to their respective country's national literature.

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32

Popular literature in Africa

ODE S. OGEDE

"Popular" is one of the most elusive concepts to define within the context of African studies. An attempt to understand this aspect of African culture should begin with a simple but generally overlooked premise: that "popular" is a fugitive concept, because theoretically oriented critics have tended to use the term to designate whatever each one of them has wanted it to mean at a particular place or context, and time. Having to depend – far more than any other expression in the scholarly discourse in the field – on the caprices, the whims, convenience, and moods of its users for its continuing circulation, the very malleability of the word has not only allowed "popular" to serve a variety of purposes but it has made it to be a phrase without a clear meaning.

The consequences of scholars' inability to settle for any fixed definitions of "popular" are real, although continually disregarded. Not being able to delimit the contours of the popular may have provided unlimited room for those attempting to write theoretical essays about the field, but it has also led to methodological uncertainty and instability as well as ideological confusion. There has been a tendency for each aspiring theorist, viewing an aspect of this heterogeneous body of material from his or her own limited standpoint, to believe and to argue strongly that the part seen, the element encountered and seized upon by the individual scholar, is all there is to see. And so, as each scholar has been mistaking a part for the whole, what we have come face to face with in studies of the popular cultural expression in Africa is a situation that calls attention to itself as a crisis in the modes of investigation.

With particular reference to popular literary expression, as individual scholars go from a variety of angles toward their object, and as each continues to see and emphasize so many different aspects, there are so many broad lines of approach taken, the differences in opinion are so vast, that it is difficult to foresee the possibility that a commonly accepted ground will emerge in the near future. For whereas on the one hand, those who follow Ime Ikiddeh's definition of popular in his essay "The Character of Popular Fiction in Ghana"

(1988) (for example, Richard Priebe and Virginia Coulon) have urged that it implies works in which esthetics are only a peripheral concern, on the other hand, those who have adhered to the view held by scholars like Ulli Beier, Donatus Nwoga, Emmanuel Obiechina, and Karin Barber dismiss such conclusions by putting much weight on "the conventions" through which popular arts (as Barber puts it in "Popular Arts in Africa") "transform, articulate, and communicate real experience" (1987: 38).

Though the work of others like Richard Bjornson presents "popular" in a light that suggests mainly the idea that a literary document was produced locally, as opposed to that which is made internationally and imported for a local audience (1991: 147), the writing of still others like F. Odun Balogun presents it as synonymous with a radicalizing artistic endeavor, one produced by the educated elite but that is not only about the abject conditions of the disadvantaged masses but also is addressed primarily to audiences with a mass appeal (Balogun 1983). Even though a writer like Johannes Fabian notes with particular regret that African popular culture is a polymorphous mass, one which encompasses such a complex range of cultural activity that it is almost an embodiment of exercises in self-contradiction and is thus impossible to pigeonhole, he tends to associate it with the so-called masses:

> (a) it suggests contemporary cultural expressions carried by the masses in contrast to both modern elitist and traditional "tribal" culture; (b) it evokes historical conditions characterized by mass communication, mass production, and mass participation; (c) it implies, in my understanding, a challenge to accepted beliefs in the superiority of "pure" and "high" culture, but also to the notion of folklore, a categorization we have come to suspect as being equally elitist and tied to certain conditions in Western society; (d) it signifies, potentially, at least, processes occurring behind the lack of established powers and accepted interpretations and, thus, offers a better conceptual approach to decolonization of which it is undoubtedly an important element.
>
> (Fabian 1978: 315)

In his book *African Popular Theatre*, the argument of David Kerr, who elaborates on aspects of the judgment of Michael Etherton and Johannes Fabian, is that one cannot fully grasp the idea of African popular arts without first understanding the conditions under which they are produced. For Kerr, the distinction often drawn in contemporary Africa between elite and popular, high and low, is an importation of colonialism, which had introduced class distinctions into the continent. What brings about African popular literature as an inferior or undervalued genre, the utterances of marginalized groups who use the form to protest their disadvantaged position, Kerr claims, is colonial

rule, which brought western education and elevated the highly educated natives (those who have assimilated the cultural model of their conquerors) over and above their less privileged fellow tribesmen and women – those with a low level of formal education – who also continue to express themselves in the lowly forms associated with the experience of poorly educated peoples.

Ironically, in outlining the provenance of popular theater, Kerr's chief message is that African popular theater "combines elements of precolonial indigenous African dramaturgy with features borrowed or parodied from colonial cultural forms" as well (Kerr 1995: 59–60). Kerr continues to emphasize both conventional drama (that which is scripted and intended to be read in silent study or performed on stage before a live audience or via the media of film, radio, or television) as well as such nonliterary forms of performance like dramatized storytelling, dance, mime, masquerade, improvised urban vast amusement theater, and the theater of resistance and social action otherwise known as participatory or guerrilla theater – all of which, in Kerr's view, converge to reproduce the experience of people who cannot defend or publicly validate themselves in any other way.

And yet, it is precisely the view that links the production of popular cultural practices to particular groups within society that scholars like Michael Etherton, also on his part arguing with special emphases on patterns of theatrical practices in Africa, have gone against. For example, in "Trends in African Theatre," Etherton, who defines popular as a hodgepodge activity – "that which is improvised and is not written at all; that which also exists as literature; that which is purely escapist; and that which has specific community development goals" (1979: 58) – emphasizes the class border-crossing temper that discourages seeing this type of cultural dissemination as ever a one-way process. For him, any attempts to tie modes of communication to the interests or productive capacities of any particular groups in society is a great mistake because art recognizes no rigid class boundaries.

Although there appears to be at least one common ground in the outlook of Kerr, Fabian, and Etherton, especially with regard to the regret expressed about what Fabian in "Popular Culture in Africa" terms the "journalistic currency" that tends to lessen the value of popular literature as a category for scholarly research (1978: 315), some distinct shades of difference of opinion are discernible over key definitional issues. When Etherton surveys the field of African popular literary expression, unlike Fabian, he is confident in his ability to schematize it accurately and productively using a combination of native insights and frameworks of analytic rigor borrowed from the international scene.

But apart from the fact that every new definition proposed by each one of these scholars seems either to shift emphasis to a different matter altogether or to entirely cancel out all the ideas suggested by previous efforts (e.g., Etherton's vista runs completely parallel to Priebe's), perhaps one important criticism that can be made against nearly every one of these attempts to define popular, in part, in terms of the processes of production and consumption and of its presumed status as well as of its purportedly inherent internal properties, is that, in dealing with these materials, all of the scholars are equally guilty of patronizing simplifications. The fact is that nearly all these critics use imported standards of value that are quite alien to the thinking of those who produce the works in question, a practice that partly explains why they cause more confusion than clarification.

Moreover, nearly all the critics who commonly moralize on the character of the popular in such generalized terms may be said to be engaged in activities fatally impoverished by the failure to provide us with clear definitions of such nebulous terms as "esthetics," "African perspective," "contemporary," "traditional," "escapist," "community development goals," "mass communication," "mass production," and "mass participation." Thus, while it is not inconceivable that the tendency to despise the category of the popular is an aspect inherited from English studies, particularly from the work of Q. D. Leavis, whether those writing on African popular literature can take something of pivotal value from Leavis's work is something that remains to be seen. Despite her condescending attitude toward what she terms England's "reading public," the "herd" whose undiminished incapacity to exercise "taste" she considered to have been threatening to everything of lasting value in the arts, her 1932 book *Fiction and the Reading Public* not only presents one of the most intelligent and exhaustive analyses that we have of the emergence of popular culture as a process within the context of a national literature, but it offers perhaps the most unified image of it to date. For now, because Africanists have not yet found a unified way through which to approach popular culture, the wide variety of definitions remains bewildering in the profusion of possibilities it offers.

Indeed, what strikes anyone familiar with the offerings is that the perplexity is little diminished by the fact that users of the word do not always stick to one operational definition of the term. This terminological imprecision is common to many who have written in more than one context, and scholars like Karin Barber and Bernth Lindfors may be taken as emblems of the apparently ever expanding notions of the popular. Nonetheless, Lindfors's indiscriminate, all-inclusive method contrasts sharply with Barber's devotion to the intricacies of

ever widening generic circles as she tries to restore items previously omitted (as when she moves from viewing popular culture in "Popular arts in Africa" as palpable expressions in music, paintings, wire bicycles, coffins, dance, costume, mime, song, and speech as well as carvings to incorporating within the canon in her edited collection *Readings in African Popular Culture* (1996) things like bumper stickers, vehicle slogans, message-bearing cloths, and cartoons).

Because of his unwillingness to hold on to any consistent definition of the term, Bernth Lindfors's linguistic circumlocutions not only blur a distinction of meanings, they undermine critical faith in the suitability of those kinds of ventures. For example, Lindfors says in *Popular Literatures in Africa*, "Any work that seeks to communicate an African perspective to a large audience in a style that can be readily apprehended and appreciated could legitimately be called a piece of African popular literature" (1991: 2). Whereas he undertakes in that text to relate popular to both the mental aptitudes of a writer's reading audience as well as the writer's mode of expression, to what he presents as the work's readability or accessibility, in another book of essays, *Loaded Vehicles*, Lindfors describes "popular" as works printed in "inexpensive media produced domestically" (1996: vii), and he makes an attempt to distinguish on the one hand, between what he calls the work of "the populists . . . i.e., authors who address themselves to the common reader in their society rather than the intellectuals at home and abroad" and, on the other, "the literati . . . i.e., the elite writers . . . the biggest giants whose works are compulsory reading in schools and universities" (1996: 74).

By this use of a rule of thumb, Lindfors extends the concept of popular to accommodate not just such materials as the Onitsha Market pamphlets and the chapbooks of David Maillu which scholars have commonly associated with the concept, but also such obscure and elitist works that are the staple diet of school and university students as the novels of the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah as well as the works of the East African writer Okot p'Bitek; South African protest poetry; Dennis Brutus's verses; and Chinua Achebe's novel of post-independence disillusionment, *A Man of the People*.

Though it was in an attempt to restore order in the confusing situation that Karin Barber wrote her 1987 essay "Popular Arts in Africa," it is clear that she has not yet achieved her main objective: to help researchers see the material as a whole, and see more clearly and collectively the parts they had been seeing singly and fragmentarily. But if Barber's essay has turned out to be far less triumphant as the landmark study she had intended it to be, despite its overly ambitious aims to "set out the scope and possibilities of this field, and to lay claim to a central position for it in the humanities and social sciences" (1987: 1),

she starts from a very elementary assumption by noting the way in which scholars had been groping for decades without finding any firm handle for discussing their material.

The major contribution of the overview may not reside in providing a universally acceptable broad theoretical framework that might be applicable to all the popular arts of Africa, but the courage that Barber has shown in setting out to provide a forum for synthesizing all of the existing approaches that had been taken in the field cannot be denied. Indeed, one of the real merits of her approach is that Barber herself does not harbor any doubts whatsoever regarding the importance of the subject to Africans, and why it merits scholarly attention, for, as she says, popular arts are "everywhere. They flourish without encouragement or recognition from official cultural bodies, and sometimes in defiance of them. People too poor to contemplate spending money on luxuries do spend it on popular arts, sustaining them and constantly infusing them with new life" (1987: 1). The profile of the popular mapped out by Barber in the same essay includes not only such materials as the music, figural sculptures, drawings, and graffiti scholars conventionally have associated with the genre, but also things like football and utterances mouthed at political rallies.

Although Karin Barber draws from the insights of Raymond Williams, who argues in *Culture and Society* (1958) that a satisfactory study of culture should cover not just a part of but the whole cultural production, she not only stresses the ethnographic value of studying these commodities and activities (as some might say Williams had viewed such items primarily as windows through which scholars can gain knowledge about the cultural, economic, and sociopolitical life of their producers), but she also emphasizes the dimension of popular arts as "expressive arts" within which she locates what she calls their "power to communicate" (1987: 2). She adds with equally illuminating passion,

> All art forms communicate, even though many are not verbal, and those which are often encode their messages in oblique, partial, and fragmentary ways . . . Many African popular forms make their effects through a combination of music, dance, costume, mime, song, and speech. In these forms the meaning cannot be extrapolated from the words alone but is conveyed by all the elements in combination. (1987: 2)

The significance of Barber's contribution is underlined by her recognition that the provenance of the popular arts is not simply restricted to culture as a collection of objects and artifacts such as carvings, paintings, and songs but includes also processes of the mind, ways of thinking.

Furthermore, while taking note of the international dimension of the popular arts (she mentions some similarities that exist between the styles of a number of British and African popular art forms, for example), Barber does not lose sight of distinctive local peculiarities. A major difference she notes, for instance, is that "for the majority of African people, the arts are the only channel of public communication at their disposal" (1987: 2). This responsiveness to the intricate details of African popular arts explains why Barber bemoans the wholesale transfer to the African situation of European conceptualizations of the popular as inappropriate. On occasion, Barber's characterization of African popular arts as an expanding maze as well as the difficulty she expresses about the possibility of defining the people because of their possessing anything but homogeneity, may appear to bear much resemblance to the despair of those researchers who are so consumed by their bewilderment that they habitually have despaired and completely given up their hope about the possibility of finding any method capable of sorting out the complex body of the material contained within the rubric of the popular in Africa and the existing scholarship in the field. Fortunately, such moments of quibbling, as in the following declaration, are very rare indeed in Barber:

> All art produced in present-day Africa is to some degree syncretic. All of it reflects some concern with social change and with relations between the indigenous and the foreign. All performance art is concerned with establishing intimate responsive contact with the audience. And all art whatsoever is communicated through shared conventions which are to a greater degree elusive, changing, and difficult to establish. (1987: 107)

Even though Barber does not always maintain a consistent level of confidence about the ability of researchers to handle the material, the good thing is that she approaches the field – as one should any field of forces in tension – with much wisdom. For example, her warning that we must always keep our minds open about the presence of new influences contains much common sense because the terrain of the creative arts is never a closed one. If Barber draws attention to the slipperiness of the material, it is in order to show that it is more fruitful to approach the subject without fixed preconceptions.

The confusion surrounding the use of "popular" in African studies is particularly perplexing because the study of this genre began with clearly defined views. In several of the early discussions of the Onitsha Market pamphlet writing, the first instance of the manifestation of this genre of literature in Africa, the characteristic features that mark it out were clearly outlined. An inventory of such studies must begin with both Ulli Beier's pioneering essay "Writing in

West Africa" (1962) and Emmanuel Obiechina's two elaborate books, *Onitsha Market Literature* (1972), the first substantial anthology of these creative works, and *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (1973), his detailed analytical study entirely devoted to this body of material; as well as others like H. R. Collins's *The New English of Onitsha Chapbooks* (1968); K. W. J. Post's "Nigerian Pamphleteers and the Congo" (1964); Nancy Schmidt's "Nigeria: Fiction for the Average Man" (1965); and Donatus Nwoga's "Onitsha Market Literature" (1965), to list only a few of the most significant ones.

All these studies – but Beier's and Obiechina's in particular – achieved their eminence not so much from the making of wide and large claims about the entire field of investigation, not so much from the making of overarching observations that are assumed to apply universally wherever writers are concerned with the documentation of the ways in which the meetings of old and new values are in ferment. Rather, the significance of these studies arose primarily from the close and detailed attention each paid to the material as a local product, determined to a large extent by local circumstances, reflecting local conditions and attitudes, produced and read by local people, often artisans, petty traders, primary and elementary schoolteachers, business people, and semi-literate politicians whose social needs the works are targeted to meet. Thus, all agree that this was a literature of coping, helping young men and women to deal with new problems attending the earliest phases of urbanization in Africa at a time when rural migration had led to influx into the emerging cities of migrants in search of opportunities in the new labor reserves. To perceive the educational interests of the pamphlets, we need only to look at their titles:

> *How to Write Good English and Composition; How to Succeed in Life; How to Know Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba and English Languages; How to Know Proverbs and Many Things; How to Make Meetings; Pocket Encyclopaedia of Etiquette and Commonsense.*
> (Obiechina 1973: 18)

In addition, the pamphleteers also wrote numerous texts for primary schools and popular examination-made-easy booklets on every conceivable subject.

Once he gives extended attention to evidence emanating from the work of the Onitsha pamphlet writers, Obiechina is able to suggest the profound connection that existed between life and art in and around Onitsha which explains why a particular segment of society found profit in reading the materials the pamphlet authors were offering them. Specifically, the Onitsha Market literature drew its relevance from its eagerness to address pressing problems that were real to the people on the lower rungs of the social ladder in regard to

how these individuals could place themselves on the road to the good life and reap the rewards that went along with successful social climbing. Moreover, as Obiechina makes clear, the writings managed to combine tantalizing pieces of advice on issues related to ideas of the suitable work ethic with concerns about the hereafter, problems the authors explored within the framework of Christian sermonizing while, crucially, the groups of the works they devoted to the art of letter-writing used model epistles sprinkled with quotations from the speeches of established philosophers and noted politicians the world over to tutor those seeking romantic involvement on the practicalities of how to make themselves agreeable to the opposite sex.

Although general education of the public may be recurrently the aim of the pamphlet writers, and Obiechina applauds the nobility of some of their intentions, he also senses the fact of the confusion in some of the ideas of the writers as well as their method of instruction, which were neither always ones in harmony with the traditional values of the people, nor ones regularly executed successfully. The inabilty of these authors to resist the desire to mix advice on morality or religion, for example, with unrelated pieces of information given on current affairs, on world demographic records, on politics, and on geography, codifies a structural error that was a constant source of distraction in the write-ups. Obiechina sees this rendering of a strange collage of disparate disciplines as resulting not only in the mystification of the public whom the pamphleteers wished to instruct, but also in the package of imperfect information, which the reading public was roused to imbibe with unrelenting drudgery through the technique of learning by rote, and which students in particular were expected to assimilate uncritically and, in like manner, to mechanically reproduce in examinations conducted in schools.

It is one of the odd aspects of the labor of the pamphlet writers that they got overly ambitious and muddled in their intentions. As noted by Obiechina, though "The wish to spread education through these books is praiseworthy" (1973: 19), the actual results were far from satisfactory because instead of developing the critical faculty as well as the originality of their readership – things which are everywhere the end in view of all genuine education – the methods utilized by these particular authors predictably led to the cultivation of hackneyed and sloppy thinking, the programmatic accumulation of superficial knowledge, and the parroting of clichés. And yet the Onitsha pamphlet authors were not unique in nursing these kinds of aspiration: "Writers at times of social change and the break-down of established values have always taken upon themselves part of the burden of helping people to find new values or a new synthesis in order to minimize the pains of change" (Obiechina 1973: 21).

And Obiechina's discussion usefully draws parallels between the work of the Onitsha pamphlet authors and the Elizabethan booklet writers, such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Robert Greene, especially with regard to the manner in which Greene used his *Notable Discovery of Cosenage* and *Groatsworth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance* to warn "young Englishmen coming from the countryside into London against the wiles of pimps and prostitutes, rogues and swindlers of all sorts, as well as evils of the taverns and such 'haunts of iniquity'" (Obiechina 1973: 21). Defoe in *The Complete English Tradesman*, and Richardson in *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum: or Young Man's Pocket Companion* provide further examples of the way in which the eighteenth-century conduct-books were utilized by their authors to give "practical advice to ordinary people on such matters as the conduct of employers and apprentices or masters and servants, how to conduct one's working life most profitably, how people could best carry out their private life, how young women could safeguard their virtue and make desirable marriages, the evils of clandestine and forced marriages, and so on" (Obiechina 1973: 21).

Given the special hold of these literary ancestors, it was not unexpected that both the language of expression and the concepts approved in the disquisitions by the Onitsha pamphleteers were unabashedly based upon imported western values. For example, despite clear differences between the African and western notions of love, the pamphlet authors turned a blind eye to their own native traditions and promoted analogous foreign ones quite uncritically. As a result, young West African males were encouraged to take on the habits of the typical European male whose desire is to prove himself worthy "before a beautiful, white-bosomed maiden, his mistress, in defense of whose honour he would attempt the impossible and hazard his life" (Obiechina 1973: 70), contrary to the native habit of the West African male who customarily "performs feats to earn the admiration of the whole people" and whose "motive force is not the desire to earn the love of a woman but to be worthy of the affection and respect of the whole people". Because the pamphleteers did not take the care to indicate why the western concept of marriage held stronger attractions for them, for Obiechina, their slavish imitativeness "falls far short of the ideal and appears somewhat ridiculous" (1973: 71).

It is a further quality of the pamphlet literature of Onitsha, Obiechina is quick to point out, that the case of voluntary assimilation of foreign influences did not end with the texts' structural and conceptual illogicalities, but was extended as well to their stylistic incongruities. In dedicating the last chapters of *An African Popular Literature* to these matters, Obiechina mentions the manner

in which the authors gratuitously imitated the content and titles of works of English writers, with Shakespeare serving as "the principal author from whom popular pamphlet writers take their allusions, plots" and memorable phrases and aphorisms (1973: 73). The pamphlet authors employed quotations from English classics, which they often arbitrarily grafted onto their own writings because they believed that it was a display of "literary learning" guaranteed to "enhance their standing with the reader": "To introduce or clinch a statement with a quotation from Shakespeare or Goethe or Bertha Clay gives a comfortable feeling of having protected this statement with authority and thus rendering it unassailable save to the most vulgar intellect" (1973: 75).

Obiechina finds this misuse of references to be one of the main marks of difference between the popular authors and their intellectual counterparts who were obviously much more selective and adept in their employment of external sources. Another marker was the constant striving by the popular authors for a "markedly orotund style and their substitution of flamboyance of language for concreteness of thought" (1973: 76). They had an uncanny desire to choose "the polysyllabic word" over "the monosyllabic one," and they tended to prefer "an abstract word to a concrete one, and a long complex sentence to a simple construction" (1973: 76). To these ineradicable marks, Obiechina adds another: where "the novelists and other sophisticated authors as intellectuals show a [deep] critical awareness of the problems of society," the pamphlet writers "see the problems mainly on the surface and very much at the personal level" (1973: 25).

What Obiechina and the other early observers say about the link between an Igbo egalitarian outlook and the emergence of the Onitsha Market literature is also applicable to the origin of the genre in Ghana and East Africa: in all cases, the form expressed the new freedom that a rapidly developing urban proletariat – a group hitherto spurned by the aspiring aristocratic middle class that dictated literary tastes – drew from new challenges as they began to write about their own experiences. Just as Onitsha was an especially suitable site for the cultural ferment because of its strategic location that facilitated its growth as a melting-pot of new and old values, so were large cities like Accra and Nairobi. As people of different ethnic origins were brought together by a common quest for self-improvement, they were driven by the notion of literature as equipment for living, and they wrote pamphlets in which politics, morality, romance, and the rules of social conduct featured as the prime subjects. Not only were these urban populations extremely receptive to change, they were very anxious to explore the new world around them with as much intensity as they could. The genre of literary activity championed by this

group was set apart by striking qualities: simplicity, accessibility, brevity, and cheapness, opposed to the erudite, complex, elevated, and expensive creative culture associated with the more sophisticated intellectual elite.

As Richard Priebe notes in his 1978 article elaborating the sociological character of Ghanaian popular literature, one recurrent issue in the development of the genre in this country has been the economic problem that continues to this day to discourage the emergence of the kind of robust independent publishing that flourished in Onitsha. Publishing risks are higher because of a limited market (Ghana lacking the oil wealth of Nigeria); therefore, most authors are compelled to publish their own works. Priebe succeeds as well in his minor interest in defining the prosaics of this genre, the bulk of which consisted of creative writing published in newspapers and magazines and employing modes similar to those of Onitsha chapbooks: using allegorical and stereotypical depiction of stock characters to warn young men of the snares of women, of the giddy effects of life in the fast lane, and the vanity of all human ambitions. A substantial number of works of Ghanaian popular literature also appeared in the form of short stories, novelettes, poetry, biography, essays, and history, and were expressed predominantly in the stiff imitative Victorian style, with "the influence and the reflection of life" (Priebe in Barber 1996: 81) as the main attribute of both those works which were published abroad, like Benibengor Blay's *Immortal Deeds: A Book of Verse*, first published in London in 1940, as well as those produced locally. Aside from the direct effect of political instability, which always affected the industry one way or the other, patrons both local and expatriate controlled the business – with the more successful ones such as Anowuno Educational Publications bringing in hundreds of dollars a year in sales. It is in the echo of such potboiler rapture with documents on sexual comedies, sensational romance, gossip, and moral didacticism that the Ghanaian popular literature most approximates the concerns of the Onitsha pamphlets. Priebe concludes quite perceptively, "The common people have little time for complexity in their literature; in fact, when they look to literature they try to find resolution for the complexities of life. Thus the world of the popular novelette is often an unambiguous world where good is rewarded and evil punished. In the Ghanaian novelette we tend to find a world where individuals are punished for giving vent to their lust and desire" (in Barber 1996: 87).

Much like the Onitsha Market writing and the popular literature from Ghana, the didactic quality of East African popular literature validates the point that the genre has traditionally functioned as a defensive mechanism shielding African urban populations from the harsh realities of life while serving as a

tool that simultaneously equips them to deal with the experiences of living in contexts where crime and boredom are realities faced on a daily basis by residents of the sprawling cities. From the very beginning of his career, Kenya's David Maillu who is justly regarded today as unquestionably the most capable exponent of this genre in East Africa, built strongly on the foundation laid by Charles Mangua, who pioneered the field with the 1971 publication of his *Son of Woman*, which he followed closely with *A Tail in the Mouth* (1972), only to wait for nearly fourteen years before returning to his writing career again in earnest by publishing *Son of Woman in Mombassa* (1986) and then *Kanina and I* in 1994.

Maillu established his reputation primarily by appropriating in writings in different genres – prose and poetry – the sordid degeneration of life that had attended urban agglomeration in his part of the world. Though the monographs printed by Maillu under his own publishing outfit, the Comb Books (now known as Maillu Publishing House), were not only written in a more sophisticated style (if laced with a more generous display of sensationalism that in some places borders on the pornographic) but also were better produced, their themes are similar to those of the Onitsha chapbooks: the temptations as well as afflictions of petty crime, sexual promiscuity, prostitution, alcoholism, moral decadence, and corruption, to which civil servants and white- and blue-collar workers were especially susceptible in big cities like Nairobi.

Maillu is a prolific writer who has published more than forty titles, but it is debatable if some of his more serious recent titles, like *The Ayah* (1986) and *Broken Drum* (1991), belong to the same genre of popular literature as do his earlier efforts. Examples of such early works of Maillu are *After 4.30* (prose, 1974a), *Unfit for Human Consumption* (prose, 1973a), *My Dear Bottle* (poetry, 1973b), *Troubles* (prose, 1974b), the multivolume *The Kommon Man* (poetry, 1975a and b, 1976), and *No* (prose, 1976). Roger J. Kurtz writes authoritatively in his study characterizing the identity of popular fiction in Kenya, about how quite "Early in his writing career, Maillu made a survey of potential readers in order to discover their interests. Respondents highlighted half a dozen topics – politics, sex, human relations, religion, death, and money – and Maillu tailored his writing accordingly, quickly producing best sellers with titles that speak for themselves" (1998: 97).

If Kurtz is correct, there is much to be learned by all who write or wish to write – whether within the intellectual or the popular parameters – from Maillu's inspirational approach to fiction writing: the ability to base creative writing upon an imaginative response to the tastes and desires of a real reading audience rather than a hypothetical one. Since the common charge of

intellectuals against popular literature of his kind is that it is repetitively monotonous, simplistic, naïve, and sentimental, it would have been helpful to know the spectrum of respondents in Maillu's survey: how many intellectuals actually responded, for example, to his queries? In *Popular Literatures in Africa*, Bernth Lindfors has decried "The kind of deflation of literary value that is apparent in the gradual progression [perhaps "decline" is what Lindfors means to say here] from Ngugi's serious historical fiction of the early Sixties to p'Bitek's amusing satirical poetry of the early Seventies to Mangua's frivolous proletarian potboilers of the early Seventies . . . [which] is being duplicated in every genre as imitators with far less talent flood the market with their insipid drivel" (1991: 51). But if we have learned nothing else, it should have been that the commercial successes attending efforts by the likes of Maillu ought now to have taught us that the writer might not only find it to be emotionally more rewarding, he would have an easier time of it, if he simply reached out to grab an audience in waiting and cater to its reading interests instead of striving fortuitously to create a new one.

Indeed, if it is true, as Lindfors informs us, that "Maillu's books are extremely popular among office workers in Nairobi and among young people in rural areas who aspire to live and work in the city," adding "Each new title has sold between 10,000 and 50,000 copies in a year or two, and profits on sales have been so good that within three years Maillu has been able to expand Comb Books from a one-man vanity press to a thriving publishing house employing seven or eight workers who do all the editing, typesetting, layout and design work using the most modern publishing equipment" (1991: 55), it is clear that we are here dealing with a rare case of a successful indigenous publishing initiative in Africa.

Olabiyi Yai warned of criticism of art history, "At this time in the history of the discipline called African art history (and indeed, a similar case could be made for the collective called African studies), a linguistic turn – the use of African indigenous concepts and discourses in African languages to investigate African cultural features . . . will help us best perform our duties as *gbenugbenu* [spokesperson]. Yes, we can still pay homage in English to our African artists, provided we revisit our concepts and check them against those elaborated in African-language art criticism" (1999: 32). Yai fixes very well the appropriate analytical methodology when he calls into question the use of concepts of analysis that bear little or no relation to the perceptual habits of Africans, taking particular exception to "patronizing" concepts such as "naive art" and "anonymous art" used "almost exclusively in relation to the arts of enslaved and colonized peoples" (1999: 33). I believe his warning applies to interpretations of

popular literature in Africa as well, for those working in this field also need to be cognizant of the high level of indigenization that has occurred as Africans take hold of the technology of writing and other forms of self-expression borrowed from the outside and make them their own. If we follow such a wisdom, the relevant question is to investigate how and why popular literature appealed so strongly to East Africans, as it did their West African counterparts; for scholars to stand outside of this tradition and utilize literary standards of a different genre to disparage it, as Lindfors has done, is grossly preposterous.

An abiding fact of experience has been that, along with urbanization in Africa has come a radical transformation of fundamental human longing. One outcome of the advancing juggernaut of modernity was the emergence of a large and diverse population, typified by an expansive taste for leisure and the titillation of what we now call the lower appetites. Thus the popularity of the writing of Maillu and his numerous imitators, who seem constantly to delight in exciting evil traits like acquisitiveness, vaulting ambition, envy, sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, and other manifestations of moral decadence, and who seem to favor scenes and characters that are devoid of any redeeming qualities. Because most of these works are amusing, and their audiences definitely love a laugh, their authors might have given up their own private concerns for the readers' happiness. Having a vocation for seeing the thoughts of their audiences is what has enabled the writers to predict trends that could profitably be developed. This is what it means to have more than manner, the art to please by capitalizing on what one's readership wants for its entertainment.

There can be no doubt that, despite their different contexts, range of coverage, and depth, the Onitsha pamphlets and all of the works of authors of popular literature in Ghana and East Africa, like Maillu and the others in this tradition, can be said to have provided for their audiences the same function that according to Q. D. Leavis in *Fiction and the Reading Public* popular fiction did for English audiences at the turn of the century: "it offers ideal companionship to the reader by its uniquely compelling illusion of a life in which sympathetic characters of a convincing verisimilitude touch off the warmer emotional responses . . . [popular] fiction for very many people is a means of easing a desolating sense of isolation and compensates for the poverty of their emotional lives" (1932: 58).

Literary expression as developed in the popular mode employed by East African writers as well as by Ghanaian authors and the Onitsha pamphleteers contains a subversive intent. Like its English counterpart, popular literature in Africa tries to offer a slice of life, a representation of the realities of its time, and

to suggest means of coping in a difficult urban milieu. Though it may appear as if its preoccupation with the sleazy side of life means its exponents relish shocking society with a vision of its sordidness just for the sake of doing so, on closer inspection, it is evident that the writers are diametrically opposed to the foibles depicted in their works. Through exposing human weaknesses, they provide the reading public much enlightenment on the very nature of living in a distressing moment of transition. However, while the familiar educational role of the oral tradition has been grafted to the popular literature of Africa, the genre is not set apart merely by the fact that it is expressed in writing. Rather, what makes this genre appealing to its audiences, what makes it distinctive as a mode of communication, is the quality of melodramatic suspense that characterizes its urban settings as well as its sententious phrasing, emotional sensationalism, narrative extravagance, and the phantasmagorical platitudes that the antiheroes or villains who populate the texts take as their inspiriting values.

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33

Caribbean literature in French: origins and development

NICK NESBITT

Caribbean literature in French is the symbolic, imaginative expression of the peoples of the French-speaking regions of the Caribbean, including Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana, and their dependencies. Each of these areas has in common the legacy of French colonialism. However, differences of history and geography have meant that though fundamental commonalities inform literary production across this linguistic and geographic zone, marked divergences are to be noted in the relative development and importance of various literary styles and themes. The challenge, then, in presenting a brief survey of this literature, is to respect its diversity (of genres, styles, themes, and regional concerns) while offering the reader the means to conceive of this field of writing as a whole. Briefly put, do these texts have anything in common besides the contingency of their common recourse to the French language?

Any attempt to encompass francophone Caribbean literature in this fashion within the boundaries of a conceptual, explanatory apparatus is at once an imperative of critical thought and the staging of an impossible task. Not only is it inevitable that certain texts will remain excluded, others misrepresented. That a world will never fit within the limits of its symbolic representation, that any analysis, no matter how detailed and thorough, will always leave out a stubborn empirical remainder is not simply a vexing logical truism. It also has the advantage, in the context of francophone Caribbean literature, of presenting as a methodological dilemma a more general existential and epistemological impasse whose reappearances and transformations can be traced throughout Antillean history. This chapter will invite the reader to consider francophone Caribbean literature in light of the divisions and alienations characteristic of francophone Antillean experience, as well as their possible transformations and resolutions. Arising at the intersection of European, African, and Native American cultures, the francophone Caribbean is fundamentally marked by both multiplicity and the attempt to recover or create attendant, ever

incomplete totalities: of language, of cultural identity, of geography, of ideological and experiential affinity.[1]

Recent studies of francophone Caribbean literature have tended to reconsider the viability of a linear, teleological account of its development; instead, they draw attention to the recurrence, in varying forms, of the multiple, fragmentary nature of both Antillean culture and francophone Caribbean literature in particular. Across the broad spectrum of francophone Caribbean literature, we find a single concern taking many forms: how to understand and actively transform the often inexplicable and indeed terrifying events (the Middle Passage and slavery, colonization, disenfranchisement) confronting both individuals and communities in their historical development. Incontestably, notions such as the Antillean search for identity and self-definition, the dilemmas of alienation, understood as a lost or unachieved wholeness (whether historical, esthetic, geographic, economic, or psychological), an "Orphic impulse" to create esthetic form via the productive imagination, or the negotiation and articulation of Antillean space have each allowed for the development of a rich and subtle historiography of francophone Caribbean literature. If the partiality of the two earliest histories of Caribbean literature in French, August Viatte's *Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française: des origins à 1950* (1954) and Lilyan Kesteloot's *Les écrivains noirs de langue française. Naissance d'une littérature* (1963) has recently been underlined (Dash 1994: 312), it was not until the early 1990s that a burst of critical publications would fill a gap addressed only by Jack Corzani (1978) and Régis Antoine (1978) in intervening years. Antoine's 1992 *La littérature franco-antillaise* is a wide-ranging survey and introduction encompassing three centuries of francophone Caribbean literature, while Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant's *Lettres créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature 1635–1975* (1991) explicitly seeks to rectify the incomplete totality that, in the authors' estimation, had previously been presented as the literature of the French Antilles. To do so, they offer an inclusive definition of a field of symbolic creation they define as "Creole literature," made up of Creole, African, and French substrates. Their critique must be kept in mind when reading texts such as the present one that limit themselves primarily to Caribbean writings in French. Taken together, these studies are in turn marked by their concern for the problematic relationship between diversity or multiplicity and totality.

This chapter will present francophone Caribbean literature in reference to three dimensions of the problem of totality: (1) the symbolic production and critique of Antillean spatial totalities (the New World, the Plantation, the Overseas Department, the Caribbean); (2) the symbolic production and

critique of Antillean identity; (3) the production and critique of esthetic totalities (poetic expression, art for art's sake, etc.). Though in many cases various texts might have been considered in light of any or all of these divisions, by avoiding a reductively linear enumeration, such a division will hopefully allow for the conceptualization of this literature in a brief space while allowing for the persistence of some degree of its complex heterogeneity.

From the production of space to the space of production

That other representations of Caribbean space pre-existed and survived the European incursion begun in 1492 is certain. The symbolic world of the Arawak and Carib Indians who preceded Columbus's voyages, however, was closed off to posterity by the New World genocide that destroyed a culture of ninety million native Americans. It is a mute discourse that has no interpreters, save perhaps in distant echoes in the oral culture of the *conteur*, as related by Chamoiseau and Confiant (1991: 16–19). It survives only in the thousands of enigmatic rock carvings dotting the landscape of Guadeloupe and Martinique (Yacou and Adélaïde-Merlande 1993: 251). If these carvings are truly the first texts of Antillean literature, their image of wholeness and reconciliation with the earth have become, in their opacity, an enigmatic Other to the Caribbean modernity initiated in 1492.

When Christopher Columbus first described the island of Guadeloupe to Queen Isabella in a recently discovered letter from January 1494, he wrote this inaugural text of French Caribbean literature not, of course, in French, nor in his native Genovese, nor even in the "standard" Spanish of the period. This, like all of Columbus's surviving texts, was written in a sort of Mediterranean Creole scholars have termed "levantesque" (in Columbe 1992: 13), a language forged on vessels in which sailors of many nationalities and languages were forced to communicate in the microcosm of their ship. Writing in a mixture of Portuguese, Genovese, and Castillean, "the great navigator expresse[d] himself correctly in no language" (in Columbe 1992: 13). While not literally a text of francophone Caribbean literature, Columbus's letter is rather the first document of what Chamoiseau and Confiant have called a French Caribbean "Creole literature." Columbus's letter begins this literature insofar as it records the violent penetration of European consciousness into a new world; the explorer's description is the narrative production of a previously unknown, putatively edenic nature. Guadeloupe is quite literally "produced" for European consciousness by Columbus's letter as an object of

European consumption, a (conceptual) commodity that would be reproduced ad infinitum in the ensuing five centuries: the exotic tropical paradise.

Columbus's text, which pretends simply to describe a pre-existing paradise, in fact operates an initial reduction of French Caribbean space to its sheer use-value at the hands of European colonizers: finding no gold to bring back to Spain, Columbus was forced to justify the expense of his trip to Ferdinand and Isabella through his narrative of the wondrous sights he found there. He describes an inviting land that beckons imperialist expansion. Columbus's voyage is, on the one hand, a utopian search for totality, an attempt to demonstrate the spherical nature of the globe, and in so doing to demonstrate the capacity of human understanding to encompass the world. And yet, its enunciation initiates the destruction of the harmonious totality his letter seeks to describe, its wondrous descriptions encouraging the European exploration that would annihilate the indigenous Caribbean population of Martinique and Guadeloupe a mere century after his arrival.

This instrumentalization of French Caribbean space first announced in Columbus's letters is the principal characteristic of early Caribbean writing in French, extending in Haiti until the country's independence in 1804, and in the French Overseas Departments, or "DOM" (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana) until as late as 1939. Following the French occupation of Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1635, French writing of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries participates in the creation of a series of totalized spaces of production, the most significant of which is the plantation, or *habitation*. The French *habitation* was a utopian economic site, a tabula rasa for the expanding forces of European capitalism. Such spaces are characterized by their total subordination to the goal of maximal, rationalized production of commodities (sugar, coffee, bananas) with humans reduced to the state of productive machines (slaves). The forces of the symbolic imagination were in turn harnessed to this project, reduced, as Chamoiseau and Confiant observe, to the state of mere functionality; *scription* rather than *écriture,* in Roland Barthes's terminology (Chamoiseau and Confiant 1991: 24–25). In the world of the plantation, writing was primarily functional, limited to bookkeeping, commercial transactions, and legal documents. The apogee of this literature of dehumanization is perhaps the famous *Code noir* promulgated by Louis XIV in 1685, a document that codified the treatment of slaves, declaring their status as mere object and possession, "raising" him or her from the status of animal to that of commodity (see Sala-Molins 1987). Though this literature disappeared in Haiti following the elimination of the white planter class upon independence, in Martinique and to a lesser extent Guadeloupe, such economic concerns

survived even the abolition of slavery in 1848 to live on until the final collapse of the plantations after 1946. They find a late, highly sublimated echo in the twenty-year-old Saint-John Perse's nostalgic evocations of plantation life in Guadeloupe: *"Plaines! Pentes! Il y / avait plus d'ordre! . . . A droite on rentrait le café, à gauche le manioc / . . . ici les fouets, et là le cri de l'oiseau Annão – et là / encore la blessure des cannes au moulin."* (1972: 25) / "Plains, Slopes! There / was greater order! . . . / To the right / the coffee was brought in, to the left the manioc . . . / here the whips, and there the cry of the bird Annaô – and still there the wound of the sugar-canes at the mill."

The various travel narratives of the colonial period also participated in this production of Caribbean space,[2] while the divided loyalties of Catholic missionaries such as Father du Tertre and Father Labat[3] rendered their relation to the dehumanizing practices of the plantations highly ambiguous. Du Tertre's and Labat's narratives of colonial space, describing in minute detail flora and fauna, plantations and fortifications, natural luxuriance and productive human industry, were effectively an early form of colonial propaganda, enticing others to participate in the process of French colonization.

The history of space in the francophone Caribbean is constituted by the recurrence of a three-fold movement: a series of violent ruptures (voyages of "discovery," the Middle Passage, colonization) that tear apart space as an object of human knowledge to create moments of existential and epistemological crisis and terror; the subsequent implementation and systematization of new spatial relationships that stabilize these conflicts, crises, and divisions in a process of increasing rationalization and reification (dispossession, massacre, and dispersal of native populations, pervasive recourse to slavery and the plantation system, increasing mastery of the production and flows of commodities – sugar, tobacco, bananas, bureaucrats[4]) culminating in the neocolonial relations of departmentalization; and ever renewed attempts to critique and overcome these spatial crises, divisions, and repressive stabilizations.

The literature of the francophone Caribbean has actively participated in each of these movements. If a scriptural, instrumentalized writing typifies the first period of Caribbean literature in French from 1635 to the period of the Napoleonic Caribbean wars (1802, Guadeloupe; 1791–1804, Haïti), the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were marked by various efforts to overcome these cleavages. This period witnessed a series of attempts to understand and describe insular francophone Caribbean spaces as totalities, whether as knowable natural space, nation-space, or home. The recurrent trope of these texts, as critics such as Yanick Lahens (1990), Françoise Lionnet and Ronnie Scharfman (1993), and J. Michael Dash (1994) and have argued, is the movement

of exile and return. While the literary culture of Guadeloupe and Martinique remained largely functional and instrumentalized following the reimposition of slavery in 1802 (see Corzani 1994: 466) in newly independent Haiti, literature participated in the imaginary constitution of a new nation, defining and demonstrating the particularities of a novel space in its history, people, flora and fauna, and topography. If one dimension of this process, to be considered below, consisted in identifying the particularities of Haitian identity, a related tendency described and defined the island itself, borrowing and adapting the language of European Romanticism in a "cartographic impulse" to articulate a natural space that would underlie an "authentic" Haitian self (Dash 1998: 47).

Poets such as Ignace Nau, Coriolan Ardouin (*Reliques d'un poète haïtien,* Relics of a Haitian Poet), and above all Oswald Durand (*Rires et pleurs,* Laughter and Tears; *Nouveaux poèmes*, New Poems) celebrated the Haitian countryside in verses formally indebted, in lesser moments, to neoclassical paraphrase, as well as to the art of Hugo and Lamartine.[5] Novelists such as Frédéric Mercelin (*Thémistocle Epaminondas Labasterre*, 1901, *La vengeance de Mama*, 1902, The Vengeance of Mama), Justin Lhérisson (*La famille des Pititecaille*, 1905, The Family Pititecaille, *Zoune chez sa ninnaine*, 1906), Fernand Hibbert (*Séna*, 1905, *Les Thazar*, 1907), and Antoine Innocent (*Mimola*, 1906) wrote the first Haitian novels, plotting the regionalist contours of Haitian social life in both city and countryside (Berrou and Pompilus 1975; see also Dash 1998: 55). Despite the predominance of utilitarian prose in Guadeloupe and Martinique during this period, a spatial identity, distinct from the French metropolis, found its first, conflicted articulations in the reactionary defense of Creole plantocracy in the poems of Poirié Saint-Aurèle (*Cyprès et palmists,* 1833, Cypresses and Palms, and *Les veillées du Tropique*, 1850, Tropical Evenings), Fernand Thaly (*Le poème des îles* [The Poem of the Islands], posthumous, 1964, and *La leçon des îles*, 1976, The Islands' Lesson) and the regionalist poetry of Octave Giraud (*Fleurs des Antilles* [Antillean Flowers], 1862) as well as the writings of Drasta Houël (*Vies légères*, 1916, Carefree Lives) and the pantheism of Léon Talboom (*Karukéra*, 1921). The region's most famous poet, Saint-John Perse, celebrated with nostalgic melancholy the Guadeloupean landscape of his youth in his first published verses, *Eloges* (1911) (Praises), while the English author Lafcadio Hearn's *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890) presented to anglophone audiences the exotic social and geographic topography of Martinique (see Corzani 1994: 468–70; Dash 1998: 58; Glissant 1981b: 430–35). A poetic "colonist of universe" (Glissant 1981b: 432), the whole of Perse's oeuvre describes an attempt to transgress and to transcend the spatial and temporal limits of

quotidian existence in an errant attempt to grasp the universal (*Anabase*, 1924, Anabasis, *Exil*, 1941, Exile, *Vents*, 1946, Winds).

This complex dialectic between national and natural space appears in hindsight to have hidden as much as it revealed. On the one hand, it produced global representations of a Caribbean space, both natural and national, invisible, in its totality, to the naked eye. At the same time, however, this literature can be understood, with rare exceptions, as having masked and hidden from view the realm of daily life: both the social space in which individuals construct communities, the political and social turmoil of the period, as well as the very language of daily experience, Creole (Antoine 1992: 126; Chamoiseau and Confiant 1991: 82).

In large part a reaction to the occupation of Haiti by American troops beginning in 1915, the Indigenist movement reversed an earlier indifference to the topography of daily life, and located the sites of a primal Haitian alterity within the country's folk culture. The poetry of Carl Brouard, Emile Roumer, and Philippe Thoby-Marcelin (see Berrou and Pompilus 1975), the prose of Jacques Roumain (*Montagne ensorcelée*, 1931, Enchanted Mountain; *Gouverneurs de la rosée,* 1944, Governors of the Dew), Jean Price-Mars (*Ainsi parla l'oncle*, 1928, Thus Spoke the Uncle), and the journal *Revue Indigène* celebrate not only the Haitian countryside, but vodou ceremonies, rural folklore, and the bars and slums of Port-au-Prince. *Gouverneurs de la rosée* in particular develops a complex discourse on Haitian space, in which the topography of rural village life determines the historical development of its inhabitants, and, by extension, that of the Haitian people as a whole. The discovery of a spring by the protagonist Manuel and his tragic self-sacrifice primes a transformation from arid sterility to fertile historical development and possibility. This regionalist tendency reaches its critical apotheosis in the work of Jacques Stephen Alexis, whose *Les arbres musiciens* (The Musician Trees), although replete with references to vodou, is in fact an attempt to surpass Indigenism in its attention to the limitations of village life and the misery of the Haitian proletariat languishing in the slums of Port-au-Prince.

In contrast to the Haitian Indigenists' celebration of Caribbean folk culture, Aimé Césaire's 1939 poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*) (see Irele 1994), perhaps the most famous text of all francophone Caribbean literature, derives a large measure of its shocking poetic force through its caustic description of a Martinican topography rotting in colonial dependency, "putrid," "dynamited," "stranded," "useless." In reference to Caribbean space, the poem is a dramatic indictment of the alienation of the colonized inhabitants of Martinique from the land they inhabit,

an incendiary rebuttal to the ideology of the exotic colonial paradise, and a symbolic rearticulation of space that negates the Cartesian structuration of the plantation for the volcanic creation of a newly transformed world. From 1941 to 1945, Césaire, in collaboration with Suzanne Césaire, Georges Gratiant, Aristide Maugée, René Ménil, and Lucie Thésée, created the journal *Tropiques* in a Fort-de-France suffering the hegemony of Marshall Pétain's envoy Admiral Robert (see Arnold 1991: ch. 3). In addition to selections of Césaire's poetry and various essays on subjects ranging from Mallarmé to the ethnology of Léo Frobénius, *Tropiques* can be seen as a Martinican adaptation of the concerns of Haitian Indigenism. The journal undertakes an "Introduction to the folklore of Martinique," with articles on Creole folktales, poems of Caribbean and African space such as Césaire's *Histoire de vivre*, as well as a series of articles that cannibalize (incorporate, transform, and adapt to new ends) the tradition of Labat's compendium of Caribbean flora and fauna: "The Pre-Columbian Fauna of the French Antilles," "Generic Denominations of French Antillean Flora," and Suzanne Césaire's extraordinary modernist evocation of the Antillean landscape, "Le grand camouflage": "And now total lucidity. My gaze moves beyond these perfect forms and colors to discover, traced upon the beautiful Antillean features, its internal torment" (Césaire and Ménil 1994).

In the years following the Second World War and the transformation of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana into French Overseas Departments (1946), the sense of alienation from the land and from social space itself first described by Suzanne and Aimé Césaire found its most articulated form in the work of Edouard Glissant (see Aldrich and Connell 1992 and Burton and Reno 1995). Glissant's wide-ranging work is arguably the most complex and extensive in all francophone Caribbean literature, spanning fifty years' steady production of poetry, novels, essays, and theater (see Dash 1995 and Britton 1999). One vector of Glissant's work has addressed Caribbean spatial experience with a global, nomadic vision, from the early epic poem *Les Indes* (1956) (The Indies), marked by the influence of Saint-John Perse, through the recent novel *Tout-monde* (1993) and the essays *Poétique de la relation* (1990) (Poetics of Relation) and *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1996) (Introduction to a Poetics of the Diverse). Novels such as *La lézarde* (1958) describe characters forced to abandon the security of home for an uncertain future (Dash 1995: 6). Marked by a vast range of concerns that straddle the formal divisions of this essay (space, identity, esthetics), these texts share a concern for an exploration of spatial experience as constitutive in the development of consciousness, both individual and collective. In this view, both the relation to the larger Caribbean community – which Glissant terms *Antillanité* – and to a world governed by

inter-relation – *"tout-monde"* – describe the existence of complex, fluctuating totalities beyond the alienation and reification characteristic in Glissant's view of French Caribbean experience, totalities accessible to human imagination, understanding, and construction (see Hallward 1998).

Along with this affirmation of an open, globalized space, Glissant's work sustains a corrosive critical valence, as he analyzes the historical and experiential alienations that have deprived francophone Caribbean consciousness of a sense of home: the plantation, in which space belongs to the land owner, colonization and later departmentalization, in which space belongs to the French Metropolis. These alienations receive their most compelling description in what remains the most imaginative, probing, and original analysis of Antillean history, culture, and experience, Glissant's 1981 work, *Le discours antillais*. The many vectors of Glissant's analysis explicate multiple crises of production in Antillean culture: crises of economic production (decline of the plantation system, vitiation of productive forces following departmentalization); crises of historical production (absence of historical dynamism and the failure of historical representation, memory, and self-understanding), crises of esthetic production (poetic mimetism, subordination to monological models such as Negritude), and crises in the production of autonomous subjective experience (subordination and assimilation to French culture, the manic, neurotic character of Antillean experience, erasure and blockage of communal intersubjectivity).

Numerous other francophone texts develop aspects of this critique of Caribbean spatial hegemony. Haitian novels in the period following the accession to power of François Duvalier in 1958 frequently describe Haitian space as a scene of cruelty far more violent and destructive than the subtle alienations of Martinican experience Glissant relates (Antoine 1992: 143). Examples include *Moins l'infini* (Less Infiinity) and *Mémoire en colin-maillard* by Anthony Phelps (1976), *Les affres d'un défi* (The Agony of a Challenge) by Frankétienne (1979), *Le nègre crucifié* by Gérard Etienne (1994), *Le mât de cocagne* (Festival of the Greasy Pole) by René Depestre (1979), and *Mourir pour Haïti* (To Die for Haiti) by Roger Dorsinville (1980). More recent fiction of the Haitian diaspora abandons this spatial dystopia for the space of immigration and exile that forms a corollary to Glissant's investigations of *relation* and *tout-monde*. *Un ambassadeur macoute à Montréal* and *Une femme muette* (A Mute Woman) by Gérard Etienne (1973, 1983), *Les urnes scelées* (1995) (The Sealed Urns) by Emile Ollivier, *Louis Vortex* by Jean Métellus (1992), *La bélière caraïbe* by Anthony Phelps (1980), and *Manhatten Blues* by Jean-Claude Charles (1985) are illustrative of this tendency, while Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1989)

(How to Make Love to a Negro) never once mentions Haiti in the whole of its *mise-en-abîme* of a black writer in Montreal writing a book about a black writer in Montreal writing a book . . . [6] The novels and short stories of Edwidge Danticat, while written in English, encompass both the dystopian Haitian landscape of Duvalier as well as the complex experiences of Haitian exile in the western Metropolis (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 1994; *Krik? Krak!*, 1995; *The Farming of Bones*, 1998).

Certain francophone literature written by Antillean women can be understood as both a critique of a masculinist social space that excludes and dispossesses women, and the conquest and elaboration of a zone of refuge and safety that would allow for the flourishing of a whole, reconciled self. Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* (1982) and Maryse Condé's *Une saison à Rihata* (1981) (A Season in Rihata) each describe a female protagonist's exile in Africa, a hostile, foreign space where they experience alienation and powerlessness. More affirmative is the work of Gisèle Pineau (*Un papillon dans la cité*, 1992, A Butterfly in the Ghetto; *La grande drive des esprits*, 1993, The Great Drive of the Spirits; *L'espérance-macadam*, 1995) and Simone Schwarz-Bart (*Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, 1972, The Bridge Beyond, 1974, and *Ti Jean l'Horizon*, 1981b, Between Two Worlds, 1981a). Schwarz-Bart's writing in particular describes a zone of plenitude and reconciliation that prefigures and complements in this respect the movement of Créolité: "One's country often depends on a person's heart: it's tiny if your heart is small, and enormous if your heart is big" (1972: 11). A veritable "poetics of space" (Shelton 1994: 432), Schwarz-Bart's texts reconquer Antillean space for the female subject, drawing on the power of the literary imagination and poetic creativity in a reformulation of the "magic realism" that has defined Antillean spatial experience since Jacques Stephen Alexis (see Alexis 1956).

The novels of the Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé trace a nomadic space, as characters move between the Caribbean, France, West Africa, North and South America. Condé's critical vision undermines illusory faith in a mythical home, be it Africa (*Hérémakhonon*, 1976), France or the United States (*Les derniers rois mages*, 1992, The Last of the African Kings, 1997c; *Désirada*, 1997), or the Caribbean itself (*Traversée de la mangrove*, 1989, Crossing the Mangrove, 1995). Other novels of the postwar period from Guadeloupe and Martinique address issues of spatial and temporal experience as well. Daniel Maximin's *L'isolé soleil* (1981) (Lone Sun, 1989) and Vincent Placoly's *Frères volcans* (1983) (Brother Volcanoes) revisit a buried Antillean history to describe a postmodern Caribbean experience, divided between the Antilles, Paris, and the American continents, in which a "submarine" unity (Kamau Brathwaite)

of cultural identities underlies a surface fragmentation of space and time.[7] The Martinican *Créolité* movement has developed a complex meditation on Caribbean space that builds on the earlier work of Glissant. The 1989 manifesto *Eloge de la créolité* (In Praise of Creoleness) seeks to recenter Antillean spatial experience around the complex (European, Native American, African, East Indian, Chinese, Lebanese) composition of Martinican Creole culture (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1993). The representation of this multifaceted Caribbean social topography is elaborated in the novels of Ernest Pépin (*L'homme-au-bâton*, 1992; *Tambour-babel*, 1996), Patrick Chamoiseau (*Chronique des sept misères*, 1988, Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows, 1999; *Solibo magnifique*, 1988; *Texaco*, 1992), and Raphaël Confiant (*Le nègre et l'amiral*, 1988, The Negro and the Admiral; *Eau de Café*, 1991; *L'allée des soupirs*, 1994, The Alley of Sighs), which describe the complex interrelations of space, time, and Creole identity in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Subjective totalities: francophone Caribbean identity

The violent contradictions of the plantation and French colonization engendered blockages, ruptures, and fragmentation not only in the constitution of spatial experience, but also in the formation of a coherent identity for Antillean subjects. Slavery was a further dehumanization following the cultural genocide of the Middle Passage, in which Africans of diverse ethnic origins were reduced to an absolute minimal degree of socialization through the loss of common language, customs, and traditions. Since plantation life systematically thwarted the cultural development of slaves for fear of rebellion, tending to prohibit their alphabetization, the constitution of individual subjectivity grew as precarious as the actual human lives exploited and mechanized for their sheer quotient of productivity as replaceable commodities. A sense of one's individual identity as coherent self persisting across time and space, an understanding of one's being as more than mere machine, capable of imaginative creativity and communal awareness, were not simply luxuries in the world of the *habitation*. Self-consciousness represented a profound threat to the plantation as mode of production, insofar as its cultivation implied the capacity both to critique one's subjection and the ability to imagine alternatives to such an existence. Within this context, needless to say, subjectivity persisted in the face of torture, violence, and suffering, but it was forced, as it were, to go underground, to take refuge in the oral culture of the *habitation* in a process described by René Depestre as a cultural "marooning" (*marronnage*) (Depestre

1980: 104; Chamoiseau and Confiant 1991: 15–64). Despite this ongoing process, the development of a *written* literature that would model and construct an autonomous postcolonial Caribbean subjectivity would only begin following the defeat of the French plantocracy and Napoleonic Empire in 1804 in Haiti.

Haiti witnessed the development and flourishing of the literary essay over a century before Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guyana. Its primary aim was to articulate a notion of national self-identity that would justify the independence of a young nation (Dash 1994: 529–46, 1998: ch. 2). The most important figure in this process in the first half of the nineteenth century was the chief advisor of the Haitian king Henri Christophe, the baron de Vastey. Faced with the constant menace of invasion by foreign powers in the country's early years, Vastey's essays assert the necessary independence of Haiti through both a violent condemnation of colonialism and the affirmation and symbolic creation of a black national identity that would negate the racist rejection of Haiti's right to exist, as in his *Le système colonial dévoilé* of 1814 (see Berrou and Pompilus 1975: vol. 1, 73–79). As Haitian political life became increasingly divided through the nineteenth century between the dominant mulatto class and the poor, disenfranchised populace, writers such as Emile Nau (*Histoire des caciques d'Haïti*, 1854) and Beauvais Lespinasse (*Histoire des affranchis de Saint Domingue*, 1882) argued for Haiti's status as the vanguard of the black race, while a generation later Anténor Firmin responded to Arthur de Gobineau's infamous 1853 *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races) in his *De l'égalité des races humaines* (1884) (On the Equality of the Human Races). The poetry of Haitian Romanticism described above can itself be understood as an attempt to forge an identity from the encounter between the individual imagination and historical and geographic reality, as the poet confronts both nature (the Haitian topography) and history (the implications of the War of Independence and Statehood).

The literary construction of a francophone Caribbean identity received its most famous and controversial articulation in the Negritude movement, founded in Paris by Aimé Césaire (the term first appears in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 1939), Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Gontran Damas. Negritude, in Césaire's usage, refers to the collective self-understanding of the members of the African diaspora, an identity based on a common historical experience of both African heritage and the suffering and unfreedom of slavery.[8] A number of literary texts predate the appearance of Césaire's poem, preparing the ground for Césaire's explosive intervention into the symbolic politics of Caribbean identity. From the 1920s on, texts such as René Maran's novel *Batouala* (1921) and Jean Price-Mars's collection of essays *La vocation de*

l'élite (1919) critiqued the denigration of African diasporic cultures. Haitian Indigenism, described above, located the Haitian self within the island's folklore and poor urban culture in texts such as Jean-Price Mars's *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (1928) and the journal *La Revue Indigène* (1928–30) while the *griots* movement (1938–40) that followed it announced the reactionary, racist totalitarian logic numerous commentators have found implicit in Negritude.[9]

In Martinique and Guadeloupe a series of political and literary journals in the 1920s and 30s announced a new spirit critical of colonialism and eager to affirm a black identity. Among these were *La Race Nègre*, founded by Lenis Blanche in 1927, *La Dépêche Africaine*, founded by René Maran and Paulette Nardal in 1928, *Le Cri des Nègres* (1931), the *Revue du Monde Noir* (1931), and, most significantly, *Légitime Défense*, founded in 1932 by the Martinican Etienne Léro, and *L'Etudiant Noir* (1934), founded by Césaire along with Gilbert Gratiant, Léonard Sainville, Paulette Nardal, and Léopold Senghor. Though short-lived, *Légitime Défense* articulated in its single published issue a fervent condemnation of French colonialism, racism, and capitalist exploitation drawing upon discourses of Surrealism, Hegelian Marxism, and Freudianism (Léro 1979). In the Guyanan Léon Damas's first collection of poetry entitled *Pigments* (1937), the poet polemically identifies himself as "nègre," revindicating this stigmatized term in an affirmation of black identity (Damas 1937).

The works of francophone Caribbean literature that participate in the Negritude movement – understood loosely as stretching from the 1928 publication of *La Revue Indigène* and *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, through the period of decolonization in the 1960s – share an underlying logic that conceives of the construction of Antillean identity following the model of a productive, radically historical subjectivity. It is among the many paradoxes of the literature of Negritude that its essentialist revindication of black identity is articulated, in large part, using the intellectual tools of the European colonizers. Césaire's debt to poets including Rimbaud, Leautréamont, Claudel, Apollinaire, and André Breton, and ethnologists such as the German Léo Frobénius is well documented (see Arnold 1981 and Combe 1993). Negritude and the francophone literature of decolonization as a whole formed its arguments using the tools of the French intellectual milieu of the period 1930–60. Elements of Marxian critique, including Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and Hegelian and Sartrean phenomenology structure the theoretical approach of Negritude as a literary and intellectual movement. While numerous critics have found an essentialist, ontological black subject implicit in Senghor's understanding of Negritude, as well as Césaire's early racialist use of the term (Arnold 1981: 38), the literature of Negritude can also be seen

in a more positive light to have enacted the historical construction of a self-conscious black subject, exemplified by Césaire's famous invocation of the Haiti of Toussaint Louverture in his *Cahier: "Haïti, où la negritude se mit debout pour la première fois et dit qu'elle croyait à son humanité"* (see Irele 1994: 23), "Haiti, where Negritude raised itself up for the first time and said that it believed in its humanity."

If, following the reasoning of Hegel and Marx, one can in fact understand the Caribbean slave to be fully human and his or her master as *de*humanized by the practice of enslavement, it is because the slave engages an active construction of his or her identity through labor: "Men distinguish themselves from animals, Marx wrote, as soon as they begin to produce." This argument claiming the master's dehumanization is explicitly brought to bear in Césaire's trenchant condemnation of colonialism, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950). In the literature of Negritude, the active production of an historically dynamic black subject becomes not merely a matter of narrative description, in texts such as Césaire's historical study *Toussaint Louverture* (1960) and his plays *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963) (The Tragedy of King Christopher, 1970) and *Une saison au Congo* (2001) (A Season in the Congo). In fact, it has often been maintained that the act of esthetic production reflexively generated an historical self-understanding within the francophone African diasporic intelligentsia (Labou Tansi 1987). Following the Hegelian / Marxist logic of productive alienation, the literary object (as poem, novel, or play) confronts an unfree colonial subject / reader, to describe both his or her unfreedom, and an image of a free black subject.[10] In this view, the literature of Negritude is not merely an esthetic side note to the march of history leading to the African independences. Instead, Negritude's inspired representation of human subjugation and freedom helped generate an historical awareness and existential fury that primed the process of decolonization on both objective (historical) and subjective (identitarian) levels.

If Negritude can be understood to emphasize the enlightenment of a heroic (racialized, masculine) individual who represents his people, a long tradition of social realism in the francophone Caribbean has in contrast striven to describe historical transformations in class and racial consciousness on an intersubjective, communal level. Following the incipient Haitian realism of Frédéric Mercelin, Justin Lhérisson, Fernand Hibbert, and Antoine Innocent described above, the novels of Jacques Roumain (*La montagne ensorcelée*, 1931, The Enchanted Mountain, and *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, 1944), Joseph Zobel (*Diab'-la*, 1946, and *La rue cases-nègres*, 1955, Black Shack Alley), Jacques Stephen Alexis (*Compère Général Soleil*, 1955, *L'espace d'un cillement*, 1959, The Space of a Blink),

and, in French Guyana, Bertène Juminer (*Les bâtards*, 1961, The Bastards, *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*, 1963, The Threshold of a New Cry) depict a complex dialectic between individual protagonists who, in the manner of Negritude, come to understand their exploitation within the confines of race, class, economics, and history, and, on the other hand, the Caribbean populace whose real and actual freedom cannot be achieved by proxy.

The Martinican psychologist and essayist Frantz Fanon's two major works, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967a) and *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963), pursue the critique of French Antillean alienation begun by Césaire. The first of these texts operates primarily on the level of individual psychology. There, Fanon describes the French Antillean's subordination to and prostration before a white French cultural and linguistic superego. While critical of the racial essentialism at work in the ideology of Negritude (1995: 99), Fanon describes a logic of racial enlightenment that, through the cultivation of self-consciousness on the part of the colonized (1995: 81), would arrive at a humanist overcoming of the binary logic of racial division (1995: 183–88). *Les damnés de la terre* attempts to move beyond the psychologism of *Peau noire* – the latter content to imagine the transformation of individual subjectivity without calling for the concomitant transformation of the world that determines its subjection – in its invocation of a revolutionary refounding of the social collectivity. To this effect, Fanon imputes the existence of an Algerian "national consciousness" whose reality would reconcile the alienated colonial experience described in *Peau noire* (*Les damnés* 1991: 230–35). Though he articulated a nonracialized vision of social transformation, Fanon remains within the orbit of Negritude insofar as he, like Césaire, advocates an intellectual and cultural avant-garde – itself differing only in its colonial specificity from the avant-gardist idealism of Lenin and Lukacs – in the face of a yet-to-be-concretized self-consciousness of the colonial masses (1991: 239).

Edouard Glissant's writings continue and complexify the reflections on Caribbean communal consciousness begun in the novels of francophone social realism and Fanon's critique of colonial alienation. Glissant's early novels (*La lézarde*, 1958, *Le quatrième siècle*, 1964, The Fourth Century, 2001) move beyond the heroic individualism of Negritude to convey a sense of Martinican collective consciousness traversing both time and space,[11] while the essays *L'intention poétique*, 1969, Poetic Intention) and *Le discours antillais*, 1981b, *Caribbean Discourse*, 1989), like René Depestre's *Bonjour et adieu à la Négritude* (1980), undertake the deconstruction of Césaire's heroic racial subject, proffering instead a collective Caribbean identity that Glissant terms "Antillanité."

To this effect, Glissant's later novels (*Malemort*, 1975; *La case du commandeur*, 1981a, The Commander's Shack; *Mahogony*, 1987), like the novels of the Haitian Frankétienne (*Les affres d'un défi*, 1979), can be said to undertake the narrative representation of a collective francophone voice.

Much francophone literature written by women can be understood as a critique of alienated subjectivity following lines of gender. Often written as first-person narratives, novels such as Michèle Lacrosil's *Sapotille et le serin d'argile* (1960) and *Cajou* (1961) (Cashew), Simone and André Schwarz-Bart's *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967) (A Plate of Pork with Green Bananas), Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Le quimboiseur l'avait dit* (1980) (The Healer Had Said So) and *Juletane* (1982), Marie Chauvet's *Amour, colère, folie* (1968) (Love, Anger, Insanity), and Suzanne Dracius's *L'autre qui danse* (1989) (The Other Who Dances) describe female subjects moving between the contradictions and alienations – psychological, affective, interpersonal, communal, historical – of Caribbean societies and the construction of a reconciled female subject of which their writing stands as an image.[12]

The production of esthetic totalities

If francophone Caribbean literature is marked by its concerted struggle to address the problems of the production of space and identity in a colonial, and now neocolonial world, it is nonetheless quite specifically an *esthetic* intervention into a larger historical and existential dilemma. What then constitutes the specificity and import of what Michael Dash, glossing Sartre's *Orphée noire*, has termed an "Orphic impulse" to construct from the depths of human suffering these objects of tortured beauty? The development of a personalized and unique mode of symbolic expression can be said to constitute the baseline of a successful poetic voice; paradoxically, then, it is the ever-renewed effort to construct truly unique textual voices that can express the transformations of Antillean subjectivity – whatever their generic mode of expression – that constitutes the unity of francophone Caribbean literature. In other words, in the face of the dehumanizing forces of slavery and colonialism – in which every individual is a mere productive machine – and then of global capitalism – in which individual subjectivity is, if not actively suppressed, merely superfluous to the global market of consumers and commodities – the cultivation of subjectivity via poetic expression can be seen, in its very uselessness as a commodity, to be an antidote to rampant commodification. As objects constructed following a particular, individual logic, but in deference to no external use or exchange value, francophone Caribbean esthetic objects offer

models of noninstrumentalized subject–object relations in a world that has been marked by what must surely count among the most dehumanizing and exploitative of all historical processes.

While the literature of the white landowning ("*béké*") class, as well as much of the strictly imitative, mimetic Creole writing prior to Césaire's *Cahier* that Chamoiseau and Confiant term "superficial" and "paradisiacal" (1991: 89) fails this standard, a number of Haitian poets from the early 1900s developed vibrant, if still somewhat derivative, poetic voices. The generation of poets identified with the journal *La Ronde* (1892–1902) rebelled against the topographic and historical referentiality of the Haitian Romantics (described above). In purging their expression of an overtly engaged political and social topicality, they left themselves open to the verdict of escapism in the eyes of future generations. As Michael Dash has argued, however, their nominally apolitical expression itself holds a hidden, if ambiguous, critical content (1998: 52–60). The poetry of Etzer Vilaire (*Poèmes de la mort*, 1900, Poems of Death; *Page d'amour*, 1901; *Nouveaux poèmes*, 1910), Amédée Brun, Edmond Laforest (*Sonnets-médaillons*, 1909), and Georges Sylvain (*Confidences et melancholies*, 1901), engages, via the esthetic imagination, the construction of a utopian space beyond the violence and divisions of political and historical life in Haiti. Adopting certain modes and tropes of Mallarméan symbolism, while retaining other stylistic traits of Lamartine, Hugo, and Musset, theirs is a poetics of absence and exile, in reaction to the Haitian nativism of the previous generation.[13]

With the possible exception of Saint-John Perse, whose ambiguous relation to francophone Caribbean letters and culture has been well described by Edouard Glissant (1981b: 430–35), Aimé Césaire is undoubtedly the region's greatest poetic voice. Césaire's epochal *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) (see Irele 1994) is a vertiginous, cathartic probing of Antillean experience, celebrated by André Breton in the pages of *Tropiques* as "the greatest lyric monument of our time."[14] Césaire's poetry, characterized by its emotive and affective force, enormous lexical and referential range, neologistic breadth of imagination, syntactical daring, rhythmic drive, and its articulation of an overwhelming ethical imperative, extends over four decades of production. Césaire's early production – in collections including *Les armes miraculeuses* (1946) (Miraculous Arms) (see Césaire 1994), *Soleil cou coupé* (1948) (Sun Cut Neck), and *Corps perdu* (1950) (Lost Body) – shows an audaciousness that has come to stand as a properly Caribbean surrealism (one developed more or less independently of Breton's Metropolitan school). Following Césaire's intense involvement in the political contestation of the decolonization movement in the 1950s, his poetic voice became increasingly grounded in the referential

contestation of historical injustice, without ever abandoning a certain Modernist complexity for a banal social realism (*Et les chiens se taisaient*, 1956, And the Dogs Grew Quiet; *Ferrements*, 1960, Chains; *Cadastre*, 1961). Finally, his most recent collection, *Moi, laminaire* (1982), revisits the Martinican landscape of the *Cahier* to move between "mountain and mangrove" (Césaire 1994: 383), describing both a decaying Martinican topography and an existential revolt now tinged with a deep nostalgia that verges on paralysis.

The work of poets such as Guy Tirolien (*Balles d'or*, 1961, Golden Bullets) and Paul Niger (*Initiation*, 1954) partakes of the Negritude movement in its topical attention to racial injustice and the drive towards decolonization, while Sonny Rupaire's *Cette igname brisée qu'est ma terre natale* (1973) (This Broken Yam that is My Native Land), like Elie Stephenson's *Une flèche pour le pays à l'encan* (1975) (An Arrow for the Country Up for Auction), articulates a provocative condemnation of inequality and human suffering, both in Rupaire's native Guadeloupe and in the Algerian war, where he fought for that country's independence. In Haiti, René Depestre's poetry has given voice to the suffering of his country, as well as a certain yearning for sensual plenitude, in collections including *Etincelles* (1945) (Sparks), *Minérai noir* (1956) (Black Ore), and *Poète à Cuba* (1976). Less overtly militant is the poetry of Alfred Melon-Degras (*L'habit d'arlequin*, 1974, The Harlequin's Clothes; *Avec des si, avec des mais*, 1976, With Yesses, with Buts), whose solemn tone of exhaustion, like Césaire's *Moi, laminaire*, describes a vision of Caribbean experience evocative of a New World *antillanité*.

Like Melon-Degras and Daniel Maximin (*L'invention des Désirades*, 2000), Edouard Glissant's extensive poetic corpus points to an experience that reaches beyond the limits of insular awareness. In this sense, his early poem *Les Indes* (1956) (The Indies) reworks the global vision of Saint-John Perse within the context of the historical epic of slavery and the Middle Passage to express, in contrast to Saint-John Perse, a virulent condemnation of human suffering and an opening onto a future historical transformation of what constitutes, in Glissant's terms, the "successful colonization" of the French Caribbean. Similarly, Glissant's volume *Sel noir* (1960) (Black Salt) gestures towards Africa as a site of freedom and possibility, while the 1977 volume *Boises* partakes of the historical disillusionment, expressed in images of a desiccated landscape, typical of the postcolonial period. In *Pays rêvé, pays réel* (1985) (Dreamed of Country, Real Country), Glissant revisits the presence of a mythical Africa in the construction of a multiply layered Caribbean experience of resistance and imagination. Glissant's poetry can be understood to undertake, on the level of the symbolic imagination, the construction of the subjective experience

his analyses have shown to be vitiated by historical forces and rendered weak and dependent by contemporary colonialism. Through a process of lyrical proliferation, there appears a subject who is no longer the heroic subject of Negritude, nor simply the critically enlightened subject of Glissant's prose, but one traversed by lines of the diverse and multiple, able to construct and maintain within its singular perception the vast extension and manifold range of the *tout-monde*.[15]

Both the representation of divisions and alienations, as well as the desire for reconciliation and plenitude characteristic of francophone Caribbean literature are determined by – yet not simply reducible to – the unique status of the region, in contrast to the vast majority of African diasporic cultures. If Haiti has enjoyed, on the one hand, a nominal independence since 1804 marked by both an immense national pride and cultural creativity and, on the other hand, political and economic destitution, the French Overseas Departments offer instead the complex and ambiguous image of a postmodern European colony. Amid systematic economic under-development combined with a subsidized European standard of living, an articulate and self-conscious populace lives in what numerous Antillean authors have judged a psychological exile; such contradictions of French Antillean culture arise from the utter violence of slavery and the plantation to live on amid postmodern globalization. In the few periods when the literature of the francophone Caribbean has invoked an immanent idyllic harmony, it has merely left unspoken the human suffering and alienation that predetermined and allowed for such a gesture. Instead, this rich literature, whether as existential critique or utopian *dépassement*, has more often drawn its force from the contradictions of Caribbean history, offering to readers an array of esthetic representations of the human experience whose force and plasticity of expression stand among the finest achievements of black Atlantic modernity.

Notes

1. Though an examination of the notion of totality, of central importance not only in francophone Caribbean letters, but in western critical thought as a whole, is beyond the scope of this article, recent commentators (Cailler 1999, Hallward 1998) on Edouard Glissant in particular have underlined its importance. Martin Jay's *Marxism and Totality* (1984) offers an encyclopedic overview of the concept.
2. See, for example Guillaume Coppier, *Histoire et voyages des Indes occidentales* (1744), François de Chastellux, *Voyage de M. le Marquis de Chastellux dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (1786), and Baron de Wimpffen, *Voyage à Saint-Domingue* (1797).

3. See du Tertre 1654 and Labat 1972. Labat's narrative, appearing fifty years after that of du Tertre, bears witness to an exponentially more complex plantation system. See for example his description of the church's *habitation* at Cabesterre, Martinique (1972: 71–80), including paternalistic descriptions of "our Negroes [*nègres*]."
4. The French Overseas Departments supplied significant numbers of bureaucrats to the French colonies in West Africa.
5. Annotated selections from these and other Haitian poets can be found in Berrou and Pompilus 1975: vol. I.
6. See Jonassaint 1986, a collection of interviews with Haitian writers in exile.
7. The reference is to the anglophone poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite's phrase "The unity is submarine," quoted by Glissant in Glissant 1981b: 134.
8. The literature on Negritude is extensive. See Irele 1997, which underlines the importance of Negritude for African diasporic thought in its largest sense, while Nesbitt 1999 emphasizes the Caribbean context of Césaire's contribution. Longer studies include Adotevi 1972, Arnold 1981, Depestre 1980, and Confiant 1993.
9. René Depestre locates the origins of Negritude's racialism in Price-Mars's failure to elaborate the sociohistorical factors determining Haitian cultural specificity, instead having recourse to a simplistic racial explanation (Depestre 1980: 46–48). See also Dash 1998: 75, Arnold 1981: 58, and Nesbitt 2000.
10. Adapted to the historical specificity of colonialism, this is one of the primary theoretical models informing Negritude. Its origins lie in the master/slave dialectic of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as explicated in Alexandre Kojève's influential *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (1933–39). Sartre explicitly reads Césaire in these terms in his comments on esthetic objectification in *Orphée noire* (1949).
11. Dash, *Edouard Glissant* (1995: 62).
12. The diversity of subject matters and approaches to be found in the work of these and other women writers of the francophone Caribbean, a diversity unfortunately erased by the brevity of the preceding description, can be appreciated in the articles collected in Suzanne Rinne and Joëlle Vitiello's *Elles écrivent des Antilles (Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique)*. Preface by Ginette Adamson (1997). (See also Lionnet 1995 and Condé 1979.)
13. See Berrou and Pompilus (1975: vol. II) for analysis and representative texts of the poets of *La Ronde*.
14. Breton, André, "Martinique, charmeuse de serpents: Un grand poète noir" in Césaire and Ménil 1994, *Tropiques*, no. 11: 122. The poem has enjoyed a wealth of revealing interpretations and close-readings. Readers will be well served by the studies of Delas (1991), Cailler (1976 and 1999), Combe (1993), Arnold (1981), Hale (1976), Irele (1994), Kesteloot (1982), and Songolo (1985).
15. See the volume *Poétiques d'Edouard Glissant*, ed. Jacques Chevrier (1999), for a range of articles addressing Glissantian poetics.

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34

Caribbean literature in Spanish

LIZABETH PARAVISINI-GEBERT

The literatures of the three hispanophone islands of the Caribbean – Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico – are the oldest in the region. Their origins can be traced back to an Arawak oral tradition rich in myth and legend – gathered in all its vividness by Spanish Friar Ramon Pané in his *Relación acerca de las antigüedades des los indios, las cuales, con diligencia, como hombre que sabe su idioma, recogió por mandato del Almirante* (1571) (An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians, Gathered Diligently by a Man Who Knows Their Language; Chronicles of the New World Encounters, 1999) – that speaks of a worldview centered on a harmonious relationship between religion, culture, politics, and patterns of work and exchange. Pané, who lived in Hispaniola from 1494 to 1499, gathered a rich trove of myths, beliefs, and aboriginal religious practices that constitute most of what we know of the Amerindian lore of the Caribbean. Together with the many descriptions found in Spanish chronicles of the dancing and singing rituals known as *areitos*, through which the Taínos recorded their history and reconstructed through drama salient episodes of everyday life, they offer glimpses of rich cultural traditions lost through the impact of warfare and the virgin soil epidemics that decimated the aboriginal population of the Caribbean. The picture they convey, of a society dependent on a simple economy of subsistence agriculture and fishing, survived the devastation and environmental assault of European conquest and colonization to make an important contribution to Puerto Rican, Dominican and, to a lesser extent, Cuban rural cultures, laying the foundation for traditions of resistance that would later serve as a counter world to the economy of the plantation. The rural subsistence farmer, a figure that with time would become the literary symbol of cultural authenticity and national purity throughout the Hispanic Caribbean, traces its existence and worldview to the Taíno/Arawak traditions captured with such vitality by Pané, later syncretized with Spanish and African customs.

The myriad exchanges triggered by Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean were, first and foremost, literary. The natural environment and autochthonous

cultures of the Caribbean region enter Spanish literature – adding to the foundations of Caribbean literature in Spanish – through Christopher Columbus's "Carta a Luis de Santangel" (1493) ("Letter of Discovery") and *Diario de a bordo* (*Diario de navegación* or shiplog, 1451–1506). The documents, which describe the natural wonders and varied people he encountered during his three voyages of "discovery," show a Spanish language already in the process of creolization, adapting itself to new realities and struggling with its inadequacies as it attempted to do justice to phenomena it had never served before. Its incorporation of Amerindian terms enriches and transforms the language, initiating the process of transculturation that would begin to give shape to a new Creole language suited to conveying the nuances of a colonial society. The myriad *Crónicas de las Indias* (Chronicles of the Indies) produced in the wake of the encounter took the shape of letters, reports, histories, and biographies that conjure up a world where classical and Amerindian myths, European and American realities and languages, ethnicities and races, coexist and clash.

The earliest of these texts focus on Hispaniola, the center for Spanish expansion in the newly discovered territories throughout the sixteenth century, and the first site of arrival for African slaves. Friar Bartolomé de las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1522) (*The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, 1974), his denunciation of the atrocities committed by the *conquistadores* against the native population, contributed an image of the Caribbean population as noble savages in harmony with the environment – the Indian as classic hero – to which Caribbean writers would return again and again in search of symbols of preconquest, preslavery cultural wholeness. Las Casas, a soldier turned bishop who had accompanied Columbus in his early travels through the region, was particularly concerned with the question of how to incorporate the native Americans into the Spanish nation as subjects with rights and prerogatives.

Las Casas's *The Devastation of the Indies*, perhaps the most influential of all chronicles of the conquest of the New World, had a long-lasting impact on historians' and writers' perception of Spain and its colonial policies. Credited with having been the source of the "Black Legend" which attributed to Spain utmost cruelty and design in the destruction and depopulation of the islands of the Caribbean, particularly of the three islands on which they concentrated their efforts – Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Cuba – Las Casas's text, with its citation of numerous incidents of the torture and maiming of indigenous peoples purportedly for failing to meet gold-production quotas, is also said to be responsible for counseling the importation of African slaves as a substitute for Indian labor, a suggestion that Las Casas came to regret and disallow.

Las Casas's subsequent works, *Historia de las Indias* (1566) (History of the Indies), which covers the history of the conquest and colonization of the Caribbean islands from 1492 to 1520, and his *Apologética historia sumaria* (1575) (General Apologetic History) in which he argues for an acknowledgment of the full rational capacities of the Indians, include African slaves among those subjects for whom he would advocate full rights as citizens. Like fellow Dominican friar Francisco de Vitoria, Las Casas wrote of the natural rights inherent in all humans, regardless of their condition, in part because of their having been created in God's image but, most importantly, because Spain's juridical tradition had elaborated and sustained a rational foundation for natural rights. Ultimately, the significance of Las Casas's work to Caribbean writing rests on his interpretation of the early history of Spanish expansion in the region as already dependent on the economic, political, and cultural exploitation of the native populations and new environments.

Eyewitness accounts of history, such as those of Las Casas, despite their obvious tensions between historical testimony and historiographic authority, determine the pattern of writing in Spanish about the Caribbean throughout the sixteenth century. The history of writing in Spain's Caribbean possessions throughout this period is indeed that of an emerging discourse that calls upon every European literary genre only to see it transformed by the necessities of the fresh content to which it seeks to respond. This content is primarily descriptive and historical, protoliterary in this new context. The cumulative importance of texts such as the 1493 letter describing the wondrous new world written by Diego Alvarez de Chanca – the Sevillian physician who accompanied Columbus on his second trip – the letters and accounts of the exploration of Florida written by Juan Ponce de León, the report to the Governor of Puerto Rico written by Juan Ponce de León Troche and Antonio de Santa Clara, known as the *Memoria de Melgarejo* (1582) (Melgarejo's Memoir) is that of chronicling how postencounter cultures and institutions, as they develop in a new multiracial social space and unfamiliar natural environments, create what is virtually a new world requiring a new literature.

Attempts at writing comprehensive histories of this crucial period in Caribbean history, such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* (1526) (Compendium of the Natural History of the Indies), already expose the uneasy consciousness of conflicting perspectives that comes out of the violence, warfare, and epidemic ravages of the conquest. Oviedo, named Official Chronicler of the Indies in 1532, in his official apologia for the conquest, had to defend the system of *encomienda* instituted by Spanish officials in their attempt to maximize Indian labor and the subsequent importation of

African slaves into the Caribbean, all in the name of the justification of Spanish colonization made necessary by the growing voices of criticism and dissent. His main work, the *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y Tierra Firme del mar Océano* (1535) (General and Natural History of the Indies, Islands, and Mainland of the Ocean Sea), described this new world from the viewpoint of an observer who was both surprised by the variety and vastness of its nature and cultures and aware that the devastation necessary for the imposition of Spanish rule in these new territories required a range of textual responses that stretched the limits of literary approaches and techniques.

These textual responses became increasingly literary as the sixteenth century moved to its close. Fernández de Oviedo had himself made his mark with the first book of poetry written in and about the new world, *Las Quinquagenas de los generosos e ilustres e no menos famosos reyes . . . e personas notables de España* (1556) (Fifty of the Generous and Illustrious and No Less Famous Kings . . . and Notable People of Spain), a text written in *arte menor* verses (six or eight syllables) in Hispaniola which, like his histories, sought to chronicle the emergence of a distinctively colonial culture. It precedes by almost three decades the most significant Caribbean literary work of the latter half of the sixteenth century, Juan de Castellanos's *Elegía de varones ilustres de Indias* (1589) (Elegy to the Illustrious Gentlemen of the Indies), the epic in verse in which de Castellanos chronicles the early history of the postencounter Caribbean, from Columbus's arrival through the conquest of Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Margarita. His stirring account of Juan Ponce de León's colonization of Puerto Rico, and of his search for the fountain of youth, helped make of the first Spanish governor of the island a hero for the ages.

As a record of the process of acculturation and of the thematic possibilities of the proto-Creole world of the Spanish Caribbean in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, no text can match two early anthologies – Eugenio Salazar de Alarcón's *Silva de poesía* (1585–95) (Assortment of Poetry) and Dr. Juan Méndez Nieto's *Discursos medicinales* (1607) (Medical Discourses). Salazar de Alarcón's *Silva de poesía*, a text that discusses and displays the poetic production of writers based in Hispaniola, speaks to their versatility, as well as to the preponderance of Italian verse forms as poetic models during this period. It is of particular importance for its mention of two women poets, Leonor de Ovando, a nun in the Santo Domingo convent of Regina Angelorum, and Elvira de Mendoza. Ovando's poems, five of which have been preserved, sustain her claim to be the first woman poet in the Americas; Mendoza's work did not survive. Méndez Nieto's *Discursos medicinales*, also introduces an intriguing collection of texts – among them a sampling of the

work of poets living in Santo Domingo at the turn of the seventeenth century. Its importance rests particularly on its introduction of the first black protagonist in Caribbean literature. His "Discurso xiv" tells the captivating tale of a slave who feigns epilepsy so as not to be separated from the woman he loves.

In this period of "firsts," Santo Domingo also boasts the first play written and performed in the Spanish Caribbean, an *entremés* (or dramatic interlude) written by Cristóbal de Llerena, a Santo Domingo-born professor at the University of Gorjón in Hispaniola. The satirical piece – performed by students in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in 1588 – already displays a proto-Creole political consciousness that expresses itself through the critique of the colonial officials and institutions that, through their lack of control of local conditions, have failed to fulfill the expectations of the population. The piece addresses a multiplicity of ills plaguing the oldest colonial city in the new world – the rising tide of prostitution, the problems posed by trade restrictions placed on the local population, which had led to the increase in smuggling and piracy, corrupt officials, and venal lawyers – and resulted in Llerena's temporary banishment from the colony.

This early promise of a blossoming of Caribbean-born writers voicing the realities of colonial life from a recognition of their difference from the metropolis was slow to fulfill itself in the seventeenth century. As the Caribbean region lost its centrality in Spain's growing empire after the conquest of Mexico and Peru and its territorial expansion throughout the Americas, the islands of the Caribbean began to lose their population. Cries of "may God take me to Peru" signaled the beginning of a flight to the continent that left the islands depopulated, and their economies dependent on subsistence agriculture and smuggling. Frequently under attack, and occasionally occupied by Dutch, French, and English privateers, the Spanish possessions in the Caribbean were quickly reduced to Hispaniola, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, a development that intensified their isolation and economic decline. They were subordinated to a peripheral role as way-stations for the Spanish *flota* transporting the wealth of South America to Spain, fortified garrisons for the armies protecting the naval routes between the new center of the empire and the metropolis, their economies dependent on the *situado*, a subsidy collected from the Mexican treasury. Until they restored their dwindling fortunes by the large-scale cultivation of sugar, which did not take firm hold on the Spanish Caribbean economies until the mid-eighteenth century, the political and social climate of these islands did not offer the most propitious ground for literary expression.

Consequently, literary production in the Spanish Caribbean throughout the seventeenth century was sporadic at best. The texts for which the century is known are often only tangentially literary. The most salient of these, *Espejo de paciencia* (1608) (Mirror of Patience), a story in two cantos written by Silvestre de Balboa, a native of the Canary Islands, is a seminal text in Cuban literature, not only for its description of the flora and fauna of the island, and of the language, mythology, and customs of the native inhabitants, but for its cast of characters, a cross-section of the growing ethnic and racial diversity of the Caribbean colonies. It narrates, in royal octaves, the true story of the kidnapping in 1604 of the Bishop of Cuba, Juan de las Cabezas Altamirano, by French pirates, and of his rescue by a ragtag militia representative of the race and class spectrum of early colonial Cuban society. From among this band of Indians, Africans, *mestizos* and *mulattos* emerges a black slave as hero. The text survived through its inclusion in Bishop Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz's *Historia de la Isla y Catedral de Cuba* (1760) (History of the Island and Cathedral of Cuba). *Espejo de paciencia* and the poems of Francisco de Ayerra Santa María, Puerto Rico's first poet, comprise the best of what can be considered strictly literary production in the seventeenth century. Ayerra Santa María, although born in Puerto Rico, gained fame and gathered prizes as a writer in Mexico, where his works were collected by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora in *Triunfo Parténico* (1683) (Parthian Triumph), and is best known for a sonnet written to the memory of celebrated Mexican poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz included in *Fama y obras póstumas* (Fame and Posthumous Works) a volume published in her honor in Spain in 1700.

Filling the vacuum left by the paucity of strictly literary production in the region during this period is a number of *descripciones* and *relaciones* that, in the process of addressing conditions on the islands (particularly in Puerto Rico, whose stagnant economy and decreasing population was the source of serious concern and study), gave ample opportunity for flights of literary fancy and incursions into creative narrative. Diego de Larrasa's *Relación de la entrada y cerco del enemigo Boudoyno, general de la armada del príncipe de Orange en la ciudad de Puerto Rico de las Indias* (1625) (Relation of the Entrance and Siege to the Island of Puerto Rico by the Enemy Boudoyno Enrico, General of the Prince of Orange's Navy) offers a stirring account of the Dutch siege and burning of San Juan. Bishop Damián López de Haro's "Carta a Juan Díaz de la Calle" (1644) ("Letter to Juan Díaz de la Calle") is of note for its disparaging portrayal of the poverty and desolation of the island, where women are described as not able to attend Mass because they lack decent clothing to appear in public. His letter is particularly known for its inclusion of a sonnet – the first example of

satirical verse written in/about Puerto Rico – that speaks of the nakedness of the black population and describes the inhabitants as fewer than those held in the prison in Seville.

It is of interest in this context to note that López de Haro's secretary, Diego de Torres Vargas, a *criollo*, offered in *Descripción de la Isla y Ciudad de Puerto Rico, y de su vecindad y poblaciones, presidio, gobernadores y obispos; frutos y minerals* (1647) (Description of the Island and City of Puerto Rico, of its Neighborhoods and Towns, Citadel, Governors and Bishops; Fruits and Minerals), a countertext to his superior's dismal assessment of the colony. Torres Vargas, writing from a decidedly colonial perspective, as one who identified with the land and its incipient national definition, has much to say in praise of the island's natural environment – particularly of its healing waters – and in defense of the moral character, intellectual potential, and physical strength of its people. His stance has prompted critics to conclude that the text represents the first example of protonational affirmation in Puerto Rican writing.

Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz's *Historia de la Islay Catedral de Cuba*, a comparable work, although finished in 1760, was not published until 1929 and, as a result, failed to have a corresponding impact on other works of this genre. Known best for his inclusion of Balboa's *Espejo de paciencia*, the *Historia . . .* offers minute descriptions of life in Cuba after Columbus's arrival, peopled with vivid historical characters and peppered with colorful anecdotes. It has been faulted by critics, however, for its failure to address the African presence in Cuba or raise the question of Cuba's growing dependence on African slavery as a main source of labor.

Writing in Hispaniola, Cuba, and Puerto Rico follows a similar descriptive and historiographic pattern throughout the eighteenth century, particularly after the introduction of the printing press in Cuba around 1723 and the publication of the first newspaper, the *Gaceta de la Habana* (Havana Gazette), founded in 1764. Of these texts – which include Alejandro O'Reilly's *Relación circunstanciada del actual estado de la población, frutos y proporciones para fomento que tiene la Isla de San Juan de Puerto Rico* (1765) (Contextualized Description of the Present State of the Population, Resources and Opportunities for Development of the Island of San Juan de Puerto Rico) – perhaps the most significant is the *Historia geográfica, civil y política de la Isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (1775) (Geographic, Civil, and Political History of the Island of San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico) by Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, noted for its acute observations of the natural environment, the customs, practices, and racial compositions of its people, and his observations on the island's dependence on slave labor as the basis for its economic development. Abbad y Lasierra's book

is of particular significance for its application of Montesquieu's theories of geographical determinism to his analysis of Puerto Rican society. The Caribbean's tropical environment, in Abbad y Lasierra's argument, determines the physical, moral, and intellectual character of native Puerto Ricans and imposes profound character changes on Spaniards who have settled in the colony. This impact, which he sees as responsible for the inferiority of the colonial population, can be overcome through *arte*, or determined intellectual exertion, thus leaving some room for the emergence of the exceptional colonial as a being comparable to the European colonizer. The arguments resurfaced in the closing years of the nineteenth century, as part of the ideas sustaining the Naturalist movement.

Abbad y Lasierra's arguments about the Spaniards' superiority, part of an intense debate that raged in the last decades of the eighteenth and opening decades of the nineteenth century, were countered by Havana native José Martín Félix de Arrate in *Llave del Nuevo Mundo* (1830), a work that, like Abbad y Lasierra's, offers a description of the geography, economy, institutions, and culture of Cuba throughout its colonial history. Arrate parades before the reader a sampling of those exceptional *criollos* whose *arte* constitute his strongest case for the equality, if not the superiority, of the colonial. Like Abbad y Lasierra, Arrate builds his arguments on theories of environmental determination, but unlike the former, he argues for the superiority of man in his natural environment, building his line of reasoning on a comparison between the adaptability of the indigenous population to their native landscape and the struggles of the African slaves to acclimatize themselves to unfamiliar surroundings. Like Abbad y Lasierra, Arrate, although recognizing the moral evils of slavery and the corrupting effect it has on slaves and slaveholders alike, rejects abolitionist viewpoints as being inimical to the economic health of the islands.

The institution of slavery does indeed constitute the main focus of intellectual debate, and literary production, in the Spanish Caribbean islands – particularly in Cuba – through the first half of the nineteenth century. In Cuba, beginning with *Petrona y Rosalía* (1838) by Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel, the novel carried the burden of translating problematic ideology into narratives accessible to the Cuban reading public. The Cuban antislavery novel was profoundly influenced by the European and Latin American literary fashions of the second half of the nineteenth century – Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, and *Criollismo* – but most particularly by the Romantic movement. It accomplished its effect primarily through the exploitation of every possible convention we have come to associate with Romantic writing – melodrama, vows of virginity, incest, racial taboos, exoticism, primitivism, and bathos. The seminal

works of the Cuban antislavery novel – Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1838) (*Cecilia Valdés*, 1962), Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (1839), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), and Antonio Zambrana's *El negro Francisco* (1875) – are vital, impassioned stories of thwarted love whose sentimental core provides an ideal filter for mildly subversive abolitionist arguments and denunciations of its concomitant racism, as well as for more conservative rationalizations of slavery and racial hierarchies.

What links these narratives together is their adherence to liberal philanthropist Domingo Delmonte's position that as a group the abolitionists' main recourse was that of speaking out against the abuses of the institution through every avenue open to them in an effort to gain converts to their cause. Cuban writers found their ideal vehicle in the passionate melodrama of the forbidden love between mulatto women and white upper-class men. Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* is structured around such a tragic relationship – that between a young white man and the mulatto woman whom he discovers to be his half-sister, a revelation that eventually results in his murder after he has married a woman of his own race and class. Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* – the story of a slave couple whose love is destroyed by the brutality of the slave system – explores the somewhat touchy subject of slave rebellion as a response to the forced labor, sexual exploitation, and racial oppression of slavery. The plot of *Francisco*, as that of Zambrana's *El negro Francisco* (which is based on the earlier text), revolves around the tensions between the plantation master's sexual desire for the woman the protagonist loves and the slaves' pure, innocent love. In both tales the young woman, in an effort to save her lover, capitulates to the master's desire, a decision that leads to the protagonist's suicide. Both tragic love stories are presented in the context of unsuccessful slave rebellions.

Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* – often compared to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (published eleven years later in 1852) for its contribution to antislavery literature – finds a fresh approach in the reversal of some of the familiar elements, portraying the heartbreaking love of a mulatto slave for his white mistress and his mortal sadness when she marries a man unworthy of her. The novel was banned in Cuba both because of its antislavery stand and for the perceived immorality of its subversive equation of slavery with the situation of women in Cuba's nineteenth-century colonial society. Through the character of Teresa, the poor and unattractive cousin to the heroine who identifies with Sab's plight and offers to run away with him and begin a new life together in some faraway land, Gómez de Avellaneda adds a feminist dimension to her abolitionist text, shocking her audience in the process. As a result, in 1844 the official Censor, Hilario de Cisneros, declared the novel

to contain a doctrine "subversive to the system of slavery" and contrary to "morals and good customs."

The Cuban antislavery novel, with its Romantic typology of the white master with his illegitimate mulatto offspring, the abusive white mistress, and the beautiful mulatto in love with her secret half brother, offers at best a strong argument for the amelioration of the conditions under which slavery operated in Cuba. Written as it was primarily by the white Creoles who constituted its reading public – and often with white Creoles as central characters – it did not present a bold argument for the abolition of slavery. It remained, despite its success in inciting pity for the slave's condition and criticizing the moral failures of a slave society, too bound in rigid literary conventions and too fearful of shaking the racial/caste hierarchies of Cuban society to propose solutions that would lead to social upheaval. Even Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1838) (Autobiography of a Slave), written to be included in an antislavery tract to be published in the United States, despite the unquestionable truth of its tale, is too dependent on Romantic rhetorical conventions to escape the ambiguities that plague the abolitionist novel in Cuba. This is not to say that these texts did not have a positive impact in eliciting sympathy for – and perhaps improving – the plight of the slaves, but that the solutions they proposed were not radical from the social and economic point of view.

The literatures of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola – which became the Dominican Republic in 1824 when it gained its independence from Spain – do not have an abolitionist tradition that can be compared to that of Cuba. In Puerto Rico, despite the strength of the abolitionist movement, with its ties to the struggle for political independence through the leadership of Ramón Emeterio Betances, the abolitionist novel did not flourish as a genre. In his writings – particularly his *Diez mandamientos* (1870) (Ten Commandments) and his preface to Wendell Phillips's *Discours sur Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1879) – Betances repudiates the Darwinian scholars who argued for the inferiority of blacks on pseudoscientific grounds and included freedom and equality for the slaves among those freedoms (of speech, suffrage, and national determination) necessary for the creation of a new nation after independence from Spain was achieved. Yet the only sustained literary exploration of the evils of slavery and racism is to be found in a quintessentially Romantic drama by Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, *La cuarterona* (1867) (The Quadroon), about the frustrated love between a beautiful mulatto girl and the handsome scion of a white aristocratic Havana family (the tale is set in Cuba), which ends tragically when it is revealed that she is the illegitimate offspring of his father's relationship with one of his

slaves. A conventional Romantic drama, despite its vividly created characters and richness of language, it remains an isolated example of abolitionist writing in Puerto Rico.

Tapia y Rivera, however, represented the second crucial aspect of Romantic writing in the Spanish Caribbean, that of voicing the emerging nationalist feeling among the region's intellectuals. A versatile writer who cultivated a broad spectrum of genres – the historical drama, the allegorical novel, philosophical poetry, autobiography, treatises on esthetics – Tapia y Rivera's work represents the crystallization of a project of creation of a Creole literature that reflected Puerto Rico's environment, history, and political realities. Puerto Rican literature – hampered by the late arrival of the printing press (1806) and the island's uncertain status as a second-rate military garrison – had been slow in developing before the mid-nineteenth century. The protoliterary texts that appeared in the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico*, the country's first newspaper, paved the way for the three anthologies that marked the beginning of a truly Puerto Rican literature: the *Aguinaldo puertorriqueño* (1843), the second *Aguinaldo puertorriqueño* (1846), and the *Cancionero de Borinquén* (1846), collections of poems and short prose, falling into the general category of *cuadros de costumbres* (snapshots of local customs) through which the contributors sought to record the idiosyncrasies of Puerto Rican Creole culture as the means of establishing it as different from that of Spain. As snapshots of national culture through which the authors sought to inscribe the specificities of Puerto Rico's incipient identity as a nation, they anticipated the publication of Manuel Alonso's seminal book, *El Gíbaro* (1849), a book credited with the consolidation of Puerto Rican *Criollismo*.

Alonso's *El Gíbaro* documents the traditions and practices of the Puerto Rican peasant or *gíbaro* (Jíbaro), the white subsistence planter from the mountains whose way of life is bound with the cultivation of produce and coffee and whose culture Alonso posits as the essence of nineteenth-century Puerto Ricanness. The book's significance comes primarily from its establishing the figure of the peasant as a symbol of the island's embryonic nationhood, an enduring symbolism that would become increasingly problematic in the twentieth century when it clashed against notions of nationhood that sought to embrace Puerto Rico's African heritage and open spaces for a broader representation of classes and gender.

El Gíbaro's powerful affirmation of rural Puerto Rican culture as emblematic of the national character contrasts against Tapia y Rivera's prolific urban cosmopolitanism, evident particularly in his drama and fiction. Tapia y Rivera, one of the founders of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, the island's most important

nineteenth-century cultural institution, and a contemporary of Alonso's, devoted his energies to the representation of Puerto Rico as a nation on the brink of modernity. His work, a reflection of the latest European literary trends – Romanticism, most emphatically – and his essays, in which he explored the relevance of European philosophy (chiefly Hegel and Schelling) to the development of modern Puerto Rican society, argued for a different concept of the nation from that of Alonso's subsistence farmer, tied to the land and rooted in his traditions. Tapia y Rivera and his colleagues at the Ateneo, which included the poet Alejandrina Benítez (niece of Puerto Rico's first woman poet, María Bibiana Benítez), prose writers José Julián Acosta and Segundo Ruiz Belvis (both active in the abolitionists movement), and novelist and feminist activist Ana Roqué de Duprey, had their fingers firmly on the pulse of European (and increasingly American) social and intellectual trends. Avid readers themselves, they sought, through the founding of journals, newspapers, and reviews, to translate and adapt into Creole realities those ideas they believed capable of transforming Puerto Rico's insular colonial society into a cosmopolitan independent democracy free of slavery and increasingly enlightened about the position and rights of women.

Tapia y Rivera's own literary work, in all its prolific variety, sought to bring life to these ideas. An admirer of Victor Hugo, Lord Byron, José de Espronceda, and the Duque de Rivas, leading names in European Romanticism, Tapia y Rivera became an indefatigable producer of Romantic texts, particularly of the historical plays and novels that had been the cornerstone of European Romanticism. His historic dramas *Roberto D'Evreux* (1848, inspired by the romance between Queen Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex), *Camoens* (1868, about the love between the Portuguese poet and Catalina de Ataide), *Hero y Leandro* (1869), and *Vasco Núñez de Balboa* (1872), among others, together with the lyrics he wrote for Felipe Gutiérrez's *indigenista* (Indian-centered) opera *Guarionex* (1854), allowed him to approach controversial themes and ideas – political freedom, racial prejudice, colonialism, gender oppression – while protected by the historical, geographical, and political distance to the settings of these texts from an energetic Spanish censorship.

Tapia y Rivera was also Puerto Rico's first novelist and writer of short stories. The numerous Puerto Rican "legends" he invented, such as *La palma del cacique* (1862) (The Chief's Palm Tree), where he explores Puerto Rico's pre-Columbian past and the shock of the Encounter, or his novel *Cofresí* (1876), which narrates the adventures of Roberto Cofresí, a Puerto Rican pirate executed by the Spanish in 1825, seek to interpret Puerto Rican history to the larger public at a time when Puerto Rican incipient historiography had yet

to produce its first account written from the local perspective. Of all of Tapia y Rivera's many narratives, however, three stand out as his most original, all three representing a break away from Romanticism and engaging local themes: the autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, *La leyenda de los veinte años* (1874) (The Legend of the Twenties), and the two-part exploration of reincarnation, *Póstumo el transmigrado* (1882) (Póstumo the Transmigrated) and *Póstumo el envirginiado* (1882) (Póstumo the Envirginated). In *La Leyenda de los veinte años*, Tapia y Rivera's transition to autobiographical social realism, he follows the adventures and sentimental episodes in the life of a young man against the backdrop of Puerto Rican history in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The two Póstumo novels, which reflect the widespread popularity of Allan Kardec's *espiritismo* among Puerto Rican intellectuals of his time, are noted for the humor and social satire through which he tells of the adventures of a man who after death returns to life in the body of his most hated enemy (in *Póstumo el transmigrado*) and has a second transmigration of soul, this time returning in the body of a woman named Virginia (in *Póstumo el envirginado*) and learning first-hand of the restrictions and frustrations of women's lives in the mid-nineteenth century.

Tapia y Rivera also made his mark as an essayist with two biographical works, the first written in the Spanish Caribbean – *Vida del pintor puertorriqueño José Campeche* (1855) (Life of the Puerto Rican Painter José Campeche) and *Noticia histórica de Don Ramón Power* (1873) (Historical Account of Don Ramón Power) – as well as an autobiographical text, *Mis memorias, o Puerto Rico como lo encontré y como lo dejo* (My Memoirs or Puerto Rico as I Found It and as I Leave It, published posthumously in 1928), and a volume that collects a number of the lectures he gave at the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, *Conferencias sobre estética y literatura* (1881) (Lectures on Esthetics and Literature) on a variety of philosophical and sociological topics.

Rivaling Tapia y Rivera's commanding presence in Puerto Rican literature during this period is the figure of Eugenio María de Hostos, the writer, patriot, and educator whose influence was felt throughout the Spanish Caribbean. As the region's first sociologist and follower of Herbert Spencer, Hostos sought to produce in his *Moral Social* (1888) a theory of Positivism suitable for the specificities of Antillean realities. A passionate proponent of Antillean independence from Spain, Hostos assumed a pan-Caribbean perspective, writing indefatigably in support of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican independence movements and working towards the establishment of homegrown public education systems that he saw as crucial to the development of free nations in the Spanish Caribbean. As an advocate for the principles of Positivist

liberalism – duty, respect for elders, education, ethical behavior, individual and social rights – so consistently thwarted by colonial repression, Hostos's work shows his progression from liberal reformist to proponent of Latin American revolution. His efforts, which earned him the title of *ciudadano de América* (citizen of America), were manifest in his pedagogical publications – among them his *Lecciones de Derecho Constitucional* (1887) (Lessons in Constitutional Law) and *Tratado de Sociología* (1901) (Treatise on Sociology) – but above all in his travelog, *Mi viaje al Sur* (1871) (My Voyage to the South), which narrates his travels through South America working on behalf of Cuban independence, and his *Diario* (1903), a remarkable chronicle of his selfless efforts and dedication to political freedom and education whose many volumes span more than thirty years.

As a fiction writer, however, Hostos's reputation rests on *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), a Romantic novel written in diary form that returns to the Caribbean's Arawak past – shared by the three Spanish islands of the Caribbean – by building a tale of the search for nation, justice, and humanity around characters taken from the legends and histories of Cuba (Marién), the Dominican Republic (Guarionex), and Puerto Rico (Bayoán). As embodiments of Hostos's dream of an Antillean Confederation – the basis of his program for independence – they embark on a pilgrimage across the spaces of violence and enslavement that figure prominently in Caribbean colonial history. *La peregrinación de Bayoán*, like Tapia y Rivera's "legends," finds an echo in comparable texts published in newspapers and magazines in Cuba and the Dominican Republic in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Cuba, these texts, although not as central to literary development as the abolitionist novel, yet produced some examples of note, chief among them Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's novellas about the conquest of Mexico, *Guatimozín* (1846), and of Colombia, *El cacique de Turmeque* (1860). *Indigenista* texts are of particular importance in the Dominican Republic after the restoration of its independence in 1865. The first half of the nineteenth century had been a period of intense political turmoil in the Dominican Republic, marked by the struggle for independence from Spain (1809–24) and the Haitian occupation that followed – which ended only after another armed struggle against Haiti (1844–61) and a brief return to Spanish colonialism (1861–65). The relaunching of political independence in 1865 signaled the return to consistent literary activity, heralded by tales about Indian lore and the sixteenth-century Arawak war against Spanish conquest and colonialism on which the new independent nation sought to build its national identity, such as Javier Angulo Guridi's *La ciguapa* (1868, The Water Sprite Tree) and *La fantasma de Higuey* (1869) (The Ghost of Higuey).

The crowning achievement of the *indigenista* approach to the definition of national identity in the Spanish Caribbean was Dominican writer Manuel de Jesús Galván's *Enriquillo* (1882) (*The Sword and the Cross*, 1954), a historical romance tracing its roots to Bartolomé de Las Casas and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's sixteenth-century histories of the colony of Hispaniola, which reached the status of a national epic shortly after its publication. The noble Indian hero, Enriquillo, direct heir of the Indian queen Anacaona, rose against the Spaniards after the seizure of his possessions by his *encomendero* and the attempted rape of his wife, holding the Spaniards at bay for fourteen years until reaching a truce with the Spanish king that guaranteed his people freedom and lands in return for their loyalty to the crown. The romance-cum-epic through which Galván sought to cement the roots of the nation in the distant indigenous past rested in part on the elaboration of a *mestizo* identity that could erase the nation's black and *mulatto* roots. Needing a historical past as removed as possible from the history of black rebellion that had made of Haiti the region's first independent republic, Galván – echoing Dominican resistance to any identity connected even tangentially to that of Haiti – returns to the presumed origins of the nation in the distant past of the Spanish conquest, thereby expunging from the national epic any connection to an Afro-Caribbean historical and cultural past. This problematic foundation for Dominican identity would be the focus of a debate that continues today, as Dominican intellectuals have sought, often unsuccessfully, to validate the nation's Afro-Caribbean past against the powerful hold of *Enriquillo*'s legacy.

Dominican narrative of the late nineteenth century, dominated by Galván's *Enriquillo*, produced only a few examples of the *costumbrismo* that followed in the wake of Romanticism in the Hispanic Caribbean, and which paved the way for the Naturalist novel that marked the transition into the twentieth century. Francisco Billini's narrative of social customs, *Engracia y Antoñita* (1892), and Miguel Billini's late-Romantic *Estela* (1904) are the two salient examples of turn-of-the-century narrative in the Dominican Republic. Cuba, in the midst of its own First War of Independence against Spain during this period (1868–78), produced sporadic examples of *costumbrista* literature that showed the incipient influence of European Realism. The best examples are Ramón Meza's *Mi tío el empleado* (1887) (My Uncle the Civil Servant) and *Don Aniceto el tendero* (1889) (Don Aniceto the Shopkeeper), both critiques of colonial bureaucracy and mercantile practices, and Nicolás Heredia's *Un hombre de negocios* (1883) (A Man of Business).

The unsettledness of Cuba's political situation in the last two decades of the nineteenth century meant an erratic literary production that curtailed the

impact of Naturalism, especially after the resumption of the war of independence against Spain in 1895. The one salient example of Cuban naturalism, Martín Morúa Delgado's proposed cycle of novels on slavery and racial discrimination, of which two novels were completed – *Sofía* (1891) and *La familia Unzúazu* (1901) – earned him a reputation as the Caribbean "Black Zola." In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, Naturalism found fertile ground, first in Salvador Brau's novellas, and later in the works of Manuel Zeno Gandía and Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo.

Brau, Puerto Rico's foremost historian of the nineteenth century, began his literary career as a writer of Romantic drama: his *Héroe y mártir* (1871) (Hero and Martyr) dealt with the rebellion of the *comuneros* in Castille, while *La vuelta al hogar* (1877) (The Return Home) centered its tragic melodrama on the history of piracy and smuggling in eighteenth-century Puerto Rico. After earning a reputation as a writer of *costumbrista* literature – with narratives taken from the oral tradition such as *Una invasión de filibusteros* (1881) (Pirate Invasion) and *Un tesoro escondido* (1885) (A Hidden Treasure) – Brau makes his mark as a Naturalist writer with *La pecadora* (1890) (The Sinner), a searing indictment of colonial laws and of the unforgiving Spanish clergy that interprets them too literally, subtitled *estudio del natural* (a study from nature). A feminist tale of how they combine to destroy a poor woman whose lover seeks unsuccessfully to marry her, it speaks to the plight of women in Puerto Rican society that had been the focus of intense public debate in the press during the 1880s and 1890s. *La pecadora*, as earlier in his *La campesina* (1887), shows how Brau, responding to the influence of sociologists Robert Owen and Herbert Spencer, saw the peasant as the necessary focus for any analysis of Puerto Rican reality that meant to look seriously at the intersections of the economic life, commerce, agriculture, and incipient industry of which the peasant was the pivot.

La pecadora and *La campesina* paved the way for Manuel Zeno Gandía's *Crónicas de un mundo enfermo* (Chronicles of a Sick World), a cycle of portraits of Puerto Rican society – four of which were ultimately published – through which he sought to translate into Puerto Rican Creole society the experimental notions put forth by Emile Zola and the social Darwinism made popular by Herbert Spencer. In his prologue to Carmen Eulate Sanjurjo's *La muñeca* (1895) (The Doll), Zeno Gandía would describe his efforts to apply science, logic, and reason to the literary text (without neglecting esthetic form) as the only way of understanding the world and the creatures that inhabit it. Of the four chronicles published, two – *La charca* (1894) (The Pond) and *Garduña* (1896) – addressed the problems of the rural world; the other two – *El negocio* (1922) (The Business) and *Redentores* (1925) (Redeemers) – published two decades later

as Zeno Gandía was leaving Naturalism behind, looked with a critical eye at the economic and political exploitation of the island that was undermining the economic health of the new American colony.

Of these, *La charca* is considered the Spanish Caribbean's Naturalist masterpiece. Written against the backdrop of a coffee plantation in the mountains of Puerto Rico – and featuring a version of Alonso's archetypal peasant degraded by poverty, disease, and miscegenation – the various plot strands of the novel weave a web of infection, official corruption, planters' greed, clerical collusion, and psychological and racial determinism through which Zeno Gandía seeks to illustrate how Puerto Rican postslavery plantation society is a "stagnant pond" that will eventually drown all who come near it. Zeno Gandía, from his perspective as a doctor, seizes upon the illness metaphor as the best textual strategy for laying bare the ills that plague Puerto Rican society, bringing upon his analysis a Naturalist esthetics built upon social determinism and contemporary psychological and physiological theories that saw miscegenation as a weakening of the "pure" races that undermined the strength to fight against social and economic conditions. Working with a gallery of social types within interweaving plots intent on showing the inevitability of death and decay in an environment plagued with tuberculosis, venereal disease, hunger, and their concomitant moral degradation, Zeno Gandía presents a scenario in which the figure of the gíbaro, forty-five years after the publication of Alonso's seminal text, is threatened with destruction from within, a victim of the "morbid debility" brought about by the repression and abuses of the colonial system.

Two years after the publication of *La charca*, Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo, a young friend and colleague of Zeno Gandía, published *La muñeca* (1895), a naturalist study of empty social *mores* that probes the depths of a beautiful young woman's self-centeredness and greed, and which looks upon high society as an environment as fraught with moral dangers as any stagnant pool in rural Puerto Rico. Set in Madrid, *La muñeca* opens with the preparations for the protagonist's wedding and ends with the suicide of her husband, driven to bankruptcy and self destruction by her coldness, the insatiable thirst for luxury to which her social ambition has driven her, and her inability to consider the impact of her behavior on others. *La muñeca* and Ana Roqué's *Luz y sombra* (1903) (Light and Shadow), which tells the parallel tales of two friends – one living an idyllic love story in the coffee-growing mountains of Puerto Rico, the other having married for money and position only to find real love after the fact – represent hybrid texts that blend elements of Romanticism and Realism with a heavy dose of experimental Naturalism to explore the changing role of women in Spanish Caribbean societies. Both proponents of the bourgeois

feminism that had been foremost in public debate since the publication of Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's *Póstumo el envirginiado*, Roqué and Eulate Sanjurjo represent a temporary openness of literary space to women's issues at the turn of the twentieth century, a space promptly closed to anything but nation-building concerns when the island passed into American control in 1898 after Spain lost its remaining Caribbean colonies in the Spanish-American War.

The growth of nationalist thought was the salient intellectual focus of the second half of the nineteenth century, and it found its most important vehicle in the region's developing poetic tradition. In the Dominican Republic, bound as the country had been throughout the century in a seemingly ceaseless struggle to solidify its independence, as in Cuba and Puerto Rico, nineteenth-century poetry assumed a patriotic tone, proclaiming its solidarity with the nationalist struggle. Salomé Ureña, the Dominican Republic's "Muse of Civilization," author of a volume of *Poesías* (1880) and a friend and follower of Hostos in her educational endeavors, poured into her patriotic poetry all her Positivist faith in the power of education, the arts, and the sciences to consolidate the foundations of a new nation. Through poems such as "La Gloria del progreso" (1873) (The Glory of Progress), "La fe en el porvenir" (1878) (Faith in the Future), and "Luz" (1880) (Light), Ureña played a fundamental role in the elaboration of the ideal of a proud nation with a promising future, free from the wars, ignorance, and dictatorships that threatened national aspirations. Her most famous poem, "A Mi Patria" (1878) (To My Nation), argues against the indiscriminate deployment of brute force in politics and the blatant disregard for prudence in the use of power, calling for peace as the first step towards the glorious future awaiting the nation. Her poetry, exaggeratedly Romantic and "excessively exhortatory" as a rule, achieves its central role in Dominican letters through its direct appeal to the budding citizenship to rally for the national cause. Published in newspapers by a young girl still in her teens, they made of Ureña the embodiment of the nation's hopes.

In Puerto Rico, the Romantic celebration of the beauty of the island – such as we find in José Gautier Benítez's "Ausencia" (1878) (Absence) and "Puerto Rico" (1878) – blossoms into patriotic exhortations as the political status of the island becomes the center of intellectual and literary debate in the works of Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Luis Muñoz Rivera, José De Diego, and others. Gautier Benítez, dead in 1880 at the age of twenty-nine, was the island's most accomplished Romantic poet, a young talent whose work celebrates the loveliness of the Puerto Rican landscape, the temperateness of its climate, and the sweetness of its people. His work, published in newspapers and journals across the island, helped crystallize the identification between the mildness

of the Puerto Rican environment and the character of its people, a powerful notion that continues to surface as an explanation for the lack of armed struggle in pursuit of independence in Puerto Rican history.

The poetry of Rodríguez de Tió and De Diego was more systematically political. Rodríguez de Tió, a militant supporter of the Grito de Lares (the failed rebellion against Spain of 1868), spent most of her adult life in exile because of her revolutionary activities. Her collections of poems – *Mis cantares* (1876), *Claros y nieblas* (1885), and *Mi libro de Cuba* (1893) – became vehicles for a call to the struggle for political independence and a union with Cuba through a Confederation of the Antilles. One of her poems provided the lyrics for the Puerto Rican national anthem. Together with De Diego – whose *Cantos de rebeldía* (1916) spoke to the agony of the Puerto Rican patriots as the island moved from a hard-fought political autonomy to becoming an American colony after the Spanish American War – Rodríguez de Tió represents the transition from Romanticism to the *Modernismo* that characterized Caribbean poetry in Spanish in the early years of the twentieth century.

In Cuba, the role of patriotic poet belongs to the national hero, José Martí. Following in the footsteps of José Maria Heredia, Cuba's best-known nineteenth-century poet, whose work served as a rallying cry against Spanish tyranny, Martí eventually concluded that war against the Spaniards was the only recourse left to the small budding nation. In poems such as "El himno del desterrado" (*c*.1820) (The Exile's Hymn), "La Estrella de Cuba" (*c*.1820) (Cuba's Star), and "El laud del desterrado" (*c*.1820) (The Exile's Lute), Heredia had given voice to the ideals of the liberal Cuban bourgeoisie that had begun to articulate the foundations of a separatist political ideology. His evocations of the idyllic Cuban landscape as paradise lost and his nostalgia for the absent homeland were instrumental in the elaboration of a discourse of the nation that remained at the heart of Cuban nationalist expression until well into the twentieth century. His participation in the conspiracy known as "Los Rayos y Soles de Bolívar" (The Suns and Rays of Bolívar) and his organization of a failed invasion of Cuba from Mexico, led by Mexican General Santa Ana, prefigured Martí's own career.

Martí, a larger-than-life figure who was at once journalist, philosopher, essayist, ideologue, and soldier, reached his largest audience as a poet through his *Versos sencillos* (1891) (*Simple Verses*, 1997), celebrated for its innovative use of popular verse forms as well as for the space it opened for the expression of his moral, social, and political aspirations. In their blend of Romanticism, incipient *Modernismo*, and liberalism his verses provide a populist frame for Martí's pan-Americanism, which manifested itself through his emphasis on the Latin

heritage that united the Caribbean and the Americas and through his warnings against the emerging shadow of the United States as an imperial nation, a threat that risked both the sovereignty and hopes for democracy of the newly formed Latin American and Caribbean nations and the internal integrity of the United States's own democratic institutions.

As the Caribbean entered the twentieth century, the looming presence of the United States became central to the region's economic, social, and political development – and to a great extent, almost as central to its literature. Spanish Caribbean writers, who opened the first decades of the twentieth century as adherents to a literary *Modernismo* emerging out of European influences but rooted in the realities and traditions of the Americas, closed the century writing against the backdrop of the ever-growing influence of the United States's media, pop culture, economy, and politics over Spanish Caribbean nations and their cultures.

Modernismo, the first literary movement original to Latin America, sprang out of a reaction against the centrality of the material world – and the concomitant neglect of spirituality – characteristic of Realism and Naturalism, as well as out of a desire for formal experimentation and renewal. Its tenets – the preference for sensual, dynamic language, the centrality of synaesthesia to the production of literary imagery, the experimentation with meter and rhyme (including the use of free verse), the influence of the French Parnassians and Symbolists and of the English Pre-Raphaelites, the return to Greco-Roman motifs, and the creative use of Oriental exoticism and cosmopolitanism – offered Spanish Caribbean poets the possibility of escape from the thematic and formal demands of patriotic exhortation and a narrowly defined nationalist agenda.

The Caribbean's greatest *modernista* poet was undoubtedly Cuba's Julián del Casal, once described by the movement's founder, Rubén Darío, as a "deep and exquisite prince of melancholy." A translator of Charles Baudelaire into Spanish, Casal embodied the same decadent neo-Romanticism that had stamped the *fin-de-siècle* sensibility of the French *poète maudit*. His work, in both prose and verse, sought perfection through strict adherence to the most rigid of literary forms, while his themes – death, bitterness, alienation, pain, and hopelessness – were deployed through imagery that sought to make palpable what was vile and corrupt, what awakened horror and melancholy. In *Hojas al viento* (1893) and *Bustos y rimas* (1893), Casal, who died prematurely at the age of thirty in 1893, anticipated the exoticism, elusiveness, and dreamy ambiguity of the brief flowering of pure *Modernismo* in the Spanish Caribbean.

Puerto Rican *Modernismo*, spearheaded by José de Diego's experiments with form in his patriotic and philosophical poetry, found its principal vehicle

in the *Revista de las Antillas* (Review of the Antilles) – founded in 1913 by Luis Lloréns Torres – which published the work of the island's foremost *modernistas*, among them Lloréns Torres, José de Jesús Esteves, Nemesio Canales, and the post-*modernista* Evaristo Rivera Chevremont. Of these, the most accomplished poet was Lloréns Torres himself, whose early work, *Al pie de la Alhambra* (1899) (At the Foot of the Alhambra) introduced *modernista* ideas to Puerto Rican literature. His evolution as a poet, especially after the publication of his *Visiones de mi musa* (1913) (Visions of My Muse), led him to embrace the *criollista* aspect of *Modernismo* that José Martí had pursued in the populist themes and forms of his *Versos sencillos*. Lloréns's *Voces de la campana mayor* (1935) (The Toll of the Main Bell) and *Alturas de América* (1940) (Heights of America), appealed broadly to an increasingly literate Puerto Rican population through the musicality of verse forms drawn from popular traditions, such as the *décima*, the use of themes and motifs taken from the island's folklore, and a lucid vernacular that resonates with an identification with the culture of the mountain *jíbaro* already elevated to the status of national symbol by Manuel Alonso in 1849.

Of the many literary trends and movements that followed in quick succession in the wake of *Modernismo*, the most important to the development of Spanish Caribbean literature were those concerned with the affirmation of the African roots of Antillean cultures. Beginning with Alejo Carpentier's *!Écue-Yamba-O!*, his novel about a young man's initiation into an Afro-Cuban secret society, and Nicolás Guillén's *Motivos del son* (1930) (Variations on the Cuban *Son*), which incorporated the rhythms of Afro-Cuban music into a vibrant poetry that celebrated the Caribbean's neglected African heritage, the literature of the period between 1930 and 1950 was for the most part committed to integrating the population of African descent into the discourse of nationality. Guillén's *Sóngoro cosongo* (1931), *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), *Cantos para soldados y sones para turistas* (1937) (Songs for Soldiers and Beats for Tourists) proposed a revolutionary reassessment of Cuban culture, with its implied affirmation of the centrality of African-derived culture and practices to the definition of the nation. Following on the groundbreaking anthropological work of Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera, whose *Los negros brujos* (1906) (The Black Sorcerers) and *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1936) (Black Tales from Cuba) respectively had brought overdue attention to the culture, narrative traditions, and belief systems of the peoples of African descent in the region, Guillén, his fellow Cuban Lino Novás Calvo (author of *La luna nona y otros cuentos*, 1942, The Ninth Moon and Other Stories), and his counterparts in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic – principally Luis Palés Matos and Manuel del Cabral – sought to

redefine the Antilles as mulatto islands. Del Cabral, a proponent of *Negrismo*, achieved, through the poems collected in *Trópico negro* (1941) (Black Tropic), a well-deserved international fame that made him one of the early voices of black decolonization.

In Puerto Rico, Luis Palés Matos, founder of the *Movimiento Antillano* (Antillean Movement), built upon the technical experimentation of the *modernistas* and the *criollistas'* concern with folklore and local custom, to present through his poetry a challenge to the accepted cultural notions of the Puerto Rican elite and its preference for the white *jíbaro* as the emblem of the island's culture. In *Canciones de la vida media* (1925) (Songs of the Half-Life) and *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937) (Drumbeats of Black Life and Kinky Hair), Palés answered the racialist claims of the likes of Antonio S. Pedreira, whose *La actualidad del jíbaro* (1935) (The Relevance of the *Jíbaro*) had argued for the white peasant as the essence of the nation, and who, in *Insularismo* (1934) (Insularism) had offered environmental and biological arguments in support of his contention that miscegenation had weakened the Puerto Rican race and culture. Palés's poetry – built upon stylized notions of Afro-Caribbean culture that were not themselves devoid of some degree of exoticism – nonetheless argued for Afro-Caribbean history and cultures as vital elements in the elaboration of an Antillean consciousness. His work had an enormous impact on writers of subsequent generations, among them Francisco Arriví, whose play *Vejigantes* (1958) (Carnival Dancers) explored the complexities of Puerto Rican attitudes toward race, and the writers of the 1970s generation, whose own version of the nation – built upon notions of inclusion and social justice inspired by the Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1960s – required the recognition of the essential mulatto roots of the Puerto Rican nation.

The Afro-Antillean movement of the first decade of the twentieth century developed alongside a recurring *Criollismo* that delved into the dismal realities of rural Caribbean life under a succession of dictatorships (in the case of Cuba and the Dominican Republic) and American colonization (in the case of Puerto Rico). This *Criollismo* manifested itself primarily through prose – short stories and novels alike – that speak of the plight of the sugar-cane laborers working under slave-like conditions, the tragic wrenching of the subsistence peasant from the land (and his subsequent uprooting into menial jobs in the new urban slums), the indifference of the state (and in many cases the Church) to the exploitation and terrorizing of the peasant, and the debasement and prostitution of the landless peasant.

The depiction of rural life takes as many forms as there were literary movements in the Spanish Caribbean in the first half of the twentieth century. In

Puerto Rico, in the hands of a writer like Emilio Belaval, author of *Cuentos para fomentar el turismo* (1946) (Stories to Encourage Tourism), the predicament of the peasant is presented with a light irony and manifest picaresque enjoyment at the clever ways in which the peasant negotiates the parameters of living under American colonialism. In Enrique Laguerre's ponderous novels, such as in his masterpiece, *La llamarada* (1935) (The Conflagration) and in *Solar Montoya* (1941) (The Montoya's Land), on the other hand, the decadence of the plantation, the abuses of systems of credit that result in the virtual enslavement of workers, the devastation caused by hurricanes on the agricultural sector, and the psychological plight of those middle-class professionals who must serve the American *centrales* (large-scale plantations) or give up their hopes for economic prosperity, are all made to fit into the narrative structures of the tragic drama. Also tragic is the approach of Abelardo Díaz Alfaro in his short story "El Josco" (1947) (The Tough One), the metaphorical tale of the castration and yoking of a proud black Puerto Rican bull to make way for its replacement by a white American stud.

In the Dominican Republic, the names of Juan Bosch (leftist political leader and President of the country from 1963 until the American invasion of 1965), and of poet Pedro Mir (perhaps the most undeservedly neglected of Caribbean authors), are the two most closely associated with the literary rendition of rural conditions. Bosch, in his early and uneven novel *La Mañosa* (1936) (The Sly One) tells the tale – narrated through the perspective of a somewhat picaresque donkey – of the fate of a rural family during one of the many civil wars that preceded the first American occupation of the island in the 1920s. But it is in his numerous short stories, collected in various volumes – among them *Camino Real* (1933),*Cuentos escritos en el exilio* (1964a) (Stories Written in Exile), *Más cuentos escritos en el exilio* (1964b) (More Stories Written in Exile) – that the traditions, language, troubles, and worldview of the Dominican peasantry found a voice. Stories like "Dos pesos de agua" (Two Dollars of Water"), "La mujer" (The Woman), and "La bella alma de Don Damián" (The Beautiful Soul of Don Damián) display Bosch's command of the language and perspective of the Dominican peasant, his understanding of rural culture, the anticlericalism that was at the root of his analysis of rural society, and the socialist philosophy that provides a subtext for his tales. The latter forms an ideological link between Bosch and Pedro Mir, whose poems "Hay un país en el mundo" (There's a Country in the World) and "Si alguien quiere saber cuál es mi patria" (If Someone Wants to Know Which Nation Is Mine) represent the most eloquent literary denunciations of the predicament of the landless Dominican peasant. Well-known also for his "Contracanto a Walt Whitman" ("Countersong to

Walt Whitman," 1993), Mir's is one of the strongest voices for decolonization of his generation.

Two other Dominican writers are important in the context of rural history: Ramón Marrero Aristy, author of *Over* (1939), and Freddy Prestol Castillo, whose novel *El Masacre se pasa a pie* (You Can Cross the Massacre River on Foot), although written in 1938, was not published until 1973. *Over* is an indictment of the exploitation suffered by Dominican cane cutters working for American sugar companies; *El Masacre se pasa a pie* tells of the slaughter of Haitian cane workers by Trujillo's forces at the Haitian–Dominican border in 1937. They represent the best of Dominican long fiction until the resurgence of the novel in the 1970s.

Rural-focused literature, on the other hand, is not very prominent in Cuba, where the best talent of the first half of the century – Carpentier, Eugenio Florit, Linás Calvo, Guillén – had concentrated instead on Afro-Cuban expression. The contributors to the period's most influential journal, *Orígenes* (1944–56), founded by José Lezama Lima, pointed to new formal and thematic directions that came to fruition during the literary *Boom* of the late 1950s and 1960s. The quandary of the Cuban peasantry under the dictatorships of Machado and Batista was left to minor talents, such as Luis Felipe Rodríguez, whose *Relatos de Marcos Antilla* (1932) (Tales of Marcos Antilla) tell of the oppression of the Cuban *guajiro* by the combined power of the Cuban landowners and American companies, and Dora Alonso, whose *Tierra adentro* (1944) (Deep in the Country) offers a detailed picture of the brutal reality and poverty of the Cuban peasantry, focusing on their exploitation by the landed classes with the aid of the dictator's Rural Guards.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the attention of writers and intellectuals shift to urban settings. In Puerto Rico, the transition is vividly rendered by short-story writer José Luis González, whose collection *El hombre en la calle* (1948) (The Man on the Street) showcased the plight of characters forced out of their rural homes by the collapse of the sugar industry during the Second World War and into the San Juan slums that became a way-station on their way to low-paying wages and the ghetto in New York. In stories such as "La carta" (The Letter) and "En el fondo del caño hay un negrito" (There's a Little Black Boy at the Bottom of the Culvert) González explores the human cost of dispossession and displacement.

If González represents the transition to urban literature, René Marqués stands out as the first great urban writer in Puerto Rican literature. Known primarily as a dramatist whose work explored the decline and fall of the backward-looking white upper-middle classes, treacherous in their alliance

with American interests in Puerto Rico, Marqués also wrote short stories and two novels, *La víspera del hombre* (1959) (The Eve of Man) and *La mirada* (1975) ("The Look," 1983). His short stories, particularly "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado" (1959) (There's a Body Leaning Against the Stern), the story of a man led into murder, self-castration, and suicide by his wife's ever-growing demands for American consumer goods, are meant to work as symbolic renderings of the inroads rampant consumerism had made into traditional Puerto Rican culture.

But it is as a dramatist that Marqués made his most significant contribution to Spanish Caribbean literature. A dramatist with a remarkable command of staging and lighting, Marqués brought his considerable talents to plays such as *Los soles truncos* (1958) (Truncated Suns) and *Un niño azul para esa sombra* (1958) (A Blue Child for That Shadow). *Los soles truncos*, the story of three sisters living in the past, in the realm of denial and memory, gives dramatic form to the threat to traditional culture from injurious American influences. In *Un niño azul para esa sombra* he uses the figure of a child as a symbol of the loss of cultural and national identity that stems from middle-class adoption of American traditions and *mores*.

Marqués's dedication of his work to the representation of the evils of American culture and what its acceptance by Puerto Ricans represented in terms of cultural impoverishment sets the parameters for the literature of the late fifties and sixties in Puerto Rico. In the literature that emerged out of the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States (chiefly New York and New Jersey) during the 1950s, Marqués's anti-Americanism provides a vital leitmotif. This literature is dominated by two names – those of Pedro Juan Soto and Emilio Díaz Varcárcel – writers whose work is deeply critical of American colonialism and its consequences for Puerto Rico. Soto's *Spiks* (1956) offers heartrending vignettes of the failure of Puerto Rican migrants to New York in adapting themselves to their new environment and circumstances. Díaz Varcárcel's *El asedio* (1958) (The Siege) brings to life the catastrophic participation of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War, moving from personal alienation to the emotional cost of mutilation and death. In his *Harlem todos los días* (1978) (*Hot Soles in Harlem*, 1993) he wrote with light humor and deft satire about the quasi-picaresque adventures of a young innocent immigrant making his way in New York.

In Cuba, the literature of the period immediately preceding the *Boom* is best represented by Virgilio Piñera, himself a master of irony and satire. Primarily known as a short-story writer, Piñera published two novels – *La carne de René* (1952) (*René's Flesh*, 1989) and *Pequeñas maniobras* (1963) (Petty

Maneuvers) – whose influence can be clearly seen in Díaz Varcárcel's late work. His characters, moving vertically and horizontally across society in typical picaresque fashion, bring their mordant wit to the description of the almost lunatic quality of Cuban life.

The decade of the 1960s witnessed the most extraordinary explosion of creative and experimental writing in the history of Latin American literature, a period that came to be known appropriately as *el Boom*. The technical innovation, inventiveness in the use of language, incorporation of popular culture, the deployment of humor and parody, and revolutionary ideology for which the decade became known placed Latin American writing at the very center of international literature. Coinciding as it did with the first decade of the Cuban Revolution – and sharing its sense of promise and expectation, the *Boom* signals a consciousness of a new era in Latin American writing. The writers of the *Boom*, translated into a multiplicity of languages, reached undreamt-of audiences around the world.

Among the islands of the Hispanic Caribbean only Cuba played a significant role in the Boom, being represented by four writers: Alejo Carpentier, whose magic realism, which he had introduced in 1949 with *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*, 1957), was vital to the movement; José Lezama Lima, whose "Baroque" masterpiece, *Paradiso* (1966) (*Paradiso*, 1974), challenged the orthodoxy of Cuban social realism; Guillermo Cabrera Infante, whose obsession with language in *Tres tristes tigres* (1967) (*Three Trapped Tigers*, 1971) filtered the manic night life of pre-Revolution Havana; and Severo Sarduy, whose ever-metamorphosing transvestites in *De dónde son los cantantes* (1967) (*From Cuba With a Song*, 1994) point to the never-ending possibilities of carnivalization and play. These writers, about whom volumes of critical work have been written since the 1960s, worked in what has come to be known as neo-Baroque style. Different in their themes and approaches, they nonetheless shared a commitment to the exploration of reality through the richness and bounteousness of language, a gift they wielded masterfully in prolific abandon. Carpentier's amazing productivity – he published almost a novel a year through the 1960s – contrasted only in ultimate volume with Lezama Lima, whose *Paradiso* became a never-ending work, nurtured and perfected through endless resurrections. As with Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, their work recreates Cuban reality with a lavishness that comes from their love affair with words.

Puerto Rico's contribution to the literature of the post-*Boom* came through the work of Luis Rafael Sánchez, whose hilarious *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1976) (*Macho Camacho's Beat*, 1980) brings parody to bear on the critique of the Puerto Rican obsession with American-style mass media. The novel, built

upon the interweaving monologues of five characters paralyzed by one of Puerto Rico's monumental traffic jams – a metaphor for the country's colonial paralysis – follows them as they listen to Macho Camacho's *guaracha* "Life Is a Phenomenal Thing" on the radio. The gap between the Panglossian lyrics of the song and the realities of the Puerto Rican bottleneck are explored by Sánchez – through at times outrageous parody – as the means of conveying his analysis of Puerto Rican society as a place that "doesn't work."

Sánchez, who earlier in his career had focused on drama – his Creole version of the Antigone myth, *La passion según Antígona Pérez* (1968) (The Passion According to Antígona Pérez), having been one of the most-often performed plays of the late sixties and seventies throughout Latin America – had also produced a pivotal collection of short stories, *En cuerpo de camisa* (1966) (In Shirtsleeves), noted above all for its candid approach to race and sexuality and its inclusion of the first story in Puerto Rican literature with a clearly avowed homosexual theme. Sánchez reprised his analysis of media obsessions and his critique of *machismo* in *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos* (1988) (The Importance of Being Daniel Santos), his fictionalized biography of the popular singer of *boleros*.

In the 1980s, homosexuality became a sort of ultimate frontier for writers seeking to challenge the hold of patriarchal perspectives – which René Marqués had mastered in his plays and fiction – on the definition of Puerto Rican culture. Of the writers dealing candidly and openly with homosexuality in their work, the most richly talented was the late Manuel Ramos Otero, dead prematurely from AIDS. Ramos Otero, one of Puerto Rico's most experimental short-story writers, published his first collection of tales, *Concierto de metal para un recuerdo y otras orgías de soledad* (A Metal Concert for a Remembrance and Other Orgies of Solitude), in 1971. In this, as in his subsequent collections, *El cuento de la mujer del mar* (1979) (The Story of the Woman of the Sea) and *Página en blanco y staccato* (1987) (Blank Page and Staccato), Ramos Otero anticipates the camp sensitivities of the late eighties and nineties, reveling in references that open the texts to Hollywood images, queenly gay behavior, outrageous in-your-face allusions to homosexual eroticism meant to *épater* all of us bourgeois, and weirdly imaginative psychological aberrations in his characters. This, together with the formal experimentation with fragmented streams of consciousness and minimal punctuation, make of his works an enjoyable challenge. Ramos Otero pushed to its limits the incursions into gay identity and national solidarity presented so painfully in Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas's texts, among them, his best, *El mundo alucinante* (1969) (*Hallucinations, or the Ill-Fated Peregrinations of Fray Servando*, 2001). In comparison, Cuba's Senel Paz's meditation on the

political consequences of being gay in Cuba, *El Bosque, el lobo, y el hombre nuevo* (1991) (translated as *Strawberry and Chocolate*, 1995), appears subdued.

Equally important in post-Boom Puerto Rican literature was the work of novelist and essayist Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, an admirer of Carpentier's whose Baroque text *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar* (1974) (*The Renunciation*, 1997), blurs the line between history and fiction as it creates false historical documentation to support a fable while using the language of the fable to narrate historical events. One of the most inventive texts of the post-Boom period in the Caribbean, the novel returns to the eighteenth century to ponder the possibility of black political power in the colony of Puerto Rico. Rodríguez Juliá has also made his mark through the elaboration of hybrid texts, richly illustrated with photographs, based on funerals of prominent Puerto Ricans. His most fascinating to date, *El entierro de Cortijo* (1982) (Cortijo's Funeral), recreated the pomp and circumstance – and uncontrollable popular grief – of the burial of Puerto Rico's most important *salsa* musician.

In the Dominican Republic, the most important voices of the post-Boom period were those of Pedro Vergés, René del Risco Bermúdez, and Pedro Peix. Vergés is the author of *Sólo cenizas hallarás: bolero* (1980) (There'll Be Only Ashes Left: Bolero), a novel whose form follows closely that of Argentinian writer Manuel Puig's *Boquitas pintadas* (1970) (*Heartbreak Tango*, 1973), but whose command of the multiple registers of Dominican speech and its understanding of the psychology of the Trujillo era combine to create what is arguably the country's best novel of the second half of the twentieth century. Del Risco's two collections of short stories, *Viento frío* (1967b) (Cold Wind) and *Del júbilo a la sangre* (1967a) (From Joy to Blood), showed exceptional promise, but his third collection, *En el barrio no hay banderas* (There Are No Flags in the Neighborhood) was published posthumously in 1974 after his premature death in 1967 at the age of thirty. Peix, a writer whose experiments with form and language and his clear-sighted analysis of Dominican history have made him the natural heir to Juan Bosch as a short-story writer, has published one collection of stories, *El fantasma de la Calle El Conde* (1988) (The Ghost of Conde Street), and has numerous prize-winning stories scattered in newspapers and magazines awaiting publication in book form.

Literary production in the Caribbean in the last two decades of the twentieth century was dominated by a "veritable explosion" in women's writing, as women's voices moved into the mainstream of literary activity in the region after decades of silence and neglect, articulating, primarily through novels and short stories, their gendered position in Caribbean societies and their search for "agency" in their personal and social lives. As the century came to a close,

women's writings expanded into new areas: religion (particularly African-derived religious systems), the erotic, popular culture, and the environment.

In Cuba, beginning in the 1970s, but particularly as a response to the challenges of the "período especial" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, women writers sought to address the reorganization of the island's socialist economy – with its tentative forays into capitalistic enterprise – and the *balsero* flight from the island in the face of diminishing resources and severe reductions in public services have found their way into fiction by Cuban women. From among this generation of new Cuban writers, three stand apart as most innovative and productive: Mirta Yáñez, Nancy Alonso, and Marilyn Bobes. Yáñez has published a number of collections of short stories, the earliest, *Todos los negros tomamos café* (1976) (We Blacks All Drink Coffee), a text that stood out for its groundbreaking use of colloquial language and acute use of irony. Her most recent book of stories, *El Diablo son las cosas* (1988) looks at Cuban realities through the prism of bittersweet nostalgia for the freshness and hope of the early years of the Revolution. Alonso's first collection of stories, *Tirar la primera piedra* (1997) (To Cast the First Stone), displays her talent for creating deeply etched characters through meticulous reconstructions of the specific linguistic registers appropriate to their gender, education, and situation. The tensions between how the persistent scarcity of goods, food, and money haunts the people of Cuba and the ease with which something as banal as a carton of eggs can become a weapon for vengeance in such a context are beautifully showcased in these stories, as are the honesty and deftness with which she addresses the realities of Cuba's Vietnam – the massive losses of Cuban lives in Mozambique and Angola. In turn, Marilyn Bobes, winner of the 1995 Casa de las Américas Prize for her first book of tales, *Alguien tiene que llorar*, deploys multiple voices in her stories to create a cocoon of voices that weaves a particular context around her central characters, giving them definition and depth. Bobes, an avowed feminist, knows the importance of literature for opening venues for the discussion of topics that have long been taboo in Cuba, such as homosexuality (particularly female homosexuality) and violence against women. Her efforts on this behalf have been part of what she sees as a thematic and conceptual opening for which women writers have prepared the ground.

Among Cuban writers living outside of Cuba during this period, Daína Chaviano has made her mark as a writer of science-fiction, a rare example of a Latin American author working in this genre. A prolific writer, Chaviano published her first science-fiction tale, *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*, in 1988, which she followed in 1990 with a collection of science-fiction tales, *El abrevadero de los dinosaurios*. Her trilogy of science-fiction tales, *La Habana oculta*

(The Occult Side of Havana), includes *Gata encerrada* (1998b), an exploration of how the power of the imagination can transform a faceless, shadowy character into an obsessive force as it struggles to become a living entity; *Casa de Juegos* (1998a), which draws on her strong familiarity with fantastic and Surrealist literature, film, art, and the power of the *orichas* (the guiding spirits of the Afro-Cuban practice of Santería) to conjure up a fable about a young woman's penetration into her own heart of darkness; and *El hombre, la hembra, y el hambre* (1999), in which Chaviano returns to Cuban *espiritismo* and the role of the *medium* as conduits to gain access to the world of fantasy and the spirits.

Zoé Valdés, born in Havana in 1959, was the most prolific of Caribbean women writers throughout the 1990s. Valdés began her writing career as a poet, but her international fame is based on her work as a novelist. She first came to notice as a writer in 1995 with the publication of *La nada cotidiana* (*Yocandra in the Paradise of Nada*, 1997), a bestseller translated immediately into a dozen languages. Valdés followed her success with *La nada cotidiana* with a third novel, *La hija del embajador* (1995a), for which she won the Premio Novela Breve Juan March Cencillo. A prolific author, Valdés has published *Te di la vida entera* (1996) (*I Gave You all When I Wed*, 1999), a finalist for the Planeta Literary Prize, *Café Nostalgia* (1999), *Querido primero novio* (2000) (*Dear First Love*, 2002a), and *Milagro de Miami* (2001).

In the Dominican Republic, Angela Hernández, a poet, short-story writer, and novelist, is known for her subtly erotic evocations of the disharmony between a lush internal world where dreams and passions lurk and the mundane terrain of everydayness. "Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores" ("How to Gather the Shadows of the Flowers," 1991), the first of Hernández's short stories, which won her the 1988 Casa del Teatro Literary Prize, anchored her first book of stories, *Alótropos*. By the time she published her second collection of short stories, *Masticar una rosa* in 1993 – mediated by two collections of poems, *Tizne y cristal* (1987) and *Edades de asombro* (1990) – her standing as the foremost Dominican prose writer of her generation was assured. *Masticar una rosa* (Gnawing on a Rose) echoes the writer's childhood memories of having lived through Trujillo's dictatorship. Since the publication of *Masticar una rosa*, Hernández has published two additional prose texts: *Piedra de sacrificio* (1998), a collection of short stories that won the Premio Nacional de Cuentos in the year of its publication as well as the Premio Cole de Literatura, and a novella, *Mudanza de los sentidos* (2001). *Piedra de sacrificio* returns to the urban settings of *Masticar una rosa* to imbue them with the magical aura of the countryside through the voices of characters rooted in rural splendors who have to settle for an urban absence of color. In *Mudanza de los sentidos*, a

Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, the voice of a young girl that served Hernández so well in *Masticar una rosa*, emerges as the filter for the horrid experiences of growing up in the turmoil that was Dominican history in the latter half of the twentieth century. A mature work that draws upon Hernández's experience as a short-story writer, *Mudanza de los sentidos* gives voice to the emerging novelist.

Puerto Rican women writers blossomed in the 1980s with the emergence of voices of such importance as Ana Lydia Vega, Magali García Ramis, Carmen Lugo Filippi, Rosario Ferré, Olga Nolla, Mayra Santos Febres, and Mayra Montero. Ferré, Puerto Rico's foremost novelist and short-story writer of the 1980s and early 1990s, had her first success with *Papeles de Pandora* (1986) (*The Youngest Doll*, 1991) and became an internationally known figure with the publication of *Maldito amor* (1986) (*Sweet Diamond Dust*, 1996). In the early 1990s, aware that translations of her fiction had enjoyed considerable success in the American market, and in response to generous offers from American publishers who found original work in English more profitable than translations – and who saw in Ferré, a writer of established reputation, a perfect bridge to the Latino market – she agreed to begin writing in English. In Puerto Rico, a nation that had made of the Spanish language – and of literature written in Spanish – the symbol of resistance against American political control and cultural influence, the decision was greeted with shock and she came under attack from writers and critics alike. Despite the success of her first English-language book, *The House on the Lagoon* (1997), which was a finalist for the prestigious National Book Award in the United States, her reputation as a Latin American – and particularly a Puerto Rican – writer has yet to recover. Her second English-language book, *Eccentric Neighborhoods* (1999), an upper-class Puerto Rican family saga, was almost equally successful with critics and readers. Ferré's most recent publication, *Flight of the Swan* (2001), is a novel inspired by the life of Anna Pavlova, the famous Russian ballet dancer. It is the third of Ferré's novels to be written and published initially in English.

Olga Nolla, known throughout her literary career as a poet, blossomed as a prose writer in the 1990s. In 1990 she published a collection of short stories, *Porque nos queremos tanto*, which she followed with her first novel, *La Segunda hija* (1992). Two other novels, *El Castillo de la memoria* and *El manuscrito de Miramar*, were published in 1996 and 1998 respectively. *El Castillo de la memoria*, Nolla's meditation on the history of *hispanidad* in Puerto Rican culture, returns to the sixteenth century to imagine what Puerto Rican history could have been if Ponce de León had returned to Puerto Rico after having succeeded in locating the Fountain of Youth, immortalizing in the process the New World as the embodiment of the spirit of the Renaissance. The publication

of *El manuscrito de Miramar* completely transformed Nolla's profile as a prose writer. In it she weaves together the stories of two upper-class women – mother and daughter – through the discovery of a manuscript that unveils the silence that has served as a veil covering stories of desire, infidelity, and longing. The recovered manuscript establishes a dialog with María Isabel's own attempt to reconcile her image of her mother with this new vision of a woman writing of secret desires, adultery, and other illicit passions.

Ana Lydia Vega, whose often hilarious short stories – collected in *Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio* (1992) and *Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión* (1987) – set the tone for Puerto Rican feminist literature in the 1980s, opened the 1990s with a fresh book of tales, *Falsas crónicas del sur* (1991), which gathers eight tales inspired by Puerto Rican history. As she did with detective fiction in *Pasión de historia*, where she parodied that popular genre as the basis for her exploration of a wife's puzzling disappearance (*à la Rear Window*), here Vega calls upon a number of genres – the Romantic novel, the tale of adventure, social satire, the political chronicle – to turn history inside out, helping us to look at familiar incidents from the individual's perspective, bringing history (and the folkloric interpretation of history), in the process, into the realm of the everyday occurrence and personal drama.

Magali García Ramis, whose *Felices días, tío Sergio* (1986) (*Happy Days, Uncle Sergio*, 1955) had redefined the Puerto Rican *Bildungsroman*, published a collection of short stories, *Las noches del riel de oro*, in 1997. In this volume García Ramis begins to distance her work from the familial, autobiographical themes of *La familia de todos nosotros*, the collection she had published in 1988, whose topics were closely connected to the *Bildungsroman* aspects of *Felices días.* Firmly grounded in Puerto Rican popular culture, with *salsa* and other forms of popular music providing a thematic foundation to tales like "Cuando canten Maestra Vida" and "Solita con las estrellas," the tales explore San Juan's urban culture and the obsessions to which it can lead. Of particular interest are "Cuando canten Maestra Vida," about the *habituées* of a somewhat seedy old San Juan bar, and "Frituras y lunas," about a man's incestuous obsession with his daughter, which leads him to murder a young man who buys the last fritter available from a vendor, the very fritter his daughter had requested.

Of all Puerto Rican writers of the 1990s the most important and innovative voice was that of Mayra Montero, born in Cuba but a resident of Puerto Rico for most of her life. Montero opened the decade with the publication of a short story, *Corinne, muchacha amable* (1991) (*Corinne, Amiable Girl*, 1994), that followed upon a collection of vignettes, *Ventitrés y una tortuga*, which had appeared in 1981. In this story of a young woman turned into a zombie by the lover

she has spurned, Montero is particularly interested in deploying the familiar conventions of the Gothic genre to lay bare the Haitian people's struggle against the Duvalier government, here represented by the dreaded Tonton Macoutes, the regime's feared militia. This commitment was already evident in her first novel, *La trenza de la Hermosa luna* (1987), a beautifully rendered tale of an exile's return to Haiti after twenty years as a wandering sailor and of the transformation that leads him from disillusionment to passionate commitment to action against the Duvalier regime. The novel marked Montero as the talent to watch in Puerto Rican writing, a promise that she has fulfilled repeatedly in the period since *La trenza de la Hermosa luna* first dazzled critics.

Montero is, of all contemporary Caribbean writers, the most indebted to the Euro-American Gothic tradition, which she has made her own, transforming the familiar conventions through her deep knowledge of Caribbean magico-religious traditions and her concerns for social justice. As she did in "Corinne, muchacha amable" and *La trenza de la Hermosa luna*, she appropriates the Gothic in *Del rojo de tu sombra* (1992) (*The Red of His Shadow*, 2001b), to unveil the vicious and corrupt politics and African-derived religious traditions that link the Dominican Republic and Haiti despite the enmity that has existed between the countries for centuries. In *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995) (*In the Palm of Darkness*, 1997), Montero returns to the production of horror that served her so well in "Corinne, muchacha amable" in the tale of American herpetologist Victor Grigg who, with the aid of his Haitian guide Thierry Adrien, is on a quest for an elusive and threatened blood frog, extinct everywhere but on a dangerous, eerie mountain near Port-au-Prince. In the volatile and bloody setting of the Haitian mountains, controlled by violent thugs, through her weaving together the stories and vastly different perspectives of her two protagonists, Montero uncovers a new haunting postcolonial space built upon the conflict between a scientific and an animistic worldview: the extinction of species due to a collapsing environment; the troubled landscape of Haiti, peopled with zombies and frightening, other-worldly creatures; political corruption, violence, and religious turmoil.

Montero's concerns with Caribbean spirituality, particularly as represented by the Afro-Caribbean religious practices that have been at the heart of so much of her fiction, maintain their centrality in her 1998 novel, *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*, 1999). Narrated by a young Cuban woman of Chinese and African ancestry, it relates the secret events that transpired when, during a series of performances in Cuba in 1920, legendary tenor Enrico Caruso fled for his life into the streets of Havana after a bomb exploded in the theater where he was rehearsing Verdi's *Aida*. Rescued by the narrator's mother, Aída Petrinera Chang,

the seriously ill Caruso embarks on an adventure that takes him from an intense affair that will result in the narrator's birth to a search for a Santería priest who can heal him – or at least protect his lover from sharing his fate.

Montero also established herself during the 1990s as the Caribbean's foremost writer of erotic fiction. Her two erotic novels, *La última noche que pasé contigo* (1991) (*The Last Night I Spent with You*, 2001a) and *Púrpura profundo* (2000) (*Deep Purple*, 2003), fuse two deep interests: the nature of erotic desire and its connection to Caribbean popular music. Montero, who had been a finalist in 1991 for the Sonrisa Vertical Prize – given in Barcelona by the prestigious Tusquets Press for the best erotic novel written in Spanish in a given year – for *La última noche* – won the prize in 2000 for *Púrpura profundo*.

Of the new generation of Puerto Rican writers that follows in the wake of Ferré, Lugo Filippi, and Montero, Mayra Santos Febres is the most accomplished. Known as a poet – she has published to date a number of poetry books, including *El orden escapade* (1991b), *Anamú y manigua* (1991a), and *Tercer mundo* (2000c) – she has emerged in the last five years as a gifted prose writer. Her first book of short stories, *Pez de vidrio* (1994), won the Letras de Oro literary prize. In 1996, "Oso blanco," featured in her second collection of stories, *El cuerpo correcto* (2000a), won the prestigious Juan Rulfo Prize in Paris. Also in 2000, her novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (*Sirena Selena*, 2000d) established her reputation as the leading writer among Puerto Rico's young authors.

The texts of Santos Febres's *Pez de vidrio* and *El cuerpo correcto* are erotic urban vignettes about desire and its frustration as they play themselves out in contemporary Puerto Rico. In "La fragancia de Marina," for example, a woman selects her perfume based on the kind of reaction she wants to elicit from men, while in "Abnel, dulce pesadilla," a female voyeur describes her thrilling sensations while she watches men showering. "Dilcia M." tells of a frustrated young woman imprisoned for her participation in an armed struggle for Puerto Rican independence. Santos Febres's interest in homoeroticism and popular music, and her concern with the exploration of the writing process, link these tales.

These concerns find ample room for development in *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*, the story of a gay teenage boy earning a living on the streets, and of the transvestite who recognizes the crystalline sweetness of his singing voice and helps him become a famous *travestí* in the Dominican Republic. It is also the parallel story of Leocadio, a Dominican boy who knows himself to be different because of his special sensibilities and the ways in which he awakens male desires. Santos Febres's exploration of sexual ambiguity and unsanctioned desire, her command of musical allusion and the technical skill with which

she can incorporate music and rhythm into her text, and her manipulation of language as a disturbing element in her text – at once erotic and humorous – all contribute to making *Sirena Selena* one of the best Puerto Rican novels in recent years.

As the literature of the Spanish Caribbean moves into the twenty-first century, it has moved closer to the pan-Antillean vision imagined by Martí in "Our America." The work of Mayra Montero, truly Antillean, which has found a worldwide audience, points to the universality of the realities facing the Caribbean. Her literary exploration of popular culture, which we find in the multiple renditions of the *bolero* in late twentieth-century literature, as well as in Leonardo Padura Fuentes's detective fiction or Daína Chaviano's science-fiction, augurs well for a renewed and invigorated Caribbean literature in Spanish.

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35

Anglophone Caribbean literature

ELAINE SAVORY

Wilfred Cartey reminds us that a literature grows out of a people's relation to place. Cartey was a visionary critic of anglophone Caribbean literature, refusing to be silenced or impeded by the sudden onset of physical blindness in his adult life. His vision of the Caribbean understands that people change place as much as place shapes them, and that place is a complicated concept in the light of the widespread Caribbean experience of migration and transcultural identity.[1] Those factors make it the more remarkable that West Indian writers have been able collectively to achieve a large body of outstanding literature, responding to their own visions of the Caribbean from wherever they happen to be, and recreating it in different parts of the world. This despite a history, both individual and collective, both in the region and outside, both historical and contemporary, of intense uprooting, separation and isolation from tradition, home and the voices of the past. Walcott powerfully describes Caribbean place as injured with human experience, "the drowned of the Middle Passage . . . the butchery of its aborigines . . . indentured Asians" (1998: 81). Wilson Harris envisions tradition complexly, "For if tradition were dogma it would be entirely dormant and passive but since it is inherently active at all times, whether secretly or openly, it participates the ground of living necessity by questioning and evaluating all assumptions of character and conceptions of place and destiny" (Bundy 1999: 150). Caribbean tradition is thus a complicated interaction of old custom with new modes of being: old traditions being fragmented and often lost by the violence of history.

History is indeed a crucial concept in the study of West Indian literature. Antonio Benítez-Rojo argues rightly that "the Caribbean . . . was shaped by Europe for the plantation, and the generalized historical convergences shown by the different territories in the region are always related to that purpose" (1992: 39); what went along with the plantation and persisted after it ceased to be economically central were systematized racism and economic inequity, as well as formal colonialism until the middle of the twentieth century.

Crucially for the genesis of Caribbean literature as a whole, resistance to oppression has always been present in Caribbean society, and has often expressed its power textually (see Ashcroft *et al.* 1989 for an extended discussion of anti- and postcolonial engagement with empire). As Hilary Beckles has persuasively argued (1987, 1989a and b), resistance was an inevitable part of the condition of being enslaved, and was carried out in many different ways by both men and women. After emancipation, various forms of verbal arts manifestly assisted the struggle against exploitation and oppression. Calypso, for example, descended from African satiric songs, became important in this respect (see Rohlehr 1981).

For Kamau Brathwaite, who began his work as a Barbadian poet-historian when African history and tradition was either erased from public memory by colonialism or sustained as a hidden source of cultural identity and survival, both in his own country and elsewhere in the Caribbean, restoring and revealing the many identities of Africa in the so-called New World was an early commitment. His poetic autobiography, *Barabajan Poems* (1994), is important in understanding the journey he made from Barbados to Cambridge University, and then to Ghana, and the implications of this for his work. Brathwaite's influence in the rediscovery and appreciation of African legacies in the postcolonial Caribbean is enormous. His cultural and literary criticism were and are closely interconnected with his poetry. He has been concerned with the many musical forms of the African diaspora, which have deeply informed his poetry. His early essay "Jazz and the West Indian Novel," originally published in the late 1960s, explores the social, political and cultural nature of jazz and of Caribbean music. He calls jazz "a music of protest . . . a music of comfort and protection, a shield of sound behind which the individual and the group have been able to protect their spirit" (1993b: 58), whereas calypso, ska, and other Caribbean forms are "concerned with protest only incidentally . . . essentially collective forms, ridiculing individualism . . . " (1993b: 59). Brathwaite has been influential in conceptualizing and reconceptualizing the Caribbean for more than forty years, often in implicit dialogue with other major writer-intellectuals such as Derek Walcott, George Lamming, and Wilson Harris. In "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" (originally published in the early 1970s), Brathwaite challenges Wilson Harris's assumption that the African slave in the Caribbean possessed very little cultural identity from Africa: punning on "limbo" as a kind of limb, he argues that this complicated ritual, deriving from Africa and relocated via the Middle Passage is a "certain kind of gateway to the new world" (1993c: 233).[2]

But while there are significant differences in the perception of Caribbean culture by Harris and Brathwaite, they are not so far apart as to be incompatible, because the conundrum of Caribbean identity has to include both an emphasis on the overall undeniable African majority, as well as on the cultural and genetic syncretism that has been so central a Caribbean experience. Harris's recent comment on "universal possibilities woven from diversities" (2002: 1) is not really so far from Brathwaite's theories of creolization explored in *Contradictory Omens* (1974). *Questioning Creole* (Shepherd and Richards 2002) is an important collection of essays dedicated to Brathwaite's pioneering work on this topic. For Walcott, the self-described mulatto of style, racial division sets up a difficult and dangerous terrain for the creative artist in the Caribbean, "although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper 'history' . . . if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates" (1998: 64).

If race and cultural definition are crucial areas for writers to be concerned with, history in the Caribbean has had to be decolonized and therefore rewritten: it is an essential frame for literature and therefore an essential resource for scholars of West Indian literature. A number of West Indian historians are also novelists and a number of historical texts, such as C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1963), are outstandingly well written. Many important cultural essays are also historically informed and esthetically achieved: James's brilliant extended essay on cricket, *Beyond a Boundary* (also first published in 1963), constructs the game as West Indian social trope, beginning the perception of it as a crucial area of discussion and insight of West Indian culture. The Barbadian historian Hilary Beckles, whose work on Caribbean history has been wide-ranging (1989a and b; Beckles and Shepherd 1991), has recently published several important texts on cricket, continuing James's example if not his particular vision (see Beckles 1998a and b). The shape of cultural studies has been importantly informed by Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-British intellectual who has argued (cited in Moore-Gilbert 1997) that it should not be so much identified with literary studies but should be more engaged with economics and sociology. Though Hall's Marxism has much to do with this, his many-faceted, interdisciplinary thinking is particularly Caribbean (see Easthope 1991 and Easthope and McGowan 1992).

It is foolhardy to fix upon one position in terms of the use and identity of history in Caribbean literature. Brathwaite's insistence on ancestors and Walcott's wariness about what history means as an organizing principle are important complementary positions that enable interpretation of the present and hopes for the future. Many writers see their role as finding the past's

suppressed voices and unspoken narratives, and using them to understand the present. Indo-Caribbean poet and novelist David Dabydeen, based for many years in the UK, has a strongly historical vision which engages specifically with British culture (*Hogarth's Blacks*, 1985, and *Turner*, 1994) as well as Guyanese history (*Slave Song*, 1984), but he comments that for him as a writer, the past has to be realized as fiction for use today: "I'm living in the twentieth century in a position of privilege . . . I never cut cane, I don't know the weight of a cutlass" (Dabydeen in Dawes 1997a: 200). For Dabydeen and many other writers, including Brathwaite, the Middle Passage was a holocaust, effectively genocide, but paradoxically it also ultimately brought the possibility of new cultures and creative developments for the descendants of the slaves and everyone else in Caribbean culture: "The middle passage was creative, by liberating the imagination from home. Writers have to live outside before they can write about inside" (Dabydeen in Birbalsingh 1997: 175).

Though Amerindians or indentured whites were sources of the labor force in the beginning, and though after slavery ended, large numbers of indentured workers were brought from India to Trinidad and Guyana to maintain sugar production, the seizure of at least ten million Africans between the mid-fifteeth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, their coerced journey over the Atlantic, racialization, sale, and enslavement in the Caribbean, shapes the core of Caribbean culture and identity (see Blackburn 1988, 1997; Dow 1927; Williams 1944; Beckles and Shepherd 1991). The Caribbean is thus a complex and syncretic but nevertheless primarily African cultural space of crosscultural modernity and, though this term is problematic here, postmodernity.[3] Rex Nettleford comments a "major part of the region's cultural difficulties is the persistent denial among many Caribbean people themselves that the African Presence is central to the ethos of the region" (1993: xiii).

The majority of Caribbean people, regionally, are of African descent, though the presence of Indo-Caribbean culture is as important in Trinidad and Guyana. Amerindian ancestry or identity is still evident in Guyana, though acknowledged by some people in other countries. In Dominica, the Caribs are still identified and have their own territory (see Hulme and Whitehead 1992). There are small minorities of Europeans, both economically privileged descendants of former planters and poor whites, such as the Redlegs of Barbados (see Shepherd 1977; Beckles 1989b). There are people of Chinese and Middle Eastern descent: indeed, Jamaica's Chinese community is central to Patricia Powell's novel *The Pagoda* (1998). Two major theoretical models have been used to describe the racial and ethnic complexity of the Caribbean: pluralist (M. G. Smith 1965) and creolization (Brathwaite 1974), though creolization is

clearly the most important now, and applies not only within the region but outside as well. As Patrick Taylor says (on religion), "The ability to invoke the emergence of a Caribbean person as a voyager in an international world, a person who can dance the terrestrial dance with an identity that is at home with difference – this is one measure of the contribution of Caribbean religions to Caribbean and world culture" (2001: 12).

Africans brought to the Caribbean in slavery came from many different peoples on the West African coast, and by the accidents of planters' preferences and the geography and history of the slave trade in relation to sugar cultivation were sometimes able to preserve a particular cultural identity. There are survivals of Yoruba culture in Trinidad and Ashanti culture in Jamaica and some scholars maintain that many Igbos came to Barbados.[4] The examination of West Indian Creoles and other cultural elements such as music and rituals provides clues as to the complex distribution of African peoples across the Caribbean sea.[5] Linguists such as Richard Allsopp, Mervyn Alleyne, and Peter Roberts have done much groundwork in analyzing the nature of what Roberts terms "West Indian English" and disclosing its many identities, its complex transcultural structures, and its political and social significance and role (see Alleyne 1980; Allsopp 1996; Roberts 1988). Roberts points out the language groups in West Africa which were brought into contact with numerous registers of English used by British indentured servants and planters: this process was of course infinitely more complicated where other colonial linguistic influences such as Spanish, French, and Dutch were present.

The history of each West Indian nation is particular and has resulted in its own particular cultural identities. Yoruba, Hindu, Muslim, Spanish, French, and British cultural influences (to name just the most evident) inform Trinidad and Tobago, for example, both separately and syncretically. Trinidadians generally speak an anglophone Creole, but French and Spanish remain important influences, and for some, like the Spanish-speaking novelist Robert Antoni, family traditions. Most Caribbean Creoles, even those of less ethnically complex cultures, such as Barbados, are difficult for outsiders to understand, even if they are of Caribbean origin themselves: Creoles came into being as innovative, inventive vehicles not only for communication across language differences in a situation where formal education was denied slaves, but also as ways of communicating within an oppressed community.[6]

In discussing any aspect of the Caribbean it is necessary to juxtapose the general with the enormously variable particular. As Gordon Lewis points out (1983: 11), Barbados was a fully developed slave economy for more than

250 years, whereas in Trinidad, slavery lasted for about half a century, and such differences have far-reaching effects.[7] In *The Story of the Jamaican People* (1998), Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett frame a detailed historical narrative by chapter headings that emphasize successive arrivals of different peoples: "The Asians Colonise America and the Caribbean," "Europe: Explorer, Coloniser and Slave Master," "Spanish Jamaica," "The Beginning of the African Diaspora," "The African-Jamaican Liberation Wars 1650–1800," "Building a New Society: People from India, China and the Middle East."

There is also geographical diversity. Writers construct metaphors that reflect their own experience of topography and its historical significance. Guyana is continental, with a low-lying coastal plain and a vast forest hinterland, intersected by rivers and waterfalls and of crucial importance in the human dramas of Wilson Harris's fiction (Durix 1996). The island chain is mainly the tops of submerged mountains, some of which, most notably Montserrat, are active or potentially active volcanoes: volcanic eruption is the subject of a number of poems, most especially Ivan Van Sertima's "Volcano" (Burnett 1986: 272). Barbados is a coral island, whose topography is less dramatic, which meant that slave rebellions were easier to put down, and whose inland waterways are almost all hidden underground, which is an effective metaphor in Brathwaite's poetry for the ways in which African culture was suppressed and hidden during the plantocracy and high colonialism (Savory 1994). Jamaica has the dramatic topography of Cockpit County, which enabled the Maroons to establish their separate sovereignty: the history of the Maroons provides an extensive metaphor in Jamaican literature for the defeat of the plantation and the survival of the human spirit against oppression.

The sea is a generally important presence in West Indian literature. Until the advent of air travel, it brought all who came to the islands and enabled those permitted to leave; it carried the slave ships and was both tragic graveyard and obstacle for slaves on slave ships or trying to escape from small islands. It intensifies the hurricanes that can wipe out an entire staple crop and level a community. It is a staple of the tourist desire for Caribbean holidays, and thus one of the reasons for tourism as a major (and sometimes the major) income earner for small economies; it is also, as Walcott reminds us, "seamless," "tiered," "a steel razor" (1986a: 125, 178), infinitely plastic and a source of important metaphors. Brathwaite's poem "South" (*The Arrivants* 1973a: 57–58) makes an implicit distinction between islands, which have few rivers, and mainland regions, like West Africa, where there are great rivers: this poem seems to answer Langston Hughes's famous "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1926).

It is both necessary and problematic to think of the anglophone Caribbean as separate from the rest of the region. When we speak of an anglophone literature, we must remember that its boundaries within the Caribbean are not very clearly marked. For example, Dominica, which lies between francophone Martinique and Guadaloupe, is counted as a West Indian nation, but French patois and Catholicism are central to the culture, as are interchanges between the peoples of adjacent islands. Therefore a pan-Caribbean perspective is very important.

Anglophone Caribbean literature is not only written in and about the region itself, but is an important presence within Canadian, US, and British literature, and less often, anglophone Caribbean writers have brought their particular visions to bear on cultures in Africa, India, the Middle East, and Australia (De Boissiere published his work in Australia where he settled: *Crown Jewel*, 1952; *No Saddles for Kangaroos*, 1964). Anglophone Caribbean literature reflects a diaspora of extensive proportions that shares the common historical and cultural experience of British colonization and the more recent increasing influence of the United States via the same language. Cricket, for example, within the Caribbean diaspora, is a uniquely West Indian cultural property, providing writers with metaphors for cultural identity and strategies for political resistance. Cities such as London, with significant West Indian populations, have provided nurturing for artists and writers a long way from home, as in the case of the Caribbean Artists Movement, which provided Kamau Brathwaite with opportunities to read his early work in London (Walmsley 1992). Some anthologies, creative or critical, permit the reader to see the scope of a growing tradition in a particular location (such as *A Shapely Fire*, ed. Cyril Dabydeen, 1987, which focuses on Canada). Exiled writers, such as Barbadian-Canadian Austin "Tom" Clarke, often keep in touch with home. Clarke used to write regularly in Barbadian newspapers.

The colonial experience and the political response

British writer-travelers to the Caribbean helped shape an imperialist and often racist or proslavery reading of the region in which the plantation was an embattled British frontier. James Walvin points out that as early as 1680, Barbados was dominated by its planters (1992: 69). Almost 200 at that time owned more than sixty slaves. Their ideological support for slavery (as well as, eventually, abolitionist agitation) was often rooted in British culture: the British philosopher John Locke himself invested substantially and importantly in the early slave trade (see Glausser 1988: 61–91).[8] Robin Blackburn describes a pageant

performed in 1594 before James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, in which a "Black-Moore," in elaborate clothing, appeared to be pulling a chariot loaded with a table piled with fruits and other delicacies: the chariot had been supposed to be pulled by a lion, but that was finally decided against on the grounds of the dangerousness of the beast (1997: 219).

It was not sugar but tobacco that began the plantations in the eastern Caribbean, but Barbados's introduction of sugar in the 1630s and 1640s realized such profits that sugar became central (Blackburn 1997: 229). Trinidadian statesman Eric Williams argued in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) that slavery ended because it became economically retrograde in the face of industrial capitalism: despite Blackburn's useful critique of Williams's argument (1988: 26), the book offers an important stimulus to anticolonial thought for its period, and as Colin Palmer points out in his introduction to a new edition (1994: xi) more than fifty years after its first appearance, it remains a controversial text.

British colonial texts that describe the region make it abundantly evident that words were a very effective means to deny identity and sovereignty to a subject people. Not surprisingly, these texts eventually became the collective provocation for early regional rebuttals and local constructions of West Indian culture. Whereas they are evidently colonialist, even propagandist, they are an important chapter in the history of anglophone Caribbean writing because they provoked effective response. They included Mrs. Carmichael's two volumes of anti-abolitionist rhetoric, *Domestic Manners . . .* (1833), and later in the nineteenth century, at the high tide of post-emancipation British racism, Carlyle's notorious essay, *Occasional Discourse on The Nigger Question* (1853), Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1860), and Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1888). Eric Williams (1944) calls Carlyle a neofascist, and contemporary historian Gordon Lewis effectively characterizes Carlyle's essay as "venom," Froude's book as "bitter Negrophobia," and Trollope's work as "ingenious paternalism mixed with undertones of antisemitism" (1968: 56). In answering Froude by a systematic demolition of his assertions, Trinidadian J. J. Thomas, in *Froudacity* (1889), understood the power of textuality. Thomas was a very important figure in the intellectual life of the West Indies in the nineteenth century: his *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1869) cogently argued the coherence and identity of Creole as a language, implicitly defending it against being seen as an inferior form of a European language.

The role of West Indian writing as a powerful and effective rebuttal of British cultural arrogance is thus clear. Derek Walcott and Jean Rhys, among others, importantly revision British or European classic texts. The revisioning

of the colonial (writing back to empire as famously dubbed by Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989 in the global popular cultural context of *Star Wars*) is a major weapon in the armory of postcolonial cultures. As Caliban (and therefore Shakespeare) understood, wars are fought primarily with language and only supported and extended by the use of force when language proves unable to produce the desired effect. Sometimes the rebuttal is explicitly directed to a specific text, as in the case of Thomas's answer to Froude, but sometimes it is implicit. Mrs. Carmichael's smugly white middle-class essay on domestic life on the plantation seems now to have been implicitly answered by the reach and innovative thinking of Jamaican Mary Seacole's *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857). No doubt even slaves denied the skills of reading and writing understood through their observation that the power of the written word to record their legal condition could become a power to effect freedom. The retelling of collectively remembered slaves' stories in Keithlyn and Fernando Smith, *To Shoot Hard Labour: The Life and Times of Samuel Smith, an Antiguan workingman, 1877–1982* (though not published until 1986) remind us that one of Caribbean literature's strongest origins is the desire to testify about a life otherwise unnoticed and unremarked.

But whites could also desire to record their plantation experience, if not for others, then for themselves. The case of Irish Thomas Thistlewood's frank and very disturbing diary of his daily life as a slave owner in Jamaica, 1750–86 (Hall 1989), reminds us, partly by its chilling ordinariness of tone, of the bizarrely imaginative cruelty ordinarily practiced by planters as punishments for their slaves' insubordinations, trivial or otherwise.

Given this background, it is understandable that scholars differ as to the precise chronological beginning of anglophone Caribbean literature. There are roughly speaking three phases: the colonial, during which British writers created their own visions of the Caribbean and West Indian writing was largely confined to conformity with British norms; the anticolonial, up to the mid-twentieth century; and the postcolonial, which continues to this day.

J. J. Thomas's twentieth-century intellectual descendants, leading politicians and activists of African descent, many of whom were West Indian, were extremely important in terms of the growth of West Indian literature as a politically engaged body of writing: for example, Eric Williams, George Padmore, C. L. R. James, and Walter Rodney were all committed writers (and Marcus Garvey, though primarily an activist and leader, understood the power of the press through his own newspaper). Padmore edited the report of the fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945, held in Manchester, UK, which Amy Ashwood Garvey attended. For, as Hakim Adi puts it, "During the 1930's and 1940's,

Britain became a center of Pan-African activity, as might be expected, since many of those in the Diaspora were subjects of the Empire" (Adi and Sherwood 1995: 11). West Indian intellectuals with a desire to write creatively have sometimes made a choice to spend more time writing political history or literary criticism or cultural essays, or being involved in active politics or activism: James (*Minty Alley,* 1936); Sylvia Wynter (*The Hills of Hebron,* 1962); Phyllis Allfrey (*The Orchid House*, 1953). Wynter's critical and theoretical work is always interesting (see her essay on James: Wynter 1962).

C. L. R. James's famous *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) is still a powerful book, and according to Blackburn, the "still unsurpassed model for understanding the struggle against slavery" (1988: 28). It is the view of a number of Caribbean historians today that L'Ouverture's successful insurgency against the French marked the end of planter confidence that they could hold their plantations against the overwhelming numbers of their slaves, and so inevitably began the last days of slavery. James's closing remarks are still extremely powerful: "Imperialism vaunts its exploitation of the wealth of Africa for the benefit of civilization. In reality, from the very nature of its system of production for profit it strangles the real wealth of the continent – the creative capacity of the African people" (1963: 377). The production of a great literature has indeed, in this sense, been an important contribution to the "real wealth" of the anglophone Caribbean, despite its past history of exploitation by colonials and plantocrats and its present dependency on tourism. James remains a very major figure in West Indian cultural, intellectual and political history: Sylvia Wynter, herself an important figure in Caribbean intellectual life, writes of James that his "deconstructive efforts radiate in several directions, simultaneously exploding the theoretical esthetic and metaphorical foundations of the doctrines that sustained Western imperialism" (1992: 63). Wynter, like James, is educated in a broad range of intellectual traditions: innovative ways of thinking about them together come from and are brought back to their Caribbean cultural base.

Oral and scribal

There is a continuum in West Indian literature between extempore, oral performance and formal scribal texts, which includes many gradations and intersections of the oral and scribal (see later discussion of Creole as a literary resource). Any study of anglophone Caribbean literature needs to take into account the forms and history of major Caribbean musical forms such as calypso (Rohlehr 1990) and reggae (Barrow and Dalton 1997) and their various

identities in the Caribbean diaspora. These forms of orature demand verbal as well as musical talent, both extempore and rehearsed, of their creators and performers. Roberts (1997) argues cogently that the primary purpose of literacy and of Standard English in plantation society was coercion and control, and classroom teaching was very rule-bound, so the creative functions of language were concentrated in marginalized Creoles. As Maureen Warner-Lewis (1991) reminds us in her discussion of Yoruba orature in Trinidad, there are some strong survivals of African languages, handed down intact from generation to generation, and acting as another source of creative inspiration to Creole orature.

The political and cultural value of Creoles and orature has been actively debated for a long time, though it seems as if the cumulative work of outstanding Caribbean scholars in the field of orature as well as the growth of cultural studies is finally gaining respect for it as a serious scholarly field of study. Carolyn Cooper, in her study of Jamaican popular culture, critiques conventional academic readings of the relationship between oral and scribal: "In the domain of language and verbal creativity, English is 'refined' and Jamaican is 'vulgar'; oral texts are 'vulgar'; written texts are 'refined'" (1993: 8). She rightly insists on "bastard oral texts" as proper material for study.

Kamau Brathwaite's term "nation language" is extremely useful, as it indicates not just orality but the fact that each Caribbean nation has its own linguistic continuum and formations of Creole. He stresses that the "noise that it makes" is as important in nation language as the meaning: "When it is written, you lose the sound or the noise, and therefore you lose part of the meaning" (1993a: 271). Brathwaite's list of the full range of nation language includes many traditional or folk forms such as Baptist and shango religious services, ring games, tea-meeting speeches, as well as orature by such established performers as Malik, the late Michael (Mikey) Smith, and Paul Keens-Douglas (he could also have mentioned, to name only some of the most widely known, Louise Bennett, Bruce St. John, Alfred Pragnell, Bob Marley, Linton Kwesi Johnson, John Agard, Mighty Chalkdust, Jean "Binta" Breeze, Mutaburaka).[9]

Even where a West Indian poet chooses the scribal mode, he or she is extremely likely to write in a range of registers between a light, easily understood Creole and Standard English, and to move back and forth between them fluently, sometimes in the same work. This is not a straightforward matter: poet and critic Mervyn Morris affirms the paradox that "For most West Indians the language of feeling, their most intimate language, is Creole," but at the same time, West Indian literature "has tended to privilege Standard English" (1999: 9).[10] Bruce St. John remarked that many people found his poems in

Barbadian language partly unintelligible until they heard him perform them (1972: 540).

As Gordon Rohlehr (1989: 3) points out, Caribbean orature derives basic forms from a variety of ethnic cultures, which are transformed and sometimes integrated creatively together. These include Anglo-Scots ballads, hymns, African drumming traditions such as the Congolese bamboula, Indian classical music, and jazz. Contemporary orature may derive its rhythmic pattern and stanza order from calypso or reggae, or any other Caribbean music, inflected by the local accent of the performer/writer. John Agard's "Listen Mr Oxford Don":

> Me not no Oxford don
> me a simple immigrant
> from Clapham Common
> I didn't graduate
> I immigrate
> (Brown *et al.* 1989: 109)

and Mighty Chalkdust's "Sea, Water and Sand":

> Man every Caribbean leader
> Taking lag at one another
> Everyone trying to protect his dollar
> Especially since Guyana
> Ain't have no foreign exchange, sah . . .
> (1989: 143)

have quite different rhythmic identities, based in their respective affiliation to Jamaican and Trinidadian musical culture (see, for music alone, Manuel 1995). But so many of the musical traditions of the Caribbean are engaged with wordplay, and Caribbean speech patterns still owe something to old tonalities. It is not surprising that Caribbean orature reinscribes the relation of words and music, and that therefore the critic or reader needs to be familiar with the particular ways in which orature differs from and is similar to scribal traditions, especially in the case of poetry.

Orature can make a once universal story speak particularly effectively as a local tale. Pamela Mordecai's *de Man: a Performance Poem* (1995) revisions Christ's crucifixion through the eyes of two Jamaicans, a middle-aged maid who serves Pontius Pilate's wife and an old carpenter:

> Him have a foster faada
> And is him learn me de

Building trade. Yuh eye big?
Yes ma'am. Me is carpenter-
And mason too . . .
(1995: 42)

The dramatic voices here are the key to the freshness of this retelling of a well-known story: it is perfectly logical within the poem that Samuel should speak about being Jewish in the time of Christ but in a Jamaican accent of the end of the twentieth century.

Though poetry and drama clearly have a performative quality that gives the writer opportunity and even requirement to write in Creole, some novelists, such as Robert Antoni (1991; 1997), have written novels entirely in Creole, rather than confining it to dialogue. Clearly the challenge to the Caribbean writer is to establish her/his own transcription of Creole onto the page, and then to use it to delineate character. There are class issues here, as well as those of race and nationality: Dabydeen has said of Brathwaite that while he is the most outstanding poet in Creole, and demonstrates feeling for it, his use of it is still restrained and polite and not instinctive (Birbalsingh 1997): of course Brathwaite came from a family well established in Bridgetown, attended the most socially and intellectually elite secondary school in Barbados (Harrison College), and then went to Cambridge.

Home, exile, and the construction of self

Cartey (1991) traces seven major themes in West Indian literature: the interaction of people with landscape or place; rituals of the folk; village to city movements and resulting tensions; fragmented West Indian society, as a result of race and class; exile; the search for new political models; the search for self.

The issue of exile and of the divided self are especially important in discussing the generation of writers who established West Indian literature as a significant presence in world literature, partly to do with the fact that a great many West Indians left the region in the 1950s and 1960s hoping for a better standard of living in the north, at a time when large-scale immigration to Britain, the United States, and Canada was still encouraged. Young writers understood that earning a living as a writer could not happen in the West Indies, so they were willing to try to make a life outside the region, either after attending university abroad or deciding simply to emigrate.

The first generation of major writers often not only knew each other, but were in Britain at the same time, and sometimes worked together on the

BBC program *Caribbean Voices*. George Lamming, who left for Britain on the same boat with Samuel Selvon, was published as a young writer in *Bim* (begun 1942), edited by Frank Collymore, who provided crucial support to literary talent in the West Indies. Brathwaite speaks of him with gratitude and respect, among many others. Literary journals have been very important in the West Indies, including *Kyk-Over-Al* (Guyana, first series begun 1945), *Focus* (Jamaica, briefly during the 1940s), and *The Beacon* (Trinidad 1931–33). Lamming has described how he lived in Trinidad as a young man, before going to Britain, and there tried to recruit writers for *Bim*. Lamming points out that *Bim* served as a kind of pool for *Caribbean Voices* (Drayton and Andaiye 1992: 61–62).

Many of Lamming's generation would eventually leave the West Indies and settle in Britain, Canada or the USA, such as Wilson Harris, (b. 1921, Guyana); V. S. Naipaul (b. 1932, Trinidad); Samuel Selvon (b. 1923, Trinidad); and George Lamming himself (b. 1927, Barbados). There they would find it much more possible to have a professional writing life than in the region itself, with its relatively small population and limited publishing outlets. They would collectively contribute to the theme of exile, although they also wrote about the region itself. Even those who became important writers in the region would increasingly be concerned in their work with journeys, migrations, and complex identity. Both Kamau Brathwaite (who returned after his university education in Britain and a number of years in Ghana, 1955–62) and Derek Walcott (who began to move between the US and the Caribbean in middle age) migrated within the West Indies for a significant period of their lives. Some writers would take migration within the region, from village to town, where traditions and self-definitions are threatened and fragmented, as one of their most important themes, as in the Trinidadian Earl Lovelace's *The School Master* (1968).

But migration overseas is a major theme in anglophone Caribbean literature. Jean Rhys (b. 1890) left Dominica in her late teens for Britain and returned for only one visit afterwards: her work is centrally about a kind of alienation that results from leaving home and never transferring allegiance to any other place. Roger Mais (b. 1905) lived most of his life in Jamaica, but according to Morris, left for London "to join the already growing throng of West Indian writers in Britain" because his first novel, *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953), was accepted by Cape (Morris 1986: 305). He died shortly afterwards, after publishing two more novels that were written in Jamaica, *Brother Man* (1954) and *Black Lightning* (1955) (see *Three Novels*, 1966). John Figueroa (b. 1920) returned to Jamaica after his first degree in the United States and after a spell in London, and did not live again in Britain until the end of his life. John Hearne (b. 1926;

Voices Under the Window, 1955) moved back and forth between the region and Britain but then settled back in Jamaica.

For the next generation of writers, born in the 1940s, much easier access to international travel through affordable air travel would give them the option of staying in the region, or migrating, or moving back and forth to renew connection and memory. There is now a strong presence of significant West Indian writers in Canada (Austin Clarke, Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, Nourbese Philip, Neil Bissoondath, Harold Sonny Ladoo, Cyril Dabydeen, Cyril Foster, among others) and Britain (for example, David Dabydeen, John Agard, Jan Shinebourne, Joan Riley, E. A. Markham, Grace Nicholls, Linton Kwesi Johnson). Some writers have moved to the United States in order to teach or work, but still maintain strong former connections (for example, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar, Robert Antoni, Glenville Lovell, Merle Collins, Anthony Kellman, Lorna Goodison, Patricia Powell). Jamaica Kincaid (b. 1949, Antigua, *Annie John* 1985) moved to the US in her late teens and became an au pair until she established her very successful writing career: she now teaches at Harvard. Migration and strategies for coping with self-redefinition, as well as a young woman's maturation, are central themes in her work.

Even writers who have remained close to home can extend their range to the world. Erna Brodber (b. 1940, Jamaica) has said that her first novel (*Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, 1980) was developed first as a case study of disassociative personality for her social work students in Jamaica (O'Callaghan 1986: 77), and her second novel is also deeply involved with Jamaican tradition (*Myal*, 1988), but *Louisiana* (1994), is set in the United States.

For a writer of West Indian descent born or raised outside the region (Paule Marshall, born in New York City of Barbadian parents in 1929; Caryl Phillips, born in 1958 in St. Kitts, raised in Britain), there are important choices to be made as to identity and audience. Such writers explore the complications of migrant or crosscultural identity. A further development of this is the way Caryl Phillips writes at times in the voice of non-West Indians (*Cambridge*, 1991). Despite some political concerns about the role of the writer in Caribbean culture, such developments are probably going to become much more common, as Caribbean writers chart their own course in an increasingly cosmopolitan world. Phillips has said that he has "a sense of responsibility almost as much to history as to literature . . . there is a complex history to the Caribbean world which paradoxically involves tourists, whether they like it or not" (interview in Birbalsingh 1996: 193–234).

Not surprisingly, the theme of exile or of complex cultural ancestry leads to the discussion of conceptions of the self in the Caribbean. Michael Gilkes

refers to the "West Indian preoccupation with identity, with a psychological and cultural split" as "the most persistent theme in West Indian writing" (1981: 84), but now we would probably see this more as evidence of a cultural strength in our increasingly cosmopolitan world than just a source of conflict, even if it is conflict that provokes creativity as a response. Younger West Indian writers might name themselves also British, Canadian, or American: their world is one in which a plurality of identities and selves coexisting is familiar and mostly positive. African descent might now be configured in terms of the "Black Atlantic"(Gilroy 1993). Pauline Melville, Guyanese-British, uses the metaphor of the folk figure the shapeshifter to express a Caribbean vision of identity as not only plural but constantly in flux (1990). She conveys both a range of Caribbean voices, and a range of British ones, proving that an acute ear for nuances of speech patterns is particularly helpful to a Caribbean writer who experiences such a variety of linguistic options. This is also evidently present in *White Teeth* (1999), a first novel by Zadie Smith, which had a very positive reception with readers in Britain. It is a fictional rendering of Britain's contemporary urban ethnic and racial complexity, optimistic, ebullient, and evidently very much embraced by the book-buying public.

Poetry

The earliest scribal West Indian poetry was mostly cast in forms derived from colonially transmitted English poetic traditions. Laurence Breiner (1998: 105) argues that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry on or about the West Indies "exemplifies mastery of an inherited medium." Lloyd Brown flatly states that the "first hundred and eighty years of West Indian poetry are uneven at best, and in some respects are downright unpromising" (1984: 19): for him the tradition really begins in or about 1940, though Jamaican-born Claude McKay wrote during the Harlem renaissance, two decades earlier.[11] Reinhard Sander states that in the 1940s, "some poets virtually leapt from sterile imitation to exciting innovation" (1995: 46–48). One such poet is Martin Carter from Guyana, who seems finally to be receiving the serious critical attention he deserves (Brown 1999): his poems "University of Hunger" and "I Come from the Nigger Yard" remain among the most powerful of all Caribbean poems:

> is the university of hunger the wide waste
> is the pilgrimage of man the long march
> The print of hunger wanders in the land . . .

> I come from the nigger yard of yesterday
> leaping from the oppressor's hate
> and the scorn of myself.
> ("University of Hunger,"
> Burnett 1986: 214, 215)

It is of course the two major poets Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott who have done most to shape the postcolonial tradition of anglophone Caribbean poetry thus far, though as Kenneth Ramchand has said, their eminence might have inadvertently restricted the reputations of younger, less established poets such as Anthony McNeill, Wayne Brown and their generation (see Dance 1986: 83). Breiner has similarly commented that Brathwaite and Walcott "appear to have cast a shadow over the generation of poets following them" (1995: 79). The contribution of Brathwaite and Walcott is outstanding: born in the same *annus mirabilis* for anglophone Caribbean literature, 1930, each has fashioned a voice that has changed as the poet's conception of culture and the role of poetry has changed, and both are still, in their early seventies, producing major new work. Both have chosen to live in the region for most of their lives and both have been honored by major literary prizes (Walcott the Nobel Prize; Brathwaite the Neustadt). Though Walcott has often turned to European poetry (Homer, Virgil, Dante, Auden, Eliot) for his acknowledgment of poetic ancestors, his poetry is a renaming and revisioning of the formerly colonized world through Caribbean eyes: "The phrases of a patois rooted in this clay hillside" (*The Bounty*, 1997: 38).

Brathwaite's rendering of the discovery of Africa, on the continent and in the region, as a human history full of contradiction, and of the Caribbean, inextricably bound up with the history of transatlantic slavery, has been constantly original and dynamic. He sees his work as a journey, and in the "interior" of it lies the Ashanti capital, Kumasi, City of Gold (see for broader connections Brathwaite 1993c). It is the discovery of Africa that eventually marks his departure from the poetic inheritance of British poetry, most particularly the pentameter: "most of the time it was different. More polytone and complex. More linked with light and perhaps dactyl" (1994: 115). But Brathwaite has also thoughtfully considered Milton's "great organ sound" (1994: 115) and Eliot's *The Wasteland* in his own development of poetic form. Both Brathwaite and Walcott are epic poets (*The Arrivants,* 1973a; *Omeros*, 1990), and both have revisioned the verse epic for the Caribbean (see Rohlehr 1981; Terada 1992; Hamner 1997). It has been a cliché of criticism to think of these two great poets as representing very different directions for Caribbean literature, but they are in fact complementary.

The best of younger West Indian poets have often found Brathwaite and Walcott to be creatively inspiring rather than suffocating or intimidating. Dionne Brand (b. 1953, Trinidad, emigrated to Canada in 1970), acknowledges being influenced by Selvon, Naipaul, Marshall and Brathwaite. As Chamberlin points out (1993: 268), her poem collection, *No Language Is Neutral* (1990), takes its title from a line in Walcott's *Midsummer* (1984).

Poetry is a widely appreciated genre in the West Indies, especially as orature. West Indian poets generally move in and out of Creole, thus identifying with the more performative oral mode, as well as with the printed poem on the page. There has always necessarily been a self-publishing tradition of small chapbooks of poetry, just as Walcott produced in his late teens. There are some poets who publish a limited amount but whose work is disproportionately important, such as the late Barbadian oral poet Bruce St. John, who did not become a poet until he was fifty and who became incapacitated by illness when he was still composing and performing brilliantly. Even when published in an anthology (see Brown *et al.*, 1989) where its verbal wit, subtle music and political sharpness can be appreciated on the page, St. John's poetry loses when not heard in his voice (see St. John 1989b). He was a trained singer, who could also still speak with the old tonality which survived from his childhood in Barbados: the result was a very sensitive rendering, through exact pronunciation of tone and rhythm, of the counterpoint of sound and sense in Bajan language (see "Friends," "Subtlety," "Wisdom," and "With Respect"). He particularly employs call and response, a Caribbean inheritance from Africa, as well as Christian church services. "Bajan Litany" especially demonstrates this form, using two columns to indicate different voices or at least a call and response structure:

> Follow pattern kill Cadogan   Yes Lord
> America got black power?   O Lord
>
> (Burnett 1986: 39)

Anthologies are a very important resource for West Indian poetry (for example, Burnett 1986; Brown *et al.* 1989; Markham 1989), enabling many little-known West Indian poets to gain an audience, and the critic to see a wide range of poetic styles and concerns. Certain central issues emerge from anthologies, for example, the huge amount of orature, the ways in which oral and scribal poetry is quite often written by the same poets, the ways in which each mode informs the other. Burnett's anthology contains a section of anonymous poems (many of them folksongs), a Rastafarian chant, poems by Marcus Garvey, Louise Bennett, Bruce St. John, calypsonians such as "The

Mighty Sparrow," the well-known performers Paul Keens-Douglas, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Mutaburaka, reggae artists such as Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, Bob Marley, and dub poet Michael Smith, among others.

Caribbean music and orature are extremely important to the scribal tradition. Brathwaite and Walcott take up different positions as to metrics in the Caribbean, with Brathwaite remarking that "*nation language* . . . largely ignores the pentameter" and "in order to break down the pentameter we discovered an ancient form which was always there, the calypso" ("History of the Voice," 1993a: 271), whereas Walcott has made many statements about his commitment to the pentameter and has no problem seeing his poetry as part of a global tradition in English. But the music of West Indian poetry, its rhythms and rhymes and line breaks and stanza forms, is always complex, always working something out between different but related systems, between the traditions and models of the scribal and the always revisioning performative identity of the oral. Abiola Irele has rightly pointed out that in *Masks* (1968), the second volume of Brathwaite's first trilogy *The Arrivants,* his poetic voice is responsive to the esthetics of African oral tradition, and further, in Brathwaite's representation of the *atumpan* drum's rhythms, "Brathwaite's verse establishes a formal correspondence between the esthetic and normative significance of African orality" (1994: 721).

The Caribbean as a whole is remarkable in having produced so many poets who are also intellectuals, Césaire and Glissant, for example (see above), as well as Brathwaite, Carter, and Walcott. By intellectual I mean a profound interest in the history of ideas and in ideas as important cultural currency. There are quite a number of poets associated with the University of the West Indies, including Edward Baugh, Mervyn Morris, and Mark McWatt. Their poetry coexists with their academic writing: in this their model would be Brathwaite, who was employed not as a poet but as a professor of history at the University of the West Indies for many years. But whereas Brathwaite's poetry has more and more embraced the idea of popularizing the intellectual and drawing on music and the visual to explode the conventions of formal poetry, the university poets, though socially and politically progressive, are generally much more restrained. In language register, they reflect the continuum between Standard English and Creole.

Baugh and Morris, both Jamaicans, work within a very well established tradition of poetry, which includes scribal poets John Figueroa and Claude McKay as well as reggae lyricists like Bob Marley and Creole performance poets such as Louise Bennett. Edward Baugh's "Nigger Sweat" (Brown *et al.* 1989: 203–04) is a very effectively angry poem, its edge kept sharpened by a careful

control. Morris's poetry is generally elliptical, tightly and elegantly phrased, often deeply ironic. McWatt often writes poignantly of his birthplace, Guyana, from the distance of his home in Barbados, but also often has an acerbic tone, not unlike Morris. Guyana has a strong tradition of poetry, including not only Carter, but also the late A. J. Seymour (2001). David Dabydeen's powerful Creole poem collection *Slave Song* (1984) won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1984.

Jamaican Dennis Scott, a fine theater director and playwright, is an economical lyricist (*Strategies*, 1989). Trinidadian Wayne Brown and Jamaican Anthony McNeill were singled out by Lloyd Brown as early as 1978, who connects Wayne Brown's "tough-minded perception of his on art and its relation with the dominant intellectual currents of his time" to Walcott's "unapologetic sense of privacy" (1978: 174). Ramchand (1986) remarks that it is customary to link Wayne Brown with McNeill, Mervyn Morris, and Dennis Scott as the next generation after Walcott and Brathwaite. E. A. Markham notes that A. L. Hendriks (and other poets such as John Figueroa, Shake Keane, and Andrew Salkey) "defies the English-British Caribbean cultural Trade Route" (1989: 26) by his strong connection with non-anglophone culture: this is another example of the cultural complexity that marks West Indian literature. In the region, St. Lucians Kendel Hippolyte and Robert Lee are both fine poets from the next generation. Louise Bennett, Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison, Velma Pollard, Pamela Mordecai, Honor Ford-Smith, Rachel Manley, Judith Hamilton, and the late Gloria Escoffery are among those who have established a strong and varied Jamaican female poetic tradition. Marcia Douglas's first poetry collection, *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom* (1999), became a Poetry Book Society recommendation.

Goodison and Nourbese Philip, like Walcott and Brathwaite, seem to represent very different kinds of poetic and cultural directions and concerns, but they are in fact, again, complementary, especially in their concern with gender. Goodison's voice is more conciliatory for the most part than Philip's and she is less adventurous in terms of form: but she contributes a gentle, intensely metaphorical poetry to the canon which is often about the need to find healing and peace amidst the violence and division of contemporary Jamaica, her homeland. In the title poem of *To Us All Flowers Are Roses* (1995), she summons the spirits of place names that people Jamaica with the ghosts of many nations: they become an incantation, a "rosary." In *Turn Thanks* (1999), she revisits ancestors and poetic inspiration found in diverse sources. Nourbese Philip is particularly important for her poetic exploration of issues of poetic form and language in relation to the politics of

race, gender, and class (*She Tries Her Tongue*, 1989; see Savory 1996). Her poems "Discourse on the Logic of Language" and "Universal Grammar" are especially powerful and formalistically provocative and effective, and her essays are not only politically provocative but also innovative in form (1997; 1993): her experiments in poetics carry over to her prose writing increasingly (1997).

Many poets presently writing live outside the region. The work of Linton Kwesi Johnson, James Berry, John Agard, David Dabydeen, E. A. Markham, Grace Nichols, and Jean Binta Breeze responds to a British context, that of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and Nourbese Philip to a Canadian one. J. Edward Chamberlin observes that poets of West Indian descent in Britain are particularly collectively clear about the way language is situated politically and socially. Chamberlin comments, "No one holds on to language as fiercely as the person who has nothing else" (1993:263). Certainly poets have been in the forefront of West Indian political struggle within and outside the region. The brilliant oral poet Mikey Smith was stoned to death during a period of political violence in Jamaica. Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetry was (and still is) a voice against racism, economic disparity, and police abuses of power in Britain, especially in the Margaret Thatcher years.

The interaction between poetry and politics is often mirrored by the ways in which Caribbean poets explode the boundaries between poetry and prose, demonstrating in this as in other ways, that Caribbean culture is not only plural but generally does not affirm divisive labels and formal categories: its creative spirit is transformative and kinetic. Brathwaite's recent work, written in a poetic voice he calls the "video style," subverts boundaries between the aural and the visual and poetry as printed word. The video style enables Brathwaite to use different font sizes and degrees of bold type, as well as spaces within and between words, lines and stanzas, to indicate the rise and fall of the voice and the nature of language as visual sign and aural experience. This style is also politically informed, for through it Brathwaite writes the presence of Caliban, the dispossessed slave of the European magician-prince Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as well as Caliban's mother, Sycorax, original ruler of the island Prospero usurps. In a quite brilliant metaphorical shift, Brathwaite utilizes the resources of the Mac computer but designates them as Sycorax's influence, the muse in the machine: "*Dear mamma* // I writin yu dis letter / *wha?* / guess what! pun a computer o / kay? / like I jine de mercantilists? // *well not quite!* . . . *if you cyaan beat prospero* / whistle" (1992: 77). Brathwaite's video style challenges the separation of poetry and design, and Walcott's latest collection, *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), contains twenty-six color reproductions of his own paintings

and is partly a history of Impressionist painting, as well as Walcott's relation to the visual arts.

Poetry in the Caribbean is an art form with very close interconnections to other arts, and precisely because it is almost invariably either orature or informed by the oral tradition, it remains, unlike fiction, capable of being truly popular.

Fiction

Michael Gilkes begins his chronology of the West Indian novel in 1492, with Columbus's first voyage to the so-called New World and includes the context of the history of the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States, as well as relevant British literary works, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which established the importance of fiction in the West Indian colonies. Diaries of colonial wives, such as Lady Nugent and other British people who visited or lived in the West Indies and wrote out of their own cultural prejudices and knowledge, established a collective thesis to which Caribbean writers would provide the antithesis. Ramchand begins his study of the West Indian novel with the social contexts that would contribute eventually to the growth of the fiction in the region: popular education in the West Indies in the nineteenth century and the issue of white absenteeism: he concludes that it is misleading to conflate the cultural condition of the English working class and liberated slaves in the West Indies in the nineteenth century because the former lived in a culture with "a cultured class," waiting to be democratized, whereas "In the background of the liberated slave was a cultural void" (1983: 38).

Despite pioneering works such as *Becka's Buckra Baby* (Tom Redcam, 1903, Jamaica), and Jamaican H. G. De Lisser's *Jane's Career* (1913), the tradition of the West Indian novel really begins in the 1930s with Jamaican Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom* (1933), Trinidadian Alfred H. Mendes's *Pitch Lake* (1934) and *Black Fauns* (1935), and Trinidadian C. L. R. James's *Minty Alley* (1936). Mendes and James jointly edited the monthly *The Beacon* (1931–33), which as Sander (1995) points out, was highly political as well as literary. All four of these important novels explore the pressures on ordinary lives in a region where poverty and racism were endemic and colonialism still in place.

By the mid-century, Jamaican Roger Mais's fiction continued this socially committed trend with *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1970), which experimented with form (the use of choruses) to give a sense of social cohesiveness in the black working class. His contemporary, Mittelholzer, is described by Gilkes (1981: 41) as being the first West Indian novelist to make central the theme of

plural racial inheritance as complicating divided loyalties, in *Corentyne Thunder* (1941). V. S. Reid's *New Day* (1949) is an important fictional reading of Jamaican history between 1865 and the 1940s, including the Morant Bay uprising and Paul Bogle.[12] But it was a cluster of texts in the 1950s and 1960s that really marked the West Indian novel's outstanding range and literary quality: Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). I would add Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) to this group though Marshall acknowledges a dual identity (African America and Barbados): her vision portrays a particularly important aspect of Caribbean experience. This was a truly remarkable group of novels by a truly remarkable group of novelists. For Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* was the consummation of a long career in which she had very often muted her West Indian voice, though as Naipaul pointed out in reviewing her second novel, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1935), excising the West Indian background makes the central character have no past, no nationality, no personal background: so the excision is glaring and evidently there is a Caribbean subtext waiting to become explicit (Savory 1998). It took the sixties, and the beginning of West Indian literature, to give Rhys's explicitly West Indian novel its place in history.

Harris has been an amazingly prolific novelist, establishing and exploring the very boundaries of self and identity by subverting fictional conventions of characterization in innovative, highly metaphorical ways that owe everything to his multi-ethnic Guyanese inheritance. He says of language that it is "the medium . . . to hint at a *medium* is to embrace a vision of patterns and capacities beneath and beyond every conventional game of one-sided meaning" (1967: 21), that is, it is a spiritual dimension, and the writer may not be so much informed as possessed by collective memory, "as an imaginative writer subject to uncanny lines sprung from unconscious/conscious memory, and appearing within the drafts of fiction I write" (in Bundy 1999: 249). Harris is the Caribbean answer to postmodernism, which he has seen as in danger of being nihilistic; he has offered instead an emphasis on thinking about what genuinely crosscultural experience, identity or literature might be – at best, "re-visionary potential" (1990: 176).

Marshall would go on to write several more major novels, each exploring the relation between the Caribbean and African America: her *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969) portrays a threatened island community that is based on her understanding of Barbados; her *Praise Song for the Widow* (1983) is the story of an affluent African American widow who finds her own connection to Africa in Carriacou's traditions; *Daughters* (1991) explores a young woman's

relation to her Caribbean father and African American mother, as well as to her own generation. Lamming's complex political vision was to develop through several novels after the autobiographical *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953). In *The Emigrants* (1954); *Of Age and Innocence* (1958); *Season of Adventure* (1960); *Water with Berries* (1971); and *Natives of my Person* (1972), he fictionalized West Indian experience in Britain, return to the Caribbean, class tensions, and the construction of Africa within the Caribbean; the nature of political action and artistic commitment, and of human behavior that inhibits or strengthens both.

For Naipaul, also a very prolific writer, of fiction and travel narratives, *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) was a sign that the clever humor of his first three books of fiction could be replaced by a full realization of the humanity of an ordinary man in an indifferent colonial Trinidad. Naipaul would go on to a major literary career in Britain, where he has been knighted: his legendary hostility to the West Indies and to other world cultures he finds wanting has produced many novels and travel books. More recently he seems to have turned to explorations of himself in a British context. Francis Wyndham's review of Naipaul's *Guerillas* (1975) sees beneath the controlled surface of the prose: "The manner is controlled to the point of terseness, but the matter resounds like a cry of pain" (Wyndham 1975: 259).

For Selvon, the turn to London as setting for *The Lonely Londoners* established a different but complementary vision and tone from the specifically Indo-Caribbean experience in his first novel, *A Brighter Sun* (1952). Selvon contributed a sustained West Indian comic voice in his fiction set in Britain. By West Indian comedy, I mean an intelligent irreverence toward British literature and colonial culture that is subversive but not aggressive. Also, it can be understood by means of thinking of a combination of the tragicomic emotional landscape of the blues with the inventive satirical wordplay of calypso. Selvon's work is particularly appropriate here, for his comedy is often on the edge of the tragic, and his fictional voice is by no means always comic. There is pain beneath a good deal of Trinidadian humor (Trinidadians being celebrated for their traditions of popular wit and extempore wordplay), but the surface levity provides a means to survive it, and Caribbean playfulness with words also destabilizes colonial possession of language ("correct" usage etc.). Ramchand puts it nicely when he speaks of Selvon's ability to use language as "sophisticated use and abuse (changing gears without de-clutching)" (Salick n.d.: 31).

The range of setting, styles and themes in the group of canonical novels mentioned above are quite varied, from a boy's young life in a village in

Barbados (Lamming) to a girl's emerging maturity in New York (Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*); from West Indian exiles in London in the mid-twentieth century (Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*) to the story of a nineteenth-century white Creole, destroyed by her implacable English husband. The last, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is seriously intertextual with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, cleverly switching the emphasis from a young English woman's struggles to the entire defeat of the hopes of her "other," the madwoman in the attic. There is the story of an Indo-Caribbean man's search for fulfillment in Trinidad, which manifests as the struggle for an outward and material symbol of achievement, a home for himself and his family (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas*); and a mythic quest by a crew of dead men into the forests and waterways of Guyana, which is a journey that questions the material and literal and explores complexities of soul and spirit (Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*). But what they have in common, apart from making the novel form their own, is an acute ear for West Indian cadences of speech, and an acute awareness of the political and social context in which West Indian lives are lived, a context which, despite variations of time and place, is always fundamentally about inequities of power and material wealth, reinforced by racial, class, and gender divisions.

Like poets and dramatists, fiction writers have contributed importantly in transcribing Creoles onto the page and giving their narrators and characters individual Creole voices. These include Lamming's Trumper: "When you see the sun you know there gottabe light. An don' say someting wrong with yuh eyes, 'cause the sun ain' t got nothin' to do with that" (1970: 130); Selvon's narrator: "So for old time sake Moses find himself on a bus going to Waterloo, vex with himself that his heart so soft that he always doing something for somebody and nobody ever doing anything for him" (1972: 7); Paule Marshall's Silla: "In truth . . . That's what I was thinking when you came. How there don seem to be no plan a-tall, a-tall to this life" (1959:31); Harris's daSilva: "I feed it often from me lip . . . My pretty lady bird. She and me was one flesh" (1985: 88); Naipaul's Moti: "He don't rob the rude and crude shopkeepers, people like himself. He frighten they give him a good dose of licks. No, he does look for nice people with nice soft heart, and is them he does rob" (1961: 171); and Rhys's Christophine: "I hope you satisfy, I hope you well satisfy. . . . and no good to start your lies with me. I know what you do to that girl as well as you know. Better. Don't think I frightened of you either" (1966: 124). These characters each have their own voice in their nation language – Barbadian, Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian – or in a more generic Caribbean accent. The issue of how to write Creole or nation language, especially as a narrative voice, which Selvon uses in *The Lonely Londoners*, was important in the 1950s and 1960s. In the

absence of standardized Creoles, or Creole dictionaries, novelists had to devise their own transcription systems with a view to the international audience that metropolitan publishers hoped to engage.

Ramchand comments that with the establishment of popular education in the nineteenth century, Standard English and the lightest Creole began to intersect. He argues that there is such a thing as "West Indian Standard," or WIS, spoken by educated people with fluency in Standard English who nevertheless are "more or less intuitive speakers of or thinkers in a West Indian dialect or dialects" (1983: 91, 94). But many of the most important West Indian novelists have had to work in circumstances that separated them from constantly hearing the voices of exclusively West Indian cultures: of these writers, Selvon, Lamming, Rhys, and Harris wrote these texts in Britain, Marshall in New York where she lived in a Barbadian community within the larger context of the city.

In the mid-1960s, Earl Lovelace's fiction began to appear (*While Gods Are Falling*, 1965). Lovelace explores tensions between country and city, the challenges of being a man in a world where hard-won traditions are under threat (such as the police offer to religious culture in *The Wine of Astonishment*, 1982). Lovelace's sense of humor and his acute portrayals of Trinidadian culture frame his understanding of the personal frustrations and tragedies that confront ordinary people caught in the ebbs and flows of cultural change. Though *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) remains his best-loved novel, *Salt* (1996) is his most ambitious novel yet, emotionally complex, seriously political, and, like all of Lovelace's work, on the side of those who are marginalized. In the 1980s, Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua) and Caryl Phillips (St. Kitts) demonstrated consistently highly accomplished literary voices which whilst West Indian are also highly cosmopolitan, and they have both received a great deal of international attention. Phillips (b. 1958), after some success as a dramatist, saw his first two novels, *The Final Passage* (1985) and *A State of Independence* (1986), appear very close together via major literary publishers, signaling his immediate recognition as a major new voice. Jamaica Kincaid (b. 1949) was already established in New York literary circles when her first volume of short fiction, *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), introduced her to a Caribbean audience. Phillips's *Cambridge* (1991), like Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994), belongs to an important group of West Indian novels that dramatize the long period of transatlantic slavery.

We can as yet only begin to sketch in the larger map of anglophone Caribbean fiction. It is interesting that its writers often begin or continue

as poets, whether publishing or not (including Lamming, Harris, E. A. Markham, Anthony Kellman, Fred D'Aguiar, Velma Pollard, Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison, Nourbese Philip, Jean Rhys), and this has some very interesting implications for form, tending to increase a writer's sense of the power of economy with words and the richness of layered metaphor, as well as the possibilities in patterns of language rhythms.

The novel has also contributed to the realization of diverse experiences within Caribbean culture. Oliver Jackman's *Saw the House in Half* (1974) portrays the contribution of Barbados, Britain, and Nigeria to the consciousness of a young man of the generation of Walcott and Brathwaite, born in Barbados, an undergraduate at Cambridge, and a journalist in Nigeria. The middle class has been less often the subject of West Indian fiction than the working class, though Andrew Salkey, John Hearne, and Marion Patrick Jones, among others, have been concerned with that particular experience. In terms of ethnic identities in the Caribbean, though many novelists reflect the majority of African descent (Lamming, Marshall, Brodber, Kincaid, Lorde, Michael Anthony, Andrew Salkey, Earl Lovelace, Vic Reid), there is a strong group of Indo-Caribbean fiction writers led by Selvon and Naipaul (such as Ismith Khan, Lakshmi Persaud), a small group of white Creoles (most famously Rhys; also Allfrey, Scott), and a number of fiction writers who determinedly cross racial lines (Cliff, Zadie Smith, Phillips). Some critics are working on specific areas of the novel to explore these issues (see Lalla 1996).

It is still true now that most West Indian fiction is written and published outside the region: recent Barbadian fiction by new writers (Glenville Lovell, Kwadwo Agymah Kamau, Cecil Foster, Anthony Kellman) portrays the island, but all of these writers live in the USA or Canada. Barbadian Austin "Tom" Clarke has had a long and distinguished career as a writer in Canada (since *The Survivors of the Crossing*, 1964). Guyanese novelists Wilson Harris, Roy Heath, Jan Shinebourne, Pauline Melville, David Dabydeen, and Fred D'Aguiar all live outside Guyana. D'Aguiar (also a poet and dramatist) won the Whitbread Prize for best first novel in 1995 for *The Longest Memory*, since made into a BBC television drama; though he has strong ties to Guyana and to the UK, he now lives in Miami. St. Lucian Garth St. Omer, like many other Caribbean writers, such as Michelle Cliff, Glenville Lovell, and Jamaica Kincaid, lives in the USA.

There is quite a strong if narrow tradition of comic or more precisely tragic-comic writing (Selvon, Anthony C. Winkler, Sonny Ladoo), which seems to be expanded by the newcomer Zadie Smith. Though many novels have a fairly conventional linear narrative, many also are highly innovative. Robert Antoni,

who experiments on the very edge of the comic/tragic divide at times, also disrupts linear narrative and writes back to Jean Rhys (1997).

The memoir, though still rare, is beginning to appear in the canon of West Indian fiction (Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher*, 1976; Rachel Manley's *Drumblair*, 1996; Kincaid's *My Brother*, 1997). This is somewhat different from formal autobiography, such as Rhys's *Smile Please* (1979), and may be anything from lightly fictionalized experience (Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, 1982) to more innovative creative nonfiction, in which memory and imagination combine to create a fictional world. Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems* (1994) is a complex text that is effectively the poet's autobiography, and in terms of form, poetry by Brathwaite and sometimes other poets, memoir, cultural essay and literary history. Kincaid's recent *My Garden Book* (1999) is another new departure: part informational, part practical handbook, mostly personal essay, and breaks new ground within Kincaid's own fictional practice. Nourbese Philip's most recent collection of essays, *Genealogies of Resistance* (1997), fascinatingly combines her polemical and political voice with reiterations of her poetry and also passages of memoir.

Interestingly, the memoir as a form in anglophone Caribbean literature, which is relatively rare, seems predominantly female thus far. Biographies of major Caribbean figures are not common, and of writers even less so, but perhaps the growth of the memoir will eventually lead to a stronger interest in disclosure of personal lives, including those of major creative people. But a word of warning: Jamaica Kincaid's latest work, *Mr. Potter* (2002), claims to be a novel based on the life of her father: her persistent use of her own life and those of her relatives as the evident basis for her writing follows Rhys, but this fusion of life and art cannot be taken in any way as autobiography or biography. Whereas all textual versions of experience are in a sense fiction, novels are the most evidently indifferent to the untidiness of actual experience, and even memoir cannot claim to be telling what actually happened without a strong authorial gloss and control. Furthermore, there is a perfectly understandable reticence in disclosing personal experience in the middle class in island societies, which are small and acutely aware of the difficulties of maintaining privacy.

Drama and theater

Recent much-needed studies have helped a great deal to begin to frame this very interesting and very under-recorded and evaluated area of West Indian literature. Judy Stone's *Theatre* (1994) in the series "Studies in West Indian

Literature" has made a major contribution to our collective memory of the recent history of West Indian theater up to the early 1990s.[13] Bruce King's *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama* (1995) is a very helpful theater history, as well as a detailed account of Walcott's work as a theater director in Trinidad. This is important also because we may be in danger of undervaluing Walcott as a dramatist simply because his poetry is so much better known in the outside world than his plays, and because plays really depend upon regular production to remain in the public imagination. King's biography of Walcott is also an important resource for theater scholars (2000).

The biggest problem for West Indian theater is the lack of financial support, which makes it impossible, with a relatively small audience pool in each country, to pay actors and production workers sufficiently for them to be able to commit themselves professionally to theater, despite the high level of skills and often of training. Thus, though the standard of performance in West Indian theater is frequently very high, the resources for sets, costumes, and other aspects of production, most especially lighting and sound facilities, are relatively slim. Almost everybody involved needs another means of support outside theatre. This limits the number of productions that can be achieved in any given period, as rehearsal time is generally limited to evenings, weekends, and holidays, working around the timetables of the cast's employment.

Perhaps it is for this reason that drama and theater have attracted the least commitment from writers (although similar conditions in Nigeria, for example, have produced quite different results), for not only are financial resources limited, but theater buildings also, and a playwright needs to work with a company to develop his craft. Walcott, who did make a serious commitment to writing plays, had a very productive period with the Trinidad Theatre Workshop from the late 1960s to the mid-70s, which led to the development of a number of his finest plays, including *Dream on Monkey Mountain, Ti-Jean and his Brothers*, and *The Joker of Seville*. From 1977 to 1993, Walcott returned to the company and developed another very important series of plays, including *Pantomime, Remembrance, The Last Carnival*, and *A Branch of the Blue Nile.* Walcott's fascinating essay "What the Twilight Says" (1998) speaks to both the creative opportunities in Caribbean theater and the difficulties. Walcott developed *Dream on Monkey Mountain* after directing Jean Genet's *The Blacks* and Wole Soyinka's *The Road*: this was a deliberate search for a West Indian theatrical esthetic (Savory 1978).

Walcott's shadow is as large in drama as it is in poetry in the sense that although there has always been a significant amount of new drama produced in the West Indies, it is not widely known. The origins of West Indian drama are

both the colonial productions that amused the planters and their friends and kept them somewhat in touch with London styles, and the rituals and festivals that survived slavery and colonialism to become rich sources of inspiration (see Omotoso 1982). The play is arguably a western form, and certainly in the Caribbean, it derived from colonial culture, but it has by no means been an entirely popular cultural form. By drawing on forms and themes from popular culture, the dramatist can bring the play closer to the mainstream of Caribbean culture and make some exciting experiments with form.

Contemporary Carnival, which is a syncretic festival, began in Trinidad as a French Creole pre-Lenten ritual, and that of course descended from even earlier European Carnival traditions. But African ritual and festival informed Carnival after emancipation: Rawle Gibbons's unpublished play *I, Lawah*, like his more recent anthology of published work, *A Calypso Trilogy* (1999), utilizes Carnival traditions to speak about the political, racial, and cultural identities of Trinidad culture in 1881. Gibbons has said that "The search for new forms in the theatre is for the Caribbean dramatist a search for truer forms" (Savory 1990). The late Earl Warner, whose work as a director led to a great deal of the most exciting and serious theater in the Caribbean in the 1980s and 1990s, directed *I, Lawah* for a newly formed pan-Caribbean anglophone company in 1986. Theater and drama depend very much on the vision of the director as well as that of the dramatist: it is particularly tragic that Warner's brilliance was cut short by his premature death.

Errol Hill (b. 1921), is identified by Judy Stone as "The last of the great West Indian pioneers active in the first half of the twentieth century" (1994: 23). A dramatist himself, he utilised stickfighting tradition in *Man Better Man* (written 1957; published, Hill 1985).[14] Hill's conception of West Indian drama was that it should move away from the predominantly verbal to a form that incorporated music, dance, and song. Walcott's collaboration with American composers of musicals (Galt McDermot and more recently, much less successfully, Paul Simon) has been uneven in quality, but in it he has shown a sustained interest in trying to bring together traditions of total theater in the Caribbean with the musical tradition in the United States. One serious problem in this has been that the traditions of the Broadway musical are tuned to commercial outreach, and so Walcott's Caribbean genius, as demonstrated in his excellent musical with Galt McDermot, *The Joker of Seville*, is likely to be muted in the US context, as it was in the disastrous musical venture he recently made with Paul Simon, *The Cape Man*. But well-made plays are still popular: Roderick Walcott's *The Harrowing of Benjy* is, according to Kendel Hippolyte, "the most widely performed play in the anglophone Caribbean" (Roderick Walcott

2000: x). There is a strong tradition of social realism, such as in the "yard plays," like Errol John's highly successful *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*, which won the *Observer* play competition in 1957 and has been produced in various European countries as well as India. It became a musical in Dominica and was produced for television in London, and John worked on a film script for many years (Stone 1994: 37). Earl Lovelace's *Jestina's Calypso* (performed 1957, published 1984) is a predominantly verbal, socially realistic play with calypsos counterpointing the theme. Trevor Rhone, a major dramatist in Jamaica with a gift for edgy social comedy, is perhaps best known for *Smile Orange* (produced 1971) and *Old Story Time* (produced 1979).

Sometimes social realism is interlaced with dramatic symbolism, as in Michael Gilkes's 1974 play *Couvade*. Dennis Scott's work, like Rawle Gibbons's, is much more deeply concerned with the commonalities of experience during and after slavery, and with the possibility of catharsis and healing. *An Echo in the Bone* centers on the nine-night ritual following a death and involving spirit possession: it moves back and forth in time. An important stage direction indicates that "All characters are black" (Hill 1985: 75), though they sometimes take white parts. The action deals with the ninth night after the killing of the planter Mr. Charles (Mr Charlie), and the disappearance and apparent suicide of Crew, the murderer.

Judy Stone's categorization of West Indian drama (1994) is interesting and provocative. After a historical survey up to 1950, including discussion of Errol Hill, she discusses six groups of plays: theater of realism; theater of the people; total theater; classical theater; the theater of ritual; and black British theater (Edgar White, Mustapha Matura, Caryl Phillips). Mustapha Matura (b. 1939 in Trinidad, and of Indo-Caribbean descent) has been extremely successful in Britain, not only with stage plays, but television series. His *Playboy of the West Indies*, based on Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, was highly successful in 1984. Though these categories are useful up to a point, there are clear overlaps between them. Total theater, for example, is a technique of production that can be just as suitable for theater of the people, such as Sistren's unpublished *Bellywoman Bangarang* (1978): theater of the people defines a thematic or cultural directive within the work. Similarly, Walcott is both a classical dramatist, in the sense of clearly working in the tradition of European drama, but in his musicals and in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1972), he utilizes and indeed helps to define West Indian total theater. Alwyn Bully, the very gifted Dominican dramatist, actor, and director, is a social realist writer as well as a creator of musicals: he utilizes whatever is appropriate for the work in hand. Brian Crow comments on Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* that "it combines

the drama of consciousness of the modern Western dream play with the conventions of West Indian folk stories" (1996: 40). But Stone's book is very valuable because it provides an enormous amount of information, thereby preserving records of productions, movements, and theater practitioners. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, in their study of postcolonial drama in a global context (1996), also provide some provocative frames for West Indian drama by focusing on a series of themes (rewriting of the European canon, as in Walcott's brilliant *Pantomime*, 1980; postcolonial histories, identity politics, and neo-imperialisms), and forms (language, Carnival and ritual, music and song). Walcott's most impressive total theater work is *The Joker of Seville* (1978).

Women's writing and gender issues

Since the 1980s, when the women's movement in the Caribbean became influential and organized, women's writing in the Caribbean has grown from a trickle to a flood of excellent varied work from both inside and outside the region.[15] Support for the writing is growing: the bi-annual Caribbean Women Writers Conference and the journal *Macomere* together provide a scholarly forum for women's writing. The Frank Collymore Literary Award, based in Barbados, has awarded its top prize to a woman for recent years.

The history of anglophone Caribbean women's writing goes back to slavery. *The History of Mary Prince* (1831; ed. Gates 1987) belongs to the tradition of slave narratives from the USA and the Caribbean that testify to conditions of life during plantation slavery, but women's experiences were particular and often involved coerced sexual relations, or tensions with white mistresses. Similarly the Crimean narrative of Mary Seacole (1857) permits a Caribbean woman's voice to break through established stereotypes and fill out or answer accounts given by whites (both men and women) and men of color.

As in the case of male historians and their relation to creative literature, it is important to note that women activists and intellectuals, who have frequently written well, have a part to play in encouraging women's writing in the region. Jamaicans Lucille Mathurin-Mair and Elsa Goveia (1956) contributed important foundational work in history, though Hilary Beckles has written a great deal on Caribbean women during slavery (1988; 1999).[16] But the collective work of the Caribbean-based women's movement and the establishment of formal women's and development studies programs at the various campuses of the University of the West Indies has also provided a great deal of important material (Ellis 1986, Mohammed and Shepherd 1988). A thorough knowledge of

the sociology of Caribbean women is extremely important in critical work on women's texts. Olive Senior and Erna Brodber have both contributed to research on Caribbean women, which has informed their creative work (Senior 1991, Brodber 1982). In addition, anthologies such as Ramabai Espinet's *Creation Fire* (1990) and outlets for publications such as *The Caribbean Writer* have encouraged women writers to begin to publish within the region.

In terms of genre, there are far more women fiction writers than established poets or dramatists; indeed there are relatively few women working in theater as writers, perhaps because sustained work in theater is difficult for women with families and there is little opportunity for a full-time career in theater in the region. The predominant fictional form is the novel, although there have been a significant number of story collections (e.g., Cliff 1998, Senior 1989, Pollard 1994, Adisa 1986, Craig 1993), and the memoir is beginning to make an appearance (also testimony, as the life stories recounted in the women's theater company from Jamaica, Sistren, *Lionheart Gal*, 1986, affirm). The novel form most favored has been the *Bildungsroman*, often complicated by issues of migration.[17] A remarkable number of texts demonstrate in innovative forms of narrative not only a Caribbean experience but a particularly African-Caribbean experience (such as Merle Collins's *Angel,* 1987). This is demonstrated in the form of the critical essay in Carole Boyce Davies's *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*: "Black women's writing . . . should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing . . . this reworking of the grounds of 'Black Women's Writing' redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality" (1994: 4). This, of course, is another example of an African-centered experience that influences the whole region (for example, even Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*). Already there are signs, in the recent work by Powell (1998), Nalo Hopkinson (1998 and 2000), Margaret Cezair-Thompson (*The True History of Paradise*, 1999), and Smith (1999), of vibrant new writing by young women that extends this new and growing canon in fascinating directions, such as science-fiction (Hopkinson) and crosscultural visions of the Caribbean (Cezair-Thompson, Smith, Powell).

Politics is as important in Caribbean women's writing as in the male tradition, but it is complexly made up of intersections of important strands of politics: for the most part working towards decolonization, against racism and poverty, and in terms of developing and protecting Caribbean identities and cultures as much as being concerned with feminism. Nourbese Philip, for example, has a whole book (*Showing Grit: Showboating North of the 44th Parallel*, 1993), on issues to do with the revival of the US musical *Show Boat*.

Though there are more books on Jean Rhys than any other West Indian writer, only a few women writers, such as Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, and Beryl Gilroy, have a sufficient body of work to warrant separate lengthy critical studies, and there is always the danger that too much critical attention too early in a writer's career may damage or confine. There are several studies on Marshall and Kincaid, but Cliff and Gilroy are relatively neglected, and most discussions of Goodison, Philip, Harris, and Brand occur in large overviews of Caribbean poetry. Brand and Harris are very strong poetic voices. Brand is especially impressive in *Land to Light On*: "sweep this stretch of land up around your feet and point to the signs, pleat whole histories with pins in your mouth and guess at the fall of words" (1997: 43). Claire Harris's "Policeman Cleared in Jaywalking Case" is a very strong poem: "This law shrivels children and I fear / your naked fear of all that's different your dreams of power / your foolish innocence . . . " (Burnett *et al.* 1986: 280).

Caribbean women writers in the region have tried to pay attention to oral traditions. Cooper's analysis of Jamaican orature (1993) includes chapters on Louise Bennett and Sistren, the Jamaican theater company that developed performance based in testimony of working-class women's experience and improvisational theater techniques, and who published a volume of testimonies (1986), as well as discussion of Jean Binta Breeze.

Clearly the separation of Caribbean women's writing from the whole canon, whether in terms of critical writing or conference themes, is an offshoot of the women's movement and enables women writers and critics of women's writing to engage in important discussions of issues in the field in a concentrated and productive manner. But it should be said that crossgender studies are still important, so that the interweaving of women's literary history with that of male-authored literature is also explored and understood. Issues that concern critics include the connections between African-Caribbean, African American, and African-women's writing; issues of voice and accent; and issues of class, race, and ethnicity, especially the role and contribution of Indo-Caribbean and white Creole women writers. Robert Antoni has challenged essentialism by writing in the voices of women (*Blessed Is the Fruit*, 1997); Patricia Powell by writing a tale of crossdressing, in which she creates the voice of a Chinese-Jamaican woman (*The Pagoda*, 1998).

The multivocal model in many African-Caribbean women's texts suggests by implication a complex reader–text relation. Furthermore, some women writers are redefining how we categorize language boundaries in literature: one of the most successful of new young writers is Edwidge Danticat, who is Haitian but writes in English (1994): this is a different case from, say, Maryse

Condé's *I, Tituba* (1992), translated into English by someone other than the author. Bibliographical resources such as Paravisini-Gebert and Torres-Seda (1993), critical anthologies such as Boyce Davies and Savory Fido (1990), Cudjoe (1990), Pyne-Timothy (1998), Newson and Strong-Leek (1998), and Anim-Addo (1995), and critical studies such as O'Callaghan (1993) are beginning to provide a forum and frame for discussion of women's texts.

Issues in criticism

Michael Gilkes remarked almost twenty years ago that the existence of Jamaican critic and poet Edward Baugh's 1978 *Critics on Caribbean Literature* for a British series on literary criticism "reflects the Metropole's acceptance: a literature has surely 'arrived' when there can be a book dealing with its critics" (1981: preface). Though conferences inside and outside the region regularly produce excellent discussions of individual texts and of related issues, there is still too little metacriticism.[18] A number of bio-bibliographical resources and surveys of the canon, like this one, help to provide a basic map of the literature, but issues relating to modes of interpretation and the implications of context are extremely important.

The anglophone Caribbean canon is so diverse, and is so complexly located (in the region, in Britain, in Canada, in the USA, and elsewhere), that it is impossible to fix one way of reading it. Postcolonial, feminist, postmodern, neomodernist, and cultural studies approaches are all well-established in this field as in other fields of postcolonial literary study, and diversity of approach in Caribbean literary criticism and theory is extremely helpful. Historical and cultural contexts explain the continually changing parameters of a diverse region that must face new threats from the global world order and transnational commercial influences. Esthetic analyses made in those contexts can express developments instigated by political and social challenges, the literary counterpart to inventiveness such as the creation of the steel band and the continuous reinvention of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere.

The boundaries between literary criticism and theory and creative writing are sometimes quite blurred in the case of anglophone Caribbean literature, which is something to celebrate as well as to study: David Dabydeen, now a very significant Caribbean writer, says of his *Slave Song* (1984), that "it is the book of poems but it is also a book with literary criticism in it. I don't see how you can separate the two" (in Dawes 1997a: 182). In his *Coolie Odyssey* (1988), however, there are no notes. Davies (1994) demonstrates how personal story and anecdote can be brought together with literary criticism, theory,

and trenchant political feminism. Kamau Brathwaite's *X/Self* (1987) and his *Barabajan Poems* (1994) both have endnotes and Brathwaite's cultural and literary criticism, as well as his historical scholarship, are informed by and inform his poetry (see also Brathwaite 1993c and see especially *Contradictory Omens*, 1974). Wilson Harris has also contributed a great deal to our thinking about issues in reading Caribbean literature. His essay "Creoleness," for example, includes his autobiographical self-placement as a descendant of "Amerindian, European, African, and, on my father's side, perhaps Asian as well" (in Bundy 1999) and goes on to argue that creolization is, when realized, fully "creative difficulty" and "cross-cultural regeneration" (in Bundy 1999: 247). Crosscultural criticism and theory that can respond to these visions will avoid ideological and esthetic simplicities (Davies and Savory Fido 1990), and criticism that understands that it, too, is a branch of creative enterprise will avoid unnecessary angst about the legitimacy of the work of writers who offer theories out of their creative practice.

A good deal of work still needs to be done to establish criticism and theory for this fascinating body of literature: certainly what is needed includes a good many more separate studies of important writers, biographies (such as Paravisini-Gebert 1996 and King 2000) and literary histories that can offer supportive contextual information, and cultural studies perspectives that seek to explain the conditions of production of this diverse and geographically scattered literary tradition (see, for example, Nettleford 1990; Hulme 1992). Studies that connect Caribbean musical traditions to those of poetry, and dance; and visual arts to those of drama and theater as a whole and orature to all literary genres are very important, but so also are studies of the different cultural identities of Caribbean countries, balancing general theories of Caribbean culture. What is crucial is that criticism and theory remain well informed about Caribbean culture, history, and politics, and that esthetic criteria are as diverse and sensitive to change as the texts to which they are applied.

Conclusion

One thing is certain: anglophone Caribbean literature is already a major canon of world literature, and has contributed enormously to the strength of Caribbean culture against oppression and foreign appropriation. Though it is enormously rewarding to read as literature, it is always implicitly politically located. The bibliography that follows indicates a number of important critical and scholarly anthologies that are of help to the scholar beginning in this field, such as the volume of profiles of fifty writers (Daryl Cumber Dance, 1986), the

surveys in James 1999 and King 1995, the interviews with Caribbean poets in *Talk Yuh Talk*, edited by Kwame Dawes (2001), and the annotated bibliography of Caribbean women novelists, edited by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Olga Tores-Seda (1993). There are also a few journals, such as *The Journal of West Indian Literature, Sargasso, The Caribbean Writer*, and *The Jean Rhys Review* that publish both critical and creative work on Caribbean writers.

Perhaps the most exciting metaphor and reality with which to end is the generational vibrancy evidenced by Nalo Hopkinson (Slade Hopkinson's daughter), whose second novel, *Midnight Robber* (2000), followed her first by only two years, and Kwame Dawes, Neville Dawes's son, whose volumes of poetry (1996, 1997a and b) suggest a similar level of creative energy, and Denise Harris, Wilson Harris's daughter, whose first novel (*Web of Secrets*, 1996) is set in Guyana.

Indeed, if this chapter were to close with a mention of all the new texts which have appeared during its writing and publication process, it would be significantly lengthened. Now in their seventies, Brathwaite and Walcott continue to publish as does Paule Marshall; Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe* (2003) and Jamaica Kincaid's *Mr Potter* (2002) must serve as indications of the high quality of new work continually produced by anglophone Caribbean writers.

Notes

1. I have used both "anglophone Caribbean literature" and "West Indian" literature here to describe this canon, for both terms are currently in use. Of course West Indian is problematic, since it designates Columbus's error in thinking he has discovered "the Indies" by going westwards, and is therefore certainly a colonialist term in a certain way, but its long history of use by West Indians themselves makes it feasible to use it; anglophone Caribbean is certainly less politically conflicted but is also less inflected by popular Caribbean usage.
2. See Brathwaite's important poem "Caliban," in *The Arrivants* (1973a: 191–95). Limbo has many different identities and becomes a central metaphor for the journey of African people from Africa (limbo may have had a role in ritual in African culture), across the Middle Passage (where it was a way the slaves could exercise on deck and reconnect with their history and identity), to the so-called New World, where it has often become a tourist spectacle in hotels.
3. The term postmodern has particular associations with European philosophy; Caribbean intellectual tradition has been both logocentric and deeply aware of the problematic relation between language and power. Although a few Caribbean critics embrace deconstruction as critical method, when used it needs to be brought into dialogue with Caribbean-derived methodologies and cultural identities (see Harris 1990: 176).

4. For example, late in the slave period, Yorubas who arrived in Trinidad were able to preserve more of their culture. The name of the Maroon leader in Jamaica, Nanny, is a version of Nana, the Ashanti title.
5. In my own experience, the connection between the fermented corn dough steamed in a banana leaf in Ghana and called "kenkey," and the mixture of cornmeal, eggs, sugar, milk, and currants or raisins steamed and served in a banana leaf in Barbados and called "conkies" was very instructive. The further historical complication is that conkies in Barbados came to be associated with an English ritual, that of Guy Fawkes Night (5 November), when a Catholic plot to blow up the English Houses of Parliament is remembered by letting off fireworks and burning an effigy of Fawkes on a bonfire. This is no longer celebrated in Barbados, its abandonment a natural part of decolonization.
6. By less ethnically complex, I mean only that Barbados has had a history, since discovery by Europeans, of British and West African cultural interaction, whereas Trinidad and Guyana have very large Indo-Caribbean populations, and a more complicated history of colonial European cultures (French, Spanish).
7. Barbados was clearly highly successfully colonized and African survivals were, at Independence in 1966, far less visible than in other Caribbean states. There is the popular joke in Barbados of the cable sent to the British at the outset of the Second World War encouraging Britain to go ahead against the Germans, with "Little England" (Barbados) behind her (Puckrein 1984).
8. See also Savory 2001. The issue of Locke's involvement with slavery, both as investor and philosopher, is very important in understanding Enlightenment intellectual complicities in the formation of racialized slavery.
9. I have in mind here the example of *Encarta Africana*, the CD-ROM version of the encyclopedia of African cultures edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Anthony Appiah. But it is also good news that Kamau Brathwaite recently produced a two volume set of CDs of his reading of *The Arrivants* (1973a), because the early reel-to-reel recordings that were part of Brathwaite's own creative process, and the LP records that have long disappeared or worn out provided a vital extension of the written texts (the CDs are available from Kamau Brathwaite at Savacou North, via New York University's Comparative Literature Department). The relative lack of reliable available recordings of major West Indian orature in conjunction with anthologies is a great problem. It is to be hoped that CD-ROM may make it possible to compile a library of audiovisual aids to the study of Caribbean literature, especially poetry.
10. Many issues intersect here. West Indian writers who live in London may have British accents; a generation born and raised in the USA may not be able to reproduce the Creole of their parents as their own language. Standard English is also a publishing issue: as West Indian writers move in greater numbers into mainstream publishing, everything from a chance at literary prizes to a large appreciative audience may depend upon that audience having no trouble

reading the text, which suggests a drift somewhat towards a Creole-inflected Standard English.

11. Kamau Brathwaite has been collecting and organizing a massive archive of West Indian literature, and especially poetry, for many years. His 1979 pamphlet *Barbados Poetry: Slavery to the Present* is a very important scholarly resource.
12. Paul Bogle was an important Jamaican freedom fighter, a free man and deacon in the church of political leader George William Gordon, who led a popular uprising at Morant Bay (1865), in response to dreadful social conditions, worsened by floods and drought in 1864, and the indifference of Governor Eyre. The administration retaliated, for twenty-nine whites killed and thirty-four others badly wounded, by punishing all those thought to be affiliated to the uprising via extensive executions and floggings, the burning of homes and destruction of crops (Sherlock and Bennet 1998).
13. Omotoso 1982 is also a useful resource on this and other topics in Caribbean theater, though his book is unevenly written.
14. See, for the connection between stickfighting and calypso, Rohlehr 1990.
15. Anglophone Caribbean women are writing in significant numbers in the Caribbean region, Britain, Canada, and the United States. A selected list of Jamaican women writers would include Louise Bennett, Erna Brodber, Michelle Cliff, Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior, Pamela Mordecai, Gloria Escoffery, Velma Pollard, Judith Hamilton, Patricia Powell, Ifeona Fulani, Barbara Lalla, Christine Craig, Jean Binta Breeze, Opal Palmer Adisa, Rachel Manley, Honor Ford-Smith, Joan Riley, Jean D'Costa, and Sylvia Wynter. Writers also come from many other countries, ancestrally and / or immediately. M. Nourbese Philip, Ramabai Espinet, Dionne Brand, Rosa Guy, Claire Harris, Sybil Seaforth, Merle Hodge, Marion Patrick Jones, Valerie Belgrave, and Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell are from Trinidad and Tobago. Paule Marshall is of Barbadian ancestry and Pauline Melville, Jan Shinebourne, Grace Nicholls, Beryl Gilroy, and Mahadai Das are from Guyana. Jamaica Kincaid was born in Antigua and Grenada's writers include Merle Collins and Audre Lorde. Dominica has Jean Rhys and Phyllis Allfrey and Belize has Zee Edgell. *Her True True Name* (1989, edited by Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson) organizes extracts from the prose of Gilroy, Kincaid, Rhys, Brodber, Senior, Shinebourne, and others according to nationality. A new generation of women writers and scholars is now emerging who have been born and raised in the US, the UK, or Canada: their cosmopolitan perspectives and commitment to the Caribbean will add to the richness of this tradition.
16. Hilary Beckles is a progressive male scholar who writes feminist history. See 1988, 1989a and b, 1999.
17. It is interesting that there is a relative lack of detailed writing about sexuality or desire in West Indian literature from the region. The narrative of a young woman's early maturity can perhaps deal with sexuality in a more protected space.
18. See Cobham and Boxill (in King 1995), whose essays, among others, set historical frames for anglophone Caribbean literature.

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36

The Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement

F. ABIOLA IRELE

One of the most significant elements of social, intellectual, and cultural movements among black people has been the progressive development of the idea of Africa as an inspirational concept of collective affirmation and endeavor in the modern world. This concept, proceeding from a comprehensive vision of African peoples, societies, and cultures as constituting an all-encompassing entity, served as a model of thought and action that gave force and direction to pan-Africanism as well as to the local manifestations of nationalism in Africa that derived ideas and impulses from the global consciousness of race implied in the pan-African idea itself. The historical connection between pan-Africanism and African nationalism is evident at the ideological and political level of their expressions; there is an obvious sense in which the former laid the foundation of ideas for the latter (Bakpetu Thompson 1972; Esedebe 1994). But it is in the literature that the atmosphere of feelings, the deep affective responses to the conditions of existence that determine the processes by which these ideas were articulated, came to be fully conveyed.

The rooted connection between the various forms of black affirmation in the modern world is exemplified, in an arresting way, by the historical and thematic links between the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement, forming a defined current within the cycle of responses through which black writers and intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic have related to each other within the black world and to the vicissitudes of a common historical experience. But before examining the specific nature of these links, it is essential to consider the historical and sociological background that determined the context of black expression in the twentieth century, a context in which the idea of Africa has featured as a prominent theme.

The circumstances that led to the emergence of a unified concept of Africa and to the racial consciousness associated with it were directly related to the consequences of the collective experience of black people, the violence that marked the historic encounter between Africa and Europe. The initial and

fundamental factor in this experience for the growth of a black self-awareness on a global scale was the transplantation of considerable numbers of Africans from the original continent to the New World. The dispersal of millions of Africans over a period of some three hundred years all over America, without regard to their primary ties and dispositions, had the effect of creating black communities in the New World. Because these communities were so visible and therefore set apart from the very beginning of their existence under the specific conditions of slavery, they have tended to retain distinctive forms of cultural expression, giving objective form to their character as ethnic minorities within societies dominated politically, socially, and culturally by the white populations among whom they maintained an often uneasy collective existence. Henry Louis Gates has described the process by which this new African-based culture emerged in the New World:

> Inadvertently, African slavery in the New World satisfied the preconditions for the emergence of a new African culture, a truly Pan-African culture fashioned as a colorful weave of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical and formal threads. What survived this fascinating process was the most useful and the most compelling of the fragments at hand. Afro-American culture is an African culture, with a difference as signified by the catalysts of English, Dutch, French, Portuguese or Spanish languages and cultures, which informed the precise structures that each discrete New World Pan-African culture assumed. (1988: 4)

Given their wide dispersal across the New World, these black communities have always presented a diversity that is indisputable, especially as regards language and national affiliations. But they have a common reference which Africa has always symbolized, in ways that have had various implications over the years for the groups and individuals they embraced (Herskovits 1941; Bastide 1967; Farris-Thompson 1987; Holloway 1991). We owe the unified concept of Africa to these communities who collectively form what has come to be known as the "Black Diaspora." Separated as they were from the mother continent, their ethnic and in some respects cultural peculiarities took on in the general consciousness a significance that was related in an immediate way to the fact of race, and became directly associated with Africa, newly apprehended as a human and spiritual universe. It is this consciousness that the literary and ideological expression of black writers and intellectuals sought to articulate and to endow with social and political purpose and, ultimately, a moral and spiritual significance.

Africa came to have a meaning for the black people in America for three principal reasons. In the first place, the forced exile of Africans and their enslavement determined the original framework of the dichotomy between black and white that has dominated black awareness and expression in America, a dichotomy that in 1852 the black nationalist Martin J. Delany formulated in these terms:

> Now of "the nations that dwell on the face of the earth," that is, all the people – there are one thousand millions of souls, and of this vast number of human beings, two thirds are colored, from black, tending in complexion to the olive or that of the Chinese, with all the intermediate and admixtures of black and white, with the various "crosses" as they are physiologically but erroneously termed, to white . . . We have then two colored to one white person throughout the earth, and yet singular as it may appear, according to the present geographical and political history of the world, the white race predominates over the colored; or in other words, wherever there is one white person, that one rules and governs two colored persons. (1993: 37)

The sentiment of a common historical predicament that took root in slavery could not but prevail in the difficult situation of its aftermath, and was later to be extended to include the colonial experience as it affected Africans on the mother continent. These two dimensions of the black experience came to be perceived therefore as forming a continuing pattern of a universal subjection of the black race. This sentiment provided the ground for that acute sense of historical grievance that has been the fundamental theme of all black literature.[1]

Secondly, the problematic relationship of black communities to the dominant culture of the white majority had important psychological implications, arising from the cultural presuppositions and ideological rationalization of white domination. The fact that an abstract conception of western civilization was everywhere proposed to black people as the only acceptable norm for legitimizing their claim to a human quality and essence fostered a sense of cultural discomfort that had a far-reaching social significance, beyond the individual plane of awareness. It is this discomfort, the inauthentic life that the social pressures of segregation and racial humiliation imposed on the black subject, that is reflected in Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "We Wear the Mask":

> We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
> To thee from tortured souls arise
> We sing, but oh, the clay is vile

Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise
We wear the mask!
(in Gates and McKay 1997: 896)

The alienating effect of this situation involved psychological responses that became apparent in the literature as a "double consciousness," given memorable and poignant expression by W. E. B. Du Bois in the early pages of his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. It is the pathological dimension of this double consciousness that Frantz Fanon has examined in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, in terms that suggest that the black subject was not merely confronted with a psychic dilemma but indeed with what amounts to an existential predicament (Irele 1981: 138–42).

Thirdly, and this is the main point, for the black communities, and especially for the intellectuals who sought to voice their inner states as affected by their experience, Africa came to represent a deep layer of the personality overlaid by the impositions of western norms, one that it required, for a proper integration of the self, to be reconnected with, in one way or the other. The explicit devaluation of the black race in western ideology thus presented a conceptual challenge and an ideological burden that had to be taken up by the black intellectual. The fact that a negative image of Africa provided the ultimate reference for the general assault upon black self-awareness implied that Africa became a symbol anchored deep in the consciousness of the Black Diaspora, with its complex of conflicting meanings. The exploration in imaginative terms of this symbol in its full range and resonance thus became a compelling necessity for negotiating the objective realities as well as the subjective pressures of black existence in the New World.

It is essential to recall these factors as evoked above in order to restore anew to black expression the sense of context that gave it point and urgency. These are the factors that provide the concrete historical and sociological background of black intellectual responses to the racial situation in America and to the colonial experience in Africa. The connection between the responses of black writers in America and Africa to what came to be felt as the global experience of the race is best exemplified by what one may consider as the carry-over of the themes of the Harlem Renaissance into the Negritude movement and their amplification into a comprehensive vision of the black race in which the idea of Africa functions as a central reference.

These themes began to emerge in a new literature associated with Harlem as a consequence of socioeconomic factors that lent powerful impulse to the

development of an assertive black consciousness in the United States in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. It was the impact of this war that determined the prevailing climate of restlessness among black communities in the United States within which this new consciousness was manifested during this period, as black veterans, who had hoped that the service they had rendered the nation on the battlefields of Europe would be rewarded by the acknowledgement of their humanity, returned to America to be confronted anew with disabilities and humiliations that had marked the experience of the race. Their disillusionment and resentment had the effect of inspiring a militancy on their part, a mood that soon permeated the general black population, leading to violent confrontations between the races (Du Bois 1994: 3–5). This situation was exacerbated by the continuing pattern of social and economic inequalities imposed on the urban blacks whose ranks had been swelled by the great migration to the industrial centers of North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There also occurred, precisely at this time, the coming into place of a well-defined intellectual elite, the result of a process that had been set in motion by emancipation. For while the black community in America had always had forceful spokespersons since slavery – personalities like Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass come readily to mind – the growth of a black intellectual elite began to attain something of a critical mass only after emancipation. It is perhaps ironic that Harvard, the leading American university, came to serve as the significant seeding ground of this new black elite, producing such figures as W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter Woodson, and Alain Locke, who were to play such an important role in the emergence of a black intellectual culture in the twentieth century (Sollors *et al.* 1993).

The great exemplar of this "maturing" of a black elite was, of course, W. E. B. Du Bois, and his career illustrates the way in which the social atmosphere of the time compelled individuals like him to confront the rending contradictions of their situation as intellectuals and at the same time members of an oppressed and disadvantaged minority in a society that was in principle founded on the ideals of freedom and equal opportunity for all its citizens. The ambiguous situation of this black elite in the American social structure fostered a sense of identification with the black population in whose fate they came to perceive their own lot, with its burden of mental discomforts, fully implicated. This sense of identification found its representation in a literature that was focused on the life of the black communities, a literature that sought to provide testimony not only of the difficult social situation of the disinherited folk, but also of the special endowments that enabled them to create the forms of a

communal life with its distinctive configuration and expressive style. The condition of the black folk thus became central to the social awareness and artistic preoccupations of the writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance, and thus came to inform their imaginative vision.[2]

The literature of the Harlem Renaissance has been sufficiently discussed to make it unnecessary to undertake here a comprehensive review.[3] It will be enough for an understanding of its determining role in the emergence of the Negritude movement to consider three principal themes that gave it a special character and enabled it to exert a powerful appeal both in America and beyond. Priority must be accorded here to what may be considered the defining theme of black literature, that of racial protest, and the acute consciousness of a collective condition that went with this theme. In its immediate reference to the black condition, the protest theme of the literature of Harlem addresses in a forthright way the contradictions inherent in the denial to blacks of participation in the democratic principles of the American republic: of the young republic that Tocqueville had extolled with such feeling and admiration. One of the vital aspects of the Harlem Renaissance was therefore the exploration of what Gunmar Myrdal was later to call "the American dilemma" in his massive work of that title (Myrdal 1944), a dilemma for which the blacks stood as an embodiment and constant indictment, a point that Langston Hughes makes in these lines:

> I am the American heartbreak –
> Rock on which Freedom
> Stumps its toe –
> The great mistake
> That Jamestown
> Made long ago.
>
> (Hughes 1995: 385)

The bitter irony of this and similar poems conditions the revolutionary stances that Hughes adopts in other poems, such as "Silhouette" with its focus on the grim reality of lynching, that serve as comment upon and denunciation of the tragedies of African American experience (Reid 2001: 18–31). The fundamental import of the protest theme as a somber vision of an immense historical burden has been summed up in Claude McKay's poem, "Enslaved":

> Oh, when I think of my long suffering race,
> For weary centuries despised, oppressed
> Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place
> In the general life line of the Christian West

And in the Black Land disinherited
Robbed in the ancient country of its birth
My heart grows sick with hate, becomes lead,
For this my race has no home on earth . . .
(in Gates and McKay 1997: 986)

In the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, the sense of a tragic collective destiny marked by a history of despair found a fresh expression newly charged with the energies of racial frustration. Insofar as the protest theme as it was so forcefully rung in this poetry had an inspirational purpose, it conveyed a social and political message that was consonant with a certain form of American radicalism in the years between the two world wars (Smethurst 1999). This message came to be clarified by subsequent developments in the African American experience, so that McKay's celebrated poem of defiance, "If We Must Die," needs to be read as an anthem expressive not only of the combative mood of the interwar years, but even more, of the deeply rooted mood of dissidence that animated the gestures of defiance by which the civil rights movement came to be sustained in the sixties (Reid 2001). Viewed from this perspective, it is safe to say that African American literature is one that is most closely bound up with the social history of the United States.

But beyond the protest theme, and of crucial significance for the interconnections between the literature of the Harlem Renaissance and that of the Negritude movement, is the celebration of black life by the Harlem writers, the confident affirmation of black humanity in the midst of a difficult collective existence. The celebration of blackness derived force and meaning from its appropriation of the forms of folk culture to fashion a new and distinctive black idiom. Martha Cobb has emphasized the importance of folk traditions in the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, which she interprets as an interweaving of the oral and written strands of black expression in a progression towards a new black esthetic (Cobb 1979). What is noteworthy here is the radical shift of the key of black expression from the dominant mode of the mainstream literature, a re-conversion as it were of the black imagination, for which Langston Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" served as a manifesto:

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the racial mountain, free within ourselves. (1926: 694)

It is this program of esthetic emancipation that Langston Hughes undertook to implement in his own work, and it is the freshness of his craft, his deployment of subtle rhythms derived from the formal attributes of the blues and the inflections of jazz, that mark him out as one of the greatest of American poets (Tracy 1988). Arnold Rampersad's observation is especially apposite in this respect: "To Hughes, black music at its best was the infallible metronome of racial grace . . . In the blues, in its mixture of pain and laughter, its lean affirmation of humanity in the face of circumstance, all in a secular mode . . . he found the tone, the texture, the basic language of true black modernism" (Rampersad 1989: 65). Rampersad thus confirms the earlier analysis by Cobb, and especially that of Onwucheka Jemie who, in his pioneering study of Langston Hughes (1976), assimilates the innovative idiom of the black poet to the modernism of T. S. Eliot, a quality of Hughes's work that has been further elaborated by Michael North (1994).

The literature of Harlem thus became an expressive mode for the collective self-affirmation of the African American, an effort in esthetic terms of the self-differentiation from which nationalist strivings often spring. Literature served here not merely as a revelation of the social tensions by which black life in America was traversed, but also as a vindication of the heritage of life and values to which the African American could lay a direct claim: in other words, as a channel of cultural nationalism with self assertive implications in the specific political and social context of black life in the United States.

It is in this respect that the third theme, which has to do with the meaning of Africa for the African American, came to assume a certain significance in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, affected in the circumstances by an ambiguity that imparted to the theme an element of pathos. For there had to be an ambiguity to this theme, given the fact that centuries of separation from the mother continent and persistent denigration of Africa in racist ideology had created an ambivalence toward Africa in the mind of the African American. This tangled web of emotions was predictably to find a strong echo in the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance; nonetheless, the African theme acquired a special resonance in relation to the sources of the black personality and sensibility that the poetry sought to uncover, as an exploration of the self.

This can be considered the primary sense of Countee Cullen's interrogation in his poem "Heritage" with the famous opening line: "What Is Africa to Me?" The poem itself reflects an anguished tension between the black poet's ancestral feeling and his American, Christian affiliations, a tension given a special complication by the exoticism that shapes the thought and imagery related to Africa. In other poems on the African theme by black poets, a certain

literary primitivism provides the ground base for the accents in which the theme is developed, sometimes giving it a false note, as in Langston Hughes's "Portrait of an African Boy." We can now take it, however, that these aspects of the African theme form part of its ambiguous appeal for the poets, and what seems ultimately significant is not this ambiguity of perception and of tone with regard to the African theme but the necessity which it denotes to come to terms with the African connection as a means of self-acceptance. And it is especially through this theme that the Harlem writers essayed a mode of introspection that their embattled condition, with its compulsion to public stances and commitment, hardly made available for sustained or deep poetic reflection.

Even more important is the relation between the statement of the deep, racial bond with Africa and the celebration of black culture which the Harlem poets enacted in their work, for this bond was to be discerned, not simply as a question of biological determination but also of a cultural continuum linking the folk traditions in America to their original sources in Africa. The African provenance of the very traditions to which these poets gave a new imaginative life had of necessity to come within the range of their vision, however dimly and uncertainly, for the quest for identity in America implied the recognition of a residual Africanity as an essential component of the black personality. As Nathan Huggins has remarked, "All seemed to know, or sense, that Africa should mean something to the race; there should be some race memory that tied black men together" (1971: 80). Moreover, the ancestral continent designated a realm of being and consciousness that predated and transcended the bitter history of enslavement and oppression in America. Africa thus came to have a dual appeal that James Edward Smethurst has summed up in this comment: "On one hand, it is through the folk culture that any deep connection with Africa is maintained – and through which the deepest protest against the experience of slavery is made" (1999: 99).

It is important to observe that the poets of the Harlem Renaissance were not only the first to take up the African theme in a comprehensive way in literature, but that they also succeeded on occasion in giving it an impassioned note corresponding to the varied and profound implications it had for the African American. Thus, in two poems, Langston Hughes captures the very essence of this theme as it is lodged in the black American consciousness. In "Afro-American Fragment," he sounds the depths of the racial memory to recall a song whose meaning he is unable fully to grasp, but whose origin he nonetheless locates: "So long, so far away, is Africa's / Dark face." And it is essentially in Africa that he grounds the collective soul of the black race in one

of his best-known poems, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers":

> I've known rivers:
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
> The flow of human blood in human veins . . .
> I've known rivers
> Ancient dusky rivers.
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
> (Hughes 1995: 23)

But if poetry was a privileged form of expression for the Harlem writers, the prose works were equally important in the formulation of their themes. Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929) deserves special attention in this respect, for it not only served to project the defining attitudes that animated the literary and artistic renewal represented by the Harlem Renaissance, but also exerted a powerful influence in the emergence of francophone black literature. Published in a French translation in 1931 to instant acclaim, the novel's action is set in Marseilles among black seamen and dockers. McKay subtitles his work "A Story without a Plot," in order to highlight its character as essentially a work of reflection, albeit cast in the fictional mode. The novel thus takes the form of a succession of tableaux that function as evocations of stages in the lifestyle and adventure of its hero, Agrippa Daily, also known as Banjo, and his bohemian friends, rather than the unfolding of a defined cluster of events forming a narrative progression. The novel's chapters constitute from this point of view a record in discrete segments of the extraordinary mode of existence of these characters, whom McKay presents as heroes of a festival of life, its intensities deriving from a racial endowment, of which music and dance are the expressive signs: "Black skin itching, black flesh warm with the wine of life, the music of life, the love and deep meaning of life" (1957: 50). It is given to the writer-protagonist Ray, who appears about half way through the work and seems a self-projection of McKay himself, to register their states of mind and to interpret the larger meaning of their lives. He functions in this respect as a pivotal character who accedes to a new consciousness of himself by contemplating the unburdened disposition of the great black community to which he belongs, remarking on them in these terms: "The black gift of laughter and melody and simple sensuous feelings and responses" (1957: 323). Central to this disposition is the African element that infuses it with warmth and consequently comes to give meaning to his own existence:

> The Africans gave him a positive feeling of wholesome contact with racial roots. They made him feel he was not merely an unfortunate accident of

> birth, but that he belonged definitely to a race weighed, tested, and poised in the universal scheme. (1957: 320)

These words were bound to have a special resonance for the francophone African and Caribbean students and intellectuals in Paris,[4] promising a liberation from the complexes induced by their conditioning, through the French policy of "assimilation," to a western-derived scale of values. The literature of Harlem thus brought to them, on the banks of the Seine, a new perspective on the world (Fabre 1985).

The correlation of the three themes examined above gave to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance an exemplary significance for black writers and intellectuals everywhere as they encountered its language of militancy, its introspective project and its revaluation of blackness as a human condition. Despite the ambivalence with which the African theme was affected, the continent itself assumed in the literature of Harlem a tragic nobility that came to be associated with the universal destiny of the black race.

We know that in the case of the francophones, it was largely through the direct influence of this literature on the Haitians that it came to be expanded and given a new register and dimension. As Naomi Garrett has shown in her seminal work, the circumstances in which this process occurred have an ironic side to them (Garrett 1963; see also Dash 1987). From 1915 to 1934, Haiti was occupied by the United States and transformed into an American colony in all but name. The impact this event effectively had on the Haitians can be measured against the strength of their historical memory, centered on the heroic slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, and of the proclamation, after his capture and imprisonment, of Haiti's independence in 1804 as the first black nation to emerge in modern history. The American occupation placed it once more under white domination, with all that this implied of the racial humiliation of its predominantly black population. The reaction of the Haitian intellectuals to the new situation of colonialism in which they found themselves took the form of a cultural affirmation that, in their particular context, also involved a profound process of self-appraisal and a rethinking of the national ethos as previously understood by the French-educated elite. In this development, the example of the Harlem Renaissance came to play a key role. For the American occupation brought with it an acquaintance with the literature of the Harlem Renaissance that soon developed into a determining influence on the expression of the younger generation of Haitian writers. The accents of Harlem penetrated into a new literature that transformed the literary culture of Haiti, thus marking a decisive break with the

French models which earlier generations had adopted (Garrett 1963: 18–44, 65–67).

It was thus that the Harlem Renaissance came to be reproduced in the French language in Haiti, in a renewal of themes and forms centered on the immediate realities that marked the life of the common people, on their systems of belief and on their forms of cultural expression. It is significant to note that in this development, a figure appeared who played a role equivalent to that of Du Bois in North America, for just as *The Souls of Black Folk* drew attention to the resources of black culture in the United States, and insisted on its African provenance which stamped this culture with its unique character in America,[5] so did *Ainsi parla l'oncle* by Jean Price-Mars, published in 1928, indicate to the Haitian intellectuals the strength of the popular culture in Haiti, and its distant but living source in Africa (Garrett 1963: 61–64; see also Damas 1969 and Antoine 1981).[6] What is more, the African presence was clearly evident in the forms of social organization and religious practices of the rural Haitians, and thus represented a visible and vital resource for the younger writers in a way that could both accommodate their identification with the people and sound the clear note of recall of African origins, in a continuous progression of sentiment and vision, as in Jacques Roumain's poem "Guinée" ("Guinea"):

It's the long road to Guinea
death takes you down.
Here are the boughs, the trees, the forest
Listen to the sound of the wind in its long hair
    of eternal night.
It's the long road to Guinea
where your fathers await you without impatience.
Along the way, they talk,
They wait.

(in Kennedy 1989: 21)

The Haitian Renaissance proceeded along the main outlines of the Harlem Renaissance insofar as it took up the themes of alienation and racial revolt on one hand, and cultural affirmation and rediscovery of Africa, on the other, but a new emphasis was given to these themes as they came to be sounded in the French language. The obligation to employ French for self-expression accentuated the sentiment of alienation which receives a new depth of pathos, as in Léon Laleau's poem "Trahison" ("Betrayal")

This haunted heart that doesn't fit
My language or the clothes I wear

Chafes within the grip of
Borrowed feelings, European ways.
Do you feel my pain,
This anguish like none other
From taming with the words of France
This heart that came to me from Senegal?
(in Kennedy 1989: 15)

Laleau's poem reflects the self-consciousness of the poetry of the Haitian Renaissance, a feature that is due partly to the character of the language of its expression – a language that favors an essentially rhetorical approach to experience – and partly to the earnest mood of the writers themselves, a function of the redemptive value that they attached to their poetry. For there is an urgent sense of mission in the poetry of the representative figures of the Haitian Renaissance, among whom, apart from Jacques Roumain and Léon Laleau already cited, the work of Camille Roussan, Carl Brouard, Félix Morisseau-Leroy, Jean Brière, and René Bélance may be considered the most outstanding. Mention must also be made of René Depestre who belongs to a later generation.[7]

It might be observed that this was poetry wedded to what seemed to the writers a desperate national cause, which therefore took on a messianic dimension that we do not quite encounter in the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. Another observation that differentiates the Haitian corpus from that of the Harlem Renaissance is what one can only describe as the "elemental" quality of the imagery by which the poetry is habitually sustained. There is an earthiness to the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, with references to the natural world as the locus of a folk apprehension. And as Jean Wagner has observed, African American poetry is marked by a religious sensibility that harks back to the spirituals (1962). But even at its most intense moments, exemplified notably by the evocations of black Southern life in Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1975), the impression still prevails in this poetry of an external regard upon the life that is summoned for contemplation. And in the case of Langston Hughes, it was essentially an urban poetry that he wrote, for he did not possess the intuitive understanding of the rural folk that Paul Laurence Dunbar constantly displays in his "dialect" poems.

Much of Haitian poetry, on the other hand, evinces a different and perhaps a more heightened quality of content and form. The intensity of passion is constantly highlighted by a recourse in imagery to the land and its people. This strain of Haitian poetry is exemplified in an arresting way by the invocations of African deities in the early work of Depestre, a poetic re-appropriation of

the ancestral memory and collective representations which function as the spiritual reference for those observances that frame their lives and thus come to serve as a fundamental touchstone for poetic utterance (Depestre in Kennedy 1989: 89–116). The term "l'indigénisme" (indigenism) derived from the name of one of the most prominent journals published during the Haitian Renaissance, *La Revue Indigène*,[8] and which has come to be attached to this poetry, is thus most appropriate as a reflection of its tenor. For the Haitians, indigenism signified a correspondence of poetic expression to the native environment and the outlook on the world it fosters. It was the sign of a confident reclamation of a native heritage, of an original dimension of imaginative life that Jacques Stephen Alexis came to identify as a Haitian version of Alejo Carpentier's "magic realism" (1956).[9]

The Haitians may be considered the first poets of Negritude as such, even before the term had been coined (Irele 1965). The fact that they are well represented in Senghor's historic 1948 anthology bears out the truth of the observation. In a sense, Senghor's compilation can be considered analogous in the French-speaking world to Alain Locke's no-less historic anthology, *The New Negro*, published in 1925. The Haitians provided the link between the two movements symbolized by these publications, and it was largely through their mediation that the themes and preoccupations of the Harlem writers found their way into black poetry in the French language.

To stress the mediation of the Haitians between Harlem and Negritude is not, however, to disregard the importance of developments among the black elite in France itself in the interwar years. The publication in 1921 of René Maran's novel *Batouala,* which won the Prix Goncourt for that year, and through its focus on the colonial situation provoked an unprecedented debate in France on the question, provided a testimony of a critical attitude developing among the francophone black intellectual elite toward the colonial dispensation. The novel's impact was of such importance that Senghor has designated Maran a precursor of the Negritude movement (1965; see also Irele 1981: 125–33). There was, moreover, the role of the remarkable circle brought together by the Nardal sisters, Paulette and Jane, in their literary salon in their house at Clamart, just outside Paris, and around the journal they founded, *La Revue du Monde Noir*, published between 1930 and 1932, as part of their conscious effort to promote in France and the francophone world a black literary and cultural movement analogous to that represented by Harlem. It is significant to note in this respect that the very first number carried a poem by Claude McKay, "To America," accompanied by a French translation, a clear reflection of the effort to establish a connection between the black American writers and

the francophone intelligentsia. Indeed, its bilingual character was maintained throughout the life of the journal, with articles in French and English by a wide range of writers, artists, and intellectuals from both Africa and the New World. Thought short-lived, *La Revue du Monde Noir* provided an important meeting point for black writers and intellectuals, and helped to foster a sense of common mission (see Kesteloot 1963; Tidjani-Serpos 1987; Robert P. Smith, Jr. 2001; Sharpley-Whiting 2002).[10]

Commenting decades later upon the influence of the Harlem writers on his own development, Senghor has included the Nardal sisters' salon and their journal among the factors that shaped the artistic and intellectual climate within which this influence came to be exerted:

> It is thanks to Paulette Nardal, the Martinican, who founded *La Revue du Monde Noir*, that I met Alain Locke and Mercer Cook; thanks to the Guyanese, Léon Damas, that I met Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen . . . It is thus that, in the general sense of the word, the Negritude movement – the discovery of black values and the Negro's awareness of his situation – was born in the United States of America. (quoted in Smith 2001: 62).

Thus, in a lecture delivered in 1950 on "La poésie négro-américaine" ("Negro American Poetry"), Senghor was to devote a long section to an exploration of "la poésie du 'Nègre Nouveau'" ("The Poetry of the 'New Negro'"), in which he demonstrates an attentive reading of the Harlem poets and a deep response to their work, thus providing a testimony to the direct influence the literature of the Harlem Renaissance exerted upon the francophone black writers and intellectuals in Paris (1964: 104–21). Indeed, the Guyanese poet Léon Damas had already begun in the mid-thirties to bend the French language to the accents of Harlem in a poetry modeled in its themes and cadences on the poetry of Langston Hughes, while displaying an originality of tone that belongs properly to Damas himself:

> A taste of blood comes
> A taste of blood rises
> Irritates my nose
> eyes
> throat
> A taste of blood comes
> A taste of blood fills me
> nose
> eyes
> throat
> A taste of blood

acridly vertical
like
the pagan obsession
for incense
(in Kennedy 1989: 46)

But what needs to be specially attended to here is the fact that the Haitians were the first to produce in French an extensive body of work that embodied the new black consciousness to which Harlem had earlier given such powerful expression. The translation of the themes of Harlem from one area of reference and sensibility – North America, English-speaking – to another area of experience – Caribbean, French-speaking – became complete when, in *Légitime Défense* (1932), the document that is considered the manifesto of the new racial awareness from which Negritude was to spring, the Martinican Etienne Léro wrote:

> Le vent qui monte de l'Amérique noire aura vite fait, espérons-le, de nettoyer nos Antilles des fruits avortés d'une culture caduque. Langston Hughes et Claude McKay, les deux poètes noirs révolutionnaires, nous ont apporté, marinés dans l'alcool rouge, l'amour africain de la vie, la joie africaine de l'amour, le rêve africain de la mort. (1979: 12)

> The storm wind blowing down from Black America will soon, we hope, clean our Antilles of the aborted fruits of a decaying civilization. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, the two revolutionary poets, have brought for us, tempered in red alcohol, the African love of life, the African joy of love, the African dream of death.

The decisive impulse in the emergence of Negritude out of the convergence of the various factors evoked above came, however, from the meeting between Césaire and Senghor and their subsequent collaboration, an event of capital importance in the development of modern African literary history (Kesteloot 1963). When Césaire wrote his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and published it in the journal *Volontés* in 1939, he had fully absorbed the lessons of both the Harlem Renaissance and the Haitian Renaissance, which merged with other influences in French literature and the esthetic and social revolutions that marked European culture in the interwar years, in particular Marxism and Surrealism, to produce the great statement of the black condition his long poem has come to represent.

The two currents that have distinguished Césaire's work over the years can be said to prolong the direction that the poets of Harlem had mapped out for the black imagination. In the first place, Césaire is mostly appreciated in black

and radical circles for the uncompromising militancy of his work: in other words, as the poet of black revolt. In the context of the black experience, he stands as the embodiment of the Nietzschean man of resentment ("l'homme de ressentiment"), whose highly developed sense of black historicity and intense poetic temperament dictated an esthetics of aggression in the service of a deeply felt racial cause:

> Soleil serpent oeil fascinant mon oeil
> Et la mer pouilleuse d'îles craquant aux doigts de roses
> Lance-flammes, et mon corps intact de foudroyé
> (1994: 84)

> Sun Serpent eye enchanting my eye,
> And the sea lice-ridden with islands crackling under rose fingers
> Flame-throwers, and my body delivered whole from the thunderbolt.

The Homeric reference in this passage both serves, ironically, to mark the Caribbean poet's disengagement from the framework of western cultural impositions – to denote his mood of disaffection toward the world order they signify – and at the same time, to lend epic resonance to the poet's statement of a conversion of being that derives from his identification with the surging life of his natural environment. The passage demonstrates the way in which Césaire's appropriation of surrealism as the "miraculous arms" of his revolt enabled him to maintain an uncommon compaction of meaning and suggestion in his poetry, an exceptional density of expression that both gave it rhetorical elevation and endowed it with its particular truth of imaginative insight. It points, moreover, to the fact that the immediate worldly preoccupations that underlie this expression cannot be dissociated from the mystical bent in Césaire's poetry, for it is the liberating impulse of his metaphysical revolt that enables his rediscovery of an ancestral endowment, a re-initiation that translates as a hyper-romanticism informing his poetic vision, for which the spirituality of Africa serves as the transcendental reference:

> Vierges d'Ogoué
> Gratifiez-moi d'une étoile dite nouvelle
> (1994: 266)

> Virgins of Ogwe.
> Grant me a star newly dedicated

Césaire's poetic odyssey culminates, then, in a vision of Africa that gives Negritude both historic and imaginative significance. It is in the poetry of Senghor, however, that we find the most sustained expression of Negritude's

imaginative revaluation of Africa. Senghor's debt to Harlem is apparent in the echoes in his own work of the classic texts of black American literature, as in his poem "Congo," which can be read as a reformulation in specific African terms of Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." In a similar way, the expansive evocation of the atmosphere of Harlem in the poem "A New York" builds on McKay's *Home to Harlem,* to which at the end of the poem Senghor gives a symbolic dimension by reference to James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones*:

> Just open your eyes to the April rainbow
> And your ears, especially your ears, to God
> Who in one burst of saxophone laughter
> Created heaven and earth in six days,
> And on the seventh slept a deep Negro sleep.
> (1991: 89)

There is thus a sense in which Harlem serves as a comprehensive reference, a foundational intertext as it were, for the literature of Negritude as it came to be given vivid illustration in Senghor's poetry. In a more general perspective, however, Negritude assumes innovative significance as the elaboration and actualization of a new African esthetics that Senghor begins to enunciate in the poem "Lettre à un poète" (Letter to a Poet), addressed, appropriately enough, to Aimé Césaire:

> Have you forgotten your nobility?
> Your talent to praise the Ancestors, the Princes,
> And the Gods, neither flower nor drops of dew?
> (Senghor 1991: 5)

Senghor proceeds to develop the renewal of the theme announced in these lines as the coming into unfettered play of an idiom, a hieratic manner appropriate to the subject matter of the new liberated African poetry and the vision it embraces:

> You recline royally, elbow on a cushion of clear hillside,
> Your bed presses the earth, easing the toil of wetland drums
> Beating the rhythm of your song, and your verse
> Is the breath of the night and the distant sea
> You praised the Ancestors and the legitimate princes
> For your rhyme and counterpoint, you scooped a star from the heavens . . .
> (1991: 5)

The postface to the volume *Ethiopiques* expands upon this conception of the black poet's vocation, in terms reminiscent of Langston Hughes's manifesto, to define the new African poetry in French as a return to the source, identified with the recall of an antecedent state of grace, "the kingdom of childhood" (*le royaume de l'enfance*)(Senghor 1964: 218–27). Senghor's comprehensive evocation in his poetry of an African historical and mythical consciousness proceeds here from a constant recourse to imagery drawn from the physical and human environment of his indigenous Serer background, which assumes meaning as the true realm of his being: "I know that only this rich black-skinned plain / Is worthy of my plowshare and the deep flow of my virility" (Senghor 1964: 29). In Senghor's poetry, the project of Negritude literature emerges ultimately as the effort to invest Africa with poetic significance (Irele 1996).

But while poetry served Senghor and the other francophone poets to give expression to the black condition and the subjective states it determined, as well as to project an inspiring vision of liberation, Senghor himself has placed greater emphasis on Negritude as a cultural concept, with an objective expression in precolonial forms of life and modes of expression in Africa. Furthermore, Negritude constitutes for him an organic whole, what he calls "the sum total of the cultural values of the black world" ("l'ensemble des valeurs de civilisation du monde noir," 1977: 65). The term denotes for him the common denominator of a global identity of the black race. The extension of the concept to include people of African descent in the New World is justified not only by a common experience of historical adversity but on the grounds of the distinctive nature of African-derived subcultures in America, which Senghor considers as channels of a fundamental connection to the ancestral heritage. As such, they serve in his view as institutional bearers of the racial memory.

It is evident that Senghor's Negritude represents a counter discourse to western representations of Africa. It was therefore inevitable that his formulations should proceed by reversing the negative connotations of traits attributed to the black race in the colonial ideology, and endowing them with a new and positive meaning. This is especially the case with Gobineau's ascription of an emotive disposition to the black race as a sign of the genetic incapacity of its members for intellectual production, and Lévy-Bruhl's notion of a "primitive mentality" characterized by a "prelogical" mental structure, with mystic participation as its mode of experience, a notion Lévy-Bruhl presents as the defining trait of non-western races (Gobineau 1853–55; Lévy-Bruhl 1922). Senghor reinterprets these European thinkers in the perspective opened up by the epistemology of Henri Bergson, with its reaction against the dominant tradition of positivism and its valuation of intuition as a valid mode of knowledge.

Senghor's thinking is generally a tributary of the antirationalist current of modern European thought: thus, along with the "paieduma" of Frobénius (1952), Negritude incorporates the vitalist estheticism of Nietzsche and owes much to the vatic conception of philosophy associated with Heidegger, with its privileging of the "preconceptual" as the ultimate basis for our discovery of the world (Senghor 1986). Senghor's Negritude presents itself, then, as an alternative vision of the world to that proposed by western rationalism; it proceeds in other words from what one might call a metaphysics of difference (Irele 1991: 31).

In the sixties, shortly before his death, Langston Hughes remarked in an interview that he and fellow poets of Harlem had had their own Negritude (1966). He obviously had in mind the crystallization of black self-awareness which served as a precedent for the corresponding movement in the French-speaking world. As Alain Locke remarks in his introduction to *The New Negro,* "The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem" (in Gates and McKay 1997: 968). It continued to beat and to resonate throughout the black world, and especially in the French-speaking world, years after the demise of the movement it had spawned. The historical and thematic links between the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement, by way of the Haitian Renaissance, represent undoubtedly the principal channel of imaginative confrontation with the black experience (Cook and Henderson 1969). The parallels between the three movements are not fortuitous; they inhere in the thematic cross currents manifested in the play of intertextuality, itself authenticated by the common historical experience to which the three movements present themselves as forms of response. But the literature of Harlem remained seminal to the inspiration of the poets of the Haitian Renaissance and of the Negritude movement, bearing out the observation by James L. De Jongh: "Black Harlem was acknowledged and employed by black francophone poets as a shared motif of the African experience" (1990: 70).[11]

However, the Harlem Renaissance underwent important transformations in its migration into the French-speaking world, an expansion of themes and an intensification of register which brought a new dimension to black expression. This was to be expected, given the different environments in which the two movements developed, and the different personalities of the writers and intellectuals involved in them. In the area of poetry, the French-speaking writers were in the direct line of influence of surrealism and other forms of European modernism which left a heavy impression on their work, with the result that they are more wide-ranging in their deployment of modernist resources than the Harlem poets. This enabled them to take to a new level the

modernism of the Harlem writers such as Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Melvin Tolson, and Langston Hughes himself.

Similarly, as regards the purely intellectual aspect of the two movements, Negritude as formulated by Senghor went far beyond anything that any member of the Harlem group could have envisaged. As the *maître à penser* of Harlem, Alain Locke devoted his energies to the analytical exploration of race as a concept and social construct, and its cultural implications (1989, 1992; see also the essays by Fraser and Mitchell, both in 1999). In the conceptual elaboration of the idea of Africa by Senghor on the other hand, what had remained a vague conception of race and a general intimation of the relationship between the fact of blackness and the African continent was formulated into an informing principle of the black personality, as the basis of a philosophy of being and mode of existence. Senghor's immersion in the philosophical tradition and the intellectual climate of Europe at the time he undertook the elaboration of the Negritude concept meant that he was able to bring his erudition to bear on an ideological project of immediate personal significance to him as an African. For this project, Senghor drew upon an intellectual armory that was extensive – in addition to Bergson and Heidegger already mentioned, it included Jean-Paul Sartre and Teilhard de Chardin, to name only the French thinkers who have lent impulse to his intellectual effort to propose a new humanism in which the values of a renovated African civilization would occupy a significant place (1993; see also Hymans 1971; Vaillant 1990).

Senghor's Negritude remains the subject of a long-standing debate that has dominated African intellectual life for some time. But whatever its merits, the presiding idea of his theoretical effort emerges ultimately as a pluralism that not only grants recognition to all cultures within their respective frames of reference, but also enables productive encounters between the varied cultures of the world, as the informing principle of their convergence within a universal consciousness.

Notes

1. The colonial situation in Africa as a dimension of the global condition of the race assumed a new prominence in black consciousness with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1938. The vigorous reaction of black writers and intellectuals worldwide demonstrated how this event brought home to them, as it were, the full implications of the historic relation between the black and white races. (See Gruesser 2000.)
2. The close correlation in the career of Zora Neale Hurston between her creative work and her ethnographic studies provides perhaps the best illustration of

this focus on the common folk by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. See Tracy 1988: 33–39 and Nghana Lewis 2002.

3. The best-known general study is Huggins 1971; see also his thematic anthology of the movement (1976). For more up-to-date assessments, see Baker 1987; Hutchinson 1995; see also Singh *et al.* 1989.
4. We can infer the direct influence of McKay upon Sembene Ousmane's first novel, *Le docker noir*, with its similar setting among black dockers in Marseilles, though with an atmosphere far removed from that created by McKay in his own work.
5. Du Bois was to adopt a more systematic sociological approach to the question of Africanisms in African American culture in his work *Black Folk, Then and Now* (1939).
6. Naomi Garrett gives this report on interviews she conducted with the young generation of Haitian writers who form the subject of her study: "The majority of poets interrogated by the writer gave 'lectures by Dr Mars' as answer to a question concerning influences upon them" (1963: 64).
7. The central chapters of Garrett's study are devoted to an extensive discussion of these poets and others of lesser importance (1963: 88–200).
8. At its founding, the name of the journal was settled upon by the younger generation of Haitian writers as a deliberate and symbolic recall of the role played during the Haitian revolution by Toussaint L'Ouverture's army, which was officially known as *l'armée indigène* (information supplied by Dr. Ludovic Comeau, Jr., of De Paul University, Chicago).
9. The magic realism of the Haitians found its most vigorous expression in the novels of Jacques Stephen Alexis himself, in particular *Compère général soleil* and *Les arbres musiciens*.
10. In his preface to the reissue of the complete run of the journal published in 1992, Louis-Thomas Achille, one of its early contributors, has provided an interesting account of the circumstances under which the Nardal sisters came to open the salon at Clamart, and for its evocation of the personalities who frequented their salon and the atmosphere that prevailed at their meetings.
11. The Harlem Renaissance was also a major factor in the emergence in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean during the interwar years of a black-centered literature and cultural revival, a phenomenon now generally known as *negrismo*, to which the work of Nicolás Guillén became central. See Coulthard 1962 and De Jongh 1990: 48–58. On Guillén, see Ellis 1983; for Afro-Cuban literature in general, see Mullen 1998.

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Postcolonial Caribbean identities

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With the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492 in his quest for the Indies and the subsequent extermination of the native population of this region, the definition of the region's identity became an acute and abiding issue. The question of definition became further aggravated by the peculiar nature of the settlement of the Caribbean. Because of the need for repopulation of the islands of the Caribbean archipelago, plantation slavery and later schemes of indentureship left in their wake diverse groups of people who were cut off from their communities of origin. Out of the need for cheap labor to work the plantations, new and undefined cultural and social entities were produced. This phenomenon of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity was further intensified by prolonged periods of colonization. Caribbean societies are some of the oldest colonies in the west and cannot be accounted for without reference to the powerful shaping forces of colonialism. Nevertheless, because of their unusual hybrid genesis, they could neither be seen as "western" or an extension of Europe nor could they be considered "native," that is distinctly "other."

These new social and ethnic realities remained an oddity in western scholarship or simply emerged in terms of images of savage otherness: problematic, impure, and unpredictable creations of the ongoing process of historical change and world trade. They were initially relegated by early commentators to a kind of prehistoric timelessness that may have received its most notorious manifestation in the racial theorizing of Gobineau between 1835 and 1853. In a similar vein, the British historian James Froude was as much a spokesperson for an entire field of scholarship as anything else when in 1888 he declared in his much cited statement that in the Caribbean "there are no people there, in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own" (cited by Naipaul 1981: 7). Consequently, attempts at determining a definition for the region's new multiracial population would necessarily have to come from within and be initially aimed at refuting the ethnocentric declarations of

Gobineau and Froude. Such responses would constitute the earliest considered responses to the issue of self-definition.

The refutations of Gobineau's theories came, not surprisingly, from the first independent Caribbean country, Haiti, where essayists such as Louis Joseph Janvier, Hannibal Price, and Antenor Firmin in the late eighteenth century published major works defending the achievements of the black race in particular and the universality of human values in general.[1] This early manifestation of nationalist thought in the Caribbean had less to do with the ideals of Negritude or black nationalism, which would not be ideologically significant until the 1930s, than with the view that no human characteristics were innate, that all men were created equal and capable of civilization. Indeed, many of these early polemicists simply adopted definitions of civilization that glossed over what they saw as the embarrassing primitivism of the Haitian peasantry. Another significant Caribbean response to European ethnocentrism at the time was J. J. Thomas's tellingly entitled critique of James Froude, *Froudacity* (1889). Thomas, a schoolmaster in colonial Trinidad, tended to argue like his Haitian counterparts. While making the case for greater respect for the black race, they were incapable of asserting the importance of cultural difference in their theories of the universal.

Indeed, it is in post-independence Haiti that Caribbean identity politics received its first full-blown examination. All the ambiguities and contradictions of Caribbean identity were present in Haiti after 1804. This was so because the Haitian Revolution was not the product of atavistic longings for some primal, ancestral past but one of the most radical expressions of the democratic revolutions of modern times. What the founding fathers of independent Haiti wanted was the "Europeanization" of St. Domingue as much as European recognition of and respect for emerging postcolonial peoples. Therefore, from the very outset, the anti-imperialist project of the first independent Caribbean nation was to define an identity that was both black western and postnative, that was different and yet not "other." Early Haitian nationalists conveyed the complications and ambiguities of this position in their writing. They were as strong, as we have seen, in their emphasis on culture and the inherent capacity of all men to be part of a universal culture as they were insistent on a Haitian specificity through the cult of nature. Much early Haitian verse, for instance, is a compilation of inventories of flora and fauna, which were seen as a way of grounding a Haitian identity. Whereas the essayists argued for universal civilization, the poets evoked a nostalgia for pure organic origins in their nationalist verse.

The identity politics of this early period of Caribbean thought sought fixed and settled definitions. Theoretically, these intellectuals were incapable of theorizing the extent to which they had been transformed by the west, which had in turn been transformed by contact with them. The evolution of Caribbean identity politics is essentially tied to an ideological and imaginative coming to terms with the thorny question of cultural heterogeneity and to problematizing issues like otherness and the ambiguities of hybridity. In nineteenth-century Haiti the problem was posed, but because of political and economic chaos as well as the limitations of identitarian thought at the time, conceptualizing a modern, postcolonial identity eluded early Caribbean theoreticians.

The fruitful ambivalence of early Haitian theories of identity, at once relativist and universal in scope yet haunted by the need for a grounded specificity, is lost in the next phase of identity politics in the Caribbean. It is not surprising that in this new phase of Caribbean thought the predominant intellectual movement should be Surrealism. In some ways Surrealist formulations respond particularly well to the peculiarities of the Caribbean's cultural predicament. Because Surrealism valued highly fortuitously juxtaposed fragments and unexpected, disparate collages, it seemed to respond particularly well to the Caribbean's history of paradoxical cultural and ethnic recombinations. However, the experience of Surrealism in the 1930s is that of a movement whose relational possibilities become congealed into a kind of essentialist alterity. The emergence of a kind of reductive mystification which undermined the emancipatory potential of the radical poetics is a major issue raised by the Martinican thinker René Menil whose essays *Tracée*s (1981) have so far received inadequate attention.

Theorizing a Caribbean identity in the thirties meant for the Caribbean an unswerving focus on identity as grounded specificity exclusive of what was seen as contamination by the west's modernity. The ideas of Haitian indigenism and Martinican Negritude turned on a radical critique of what was seen as the decadent values of the west in contrast to the mystical, redemptive nature of African culture. If in an earlier phase Caribbean cultural difference was absorbed under universal values, in this second manifestation of Caribbean thought the specificity of the region was subsumed under the construct of neo-Africanism. The ideological thrust of Haitian indigenism was articulated by Jean Price-Mars in his speeches gathered together in *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (1928), which became the basis for theories of racial authenticity. These theories drew heavily on the work of European anthropologists such as Maurice Delafosse and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. At its most benign, indigenism celebrated the strengths

of peasant culture and at its most extreme, it meant the celebration of a transgressive blackness and racial separatism. Ethnic particularism in Haiti was a product of the American Occupation (1915–34) and shared with the Negritude movement the ideal of the uninhibited "nègre" as the defining feature of Caribbean culture.

Césairean Negritude, formulated in the early epic poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) (*Notebook of a Return to my Native Land*, 1995) drew on the ethnography that influenced Price-Mars's theories combined with an intense interest in a Jungian notion of a collective racial unconscious. Despite his Marxist beginnings, Césaire always insisted on an essentialist approach to culture and on the transcendent values of the Caribbean's African legacy. In his insistence on the importance of racial specificity, Césaire privileged the figure of the maroon as founding father, rooted in a culture of resistance against western values. The anglophone Caribbean's most vocal proponent of Caribbean Negritude, Kamau Brathwaite, who has argued that neo-African culture be accepted "as the paradigm and norm for the entire society" (*Contradictory Omens*, 1974: 30), has modified the separatist thrust of Negritude by stressing the importance of creolization and interculturation as the dynamic in Caribbean society that make it possible to achieve wholeness beyond fragmentation. Brathwaite's ideal of an Afro-Creole Caribbean has been articulated as much in his trilogy *The Arrivants* (1973) as in his most recent reflections on "nation language," expressed in the short essay *History of the Voice* (1984).

The challenge to Negritude in the francophone Caribbean was first raised by Jacques Roumain in Haiti. Roumain, the founder of the Haitian Communist Party, was acutely aware of the excesses of the cult of authenticity in Haiti and argued that culture should not be seen as innate but as a function of economic circumstance. Such a materialist reading of Caribbean culture stood in stark contrast to the black nationalist celebration of African retentions. Despite his early death, Roumain's challenge to Afrocentrism would later be picked up by Jacques Stephen Alexis and René Depestre who became by the 1950s ardent critics of both the poetics of Negritude and the politics of racial authenticity as practiced by François Duvalier in Haiti.

One of the complications of Roumain's thought, and arguably of Caribbean Marxism as a whole, is its investment in a kind of strategic primitivism promoted in defiance of what was seen as the oppressive unfolding of a global modernity. The spread of American imperialism especially in the northern Caribbean with the experience of the nineteen-year United States occupation of Haiti and the view of the Second World War as a nightmare of modern technology encouraged the need for a poetics of origination, of an identity

mystically rooted in the earth. Roumain, indeed, was ideologically as much as a Maurassian as he was a Marxist. Thus the main thrust of Roumain's novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1945) (*Masters of the Dew*, 1978) is the heroic redemption of the Haitian heartland. This is a peculiar novel for a Marxist because of its insistence on founding a new community whose legitimacy is tied to a mystical union with the Haitian heartland. There is no denying the apocalyptic thrust of the esthetic that marked works like Césaire's epic poem and Roumain's famous novel. Identity for this generation was based on erasure of the past and visualizing the Caribbean ground in terms of an unproblematic sovereign territory. Ultimately, the fiery volcano of Césaire's *Notebook* and the blade of water in Roumain's *Masters of the Dew* leave incisive marks on the protesting surface of the land, triumphantly announcing the founding of a new Caribbean heterocosm, a world absolute in its difference.

An even more telling and ultimately more influential critique of Negritude came from one of Césaire's former students, the psychologist Frantz Fanon. Fanon felt that neither Marxism nor Negritude provided useful insight into the psychological problems that lay at the heart of the dilemma of Caribbean self-definition. Fanon turned to existentialism for the conceptual framework for exploring the problematic and fragile nature of the Caribbean self. Negritude, or Roumain's nationalist mysticism for that matter, was seen by Fanon as a false specificity for the Caribbean and could provide only fleeting consolation to the individual faced with the incapacity to project himself or herself into the world. Fanon's first major work, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1968), dramatically enacts the fragile ego's collapse into nonbeing as previously romantic notions of *marronnage* are challenged in terms of the Caribbean individual's lack of ontological resistance to the white presence. Fanon argued for the emergence of the Sartrean for-itself as a full-fledged consciousness projected outward as opposed to a static and illusory idea of identity as a self-indulgent in-itself. In redeploying the concepts of European existentialism, Fanon raised the difficult but vital notions of historical contact, discursive practice, and the struggle for recognition of human consciousness. It is a bold attempt to relate the universal and the particular in defining Caribbean identity in that it is ultimately as critical of the abstract humanism of Jean-Paul Sartre as it is of the defensive particularism of Negritude.

Another crucial aspect of Fanon's theorizing is related to his rejection of the unproblematic and polarizing ideological perspectives of an earlier generation in favor of a view of the individual as an embodied consciousness condemned to come to terms with the other's existence. Fanon borrowed the Hegelian notion

that identity could never be determined in isolation but needed the reciprocity of the other. This reality provoked deep anxiety in the colonial situation since the normal tensions between self and other are undercut by the mimetic impulse in the colonized who lacked what Fanon called "ontological resistance" to the colonizer. At the base of Fanon's theory of the pathology of the colonial consciousness is the realization that a profoundly disruptive modernity had made a self-sufficient alterity impossible and plunged Caribbean societies into a violently forged creolizing experience. Fanon's perspective is crucial to understanding the next phase of Caribbean thought since it posits the view that all human relations must unfold in relation to the unavoidable presence of the other. In his calling into question of reductionist theories of difference that had begun to dominate Caribbean ideology, Fanon revived the issue of historical contact in the Caribbean's struggle to establish its own peculiar postcolonial identity.

Fanon's critique of Negritude as illusory and conservative would leave its mark on the foremost poet of the anglophone Caribbean, Derek Walcott. In an early essay, "What the Twilight Says" (1970), he reacted strongly against the effects of Black Power in the Caribbean and dismissed its proponents as "reactionaries in dashikis" (1970: 27). The basis of Walcott's position is his rejection of the Afrocentric attitude of "racial despair," which is derived from the view of post-plantation society as uncreative and exploitative. Walcott has from the outset put emphasis on the spirit of renascence and the ideal of an unencumbered consciousness in the Caribbean. He consistently celebrates the possibility of a creolized whole from the scattered and indeterminate reality of the Caribbean. In his 1974 essay "The Muse of History," he insists it is this creative dynamic that makes the past irrelevant in the Caribbean and makes artistic openness the ideal expression of Caribbean identity. Walcott's theorizing of a creole model for the Caribbean both reached back to a vision of the Caribbean as tropical Mediterranean and pointed to a model of culture as synchronic interplay that challenged ideas of sacred origins or ancestral beginnings. Walcott's vision of a Homeric America or of a Greco-Roman Caribbean is both an attempt to wrest the region free from the stereotype of uncreative dependency and to assert an esthetic of juxtaposition and heterogeneity. The Mediterranean is projected as polyglot matrix in Walcott's thought and the Caribbean Sea becomes a New-World equivalent of the Aegean with its wealth of cultural and artistic diversity. In this regard, Walcott's ideas overlap interestingly with those of earlier major figures in the Caribbean, the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, the Haitian novelist Jacques Stephen Alexis, and the Trinidadian Marxist, C. L. R. James.

Carpentier's theories of the Caribbean's Mediterranean identity draw on Oswald Spengler's global concepts of growth and decline which allow the Cuban writer to view the Caribbean at a stage in its development where its mythic resources are not used up, very much like the Mediterranean before materialism caused modern Europe to lose a sense of the marvelous. Carpentier's ideas were crucial to Alexis's formulation of a marvelous realism for Haitians that offered a way out of the racial mystifications of François Duvalier's brand of Haitian Negritude. C. L. R. James, like Alexis and Carpentier, in invoking a Mediterranean identity for the region, is also interested in orienting the Caribbean away from the rigid monologic colonial order for something more creative and transgressive that he associates with the Mediterranean. The issue is how to theorize a creole Caribbean within a global, modernizing context. James's ideas are concerned with the group or the community's capacity to retake power within a situation of domination. This perspective is as crucial to James's study of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), as it is to his celebrated study of cricket, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963). James argues that the cricket field is in more ways than one a recreation ground. The re-creative aspect of the field of play allows for a disruptive, creative performance that disrupts the rules of the games that are imposed in accordance with a strict, puritanical colonial code. The cricket field therefore becomes for James the quintessential Caribbean paradigm, a modern space where boundaries, both real and figurative, are creatively transgressed. In James's sociocultural model we see the emergence of a theory of creolization. Forged within a context of domination and subordination, creolization is an unceasing process that does not result in the cliché of "the melting pot" or cultural homogeneity but a creative tension built around interaction and contestation.

In the anglophone Caribbean it is the Guyanese novelist and essayist Wilson Harris who most fully theorizes this esthetic of renascence in terms of what he calls "the inner corrective" in the Caribbean imagination or the human capacity for psychic regeneration. Indeed, the strength of Harris's theorizing lies in both his directing attention away from the individual as the basic unit of society and his exploration of the inner re-creative dimension of the community's response to the trauma of history. In his theoretical formulations Harris uses terms such as "gateway consciousness" or "threshold consciousness" to point to a complex process of accommodation and transformation that forms the dynamic of an emergent creole culture. This dynamic he argues is specific to the Caribbean person: "a sense of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities" (1967: 28). Harris's theories which start with the transformative powers of the psyche ultimately

offer societies like those in the Caribbean a way of overcoming the trauma of history as well as a capacity for what he terms a cross-cultural creativity. As the most radical theoretician from the anglophone Caribbean, Harris challenges monolithic imperialistic forms, ideologies, and epistemologies and projects the strength of the Caribbean personality in terms of a breakdown of tradition, a collapse of ancestral origins that releases a creative instability making fixed systems and destructive binaries impossible to sustain.

Because Harris's Caribbean theories of identity shift from an obsession with creating a lost past to confront the postcolonial reality of New World hybridity in the archipelago, he forms a crucial link with writers from the francophone and hispanophone Caribbean who have been wrestling much longer with the question of the Caribbean's hemispheric identity. This idea is as old as the 1891 essay by the Cuban writer Jose Marti, "Nuestra America" ("Our America," 1977), in which he argued against seeing the Caribbean as an Old-World construct and urged the Caribbean to build on its own indigenous *mestizo* American heritage. There is less of Marti's romantic utopianism in more recent Caribbean reformulations of this theme. The most influential recent hispanophone response to Marti's ideal of the Caribbean hybrid American legacy is Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1992). In his definition of the Caribbean as an open-ended New-World community, Benítez-Rojo insists on the supersynscretic nature of the region and opposes the images of pastoral seclusion that were once important to nativist forms of self-definition to a Caribbean reality of contact and transformation. He sees in the carnival, the city and ultimately the Caribbean Sea the confluence of diverse, interacting cultural elements that constitute Caribbeanness. He defines the Caribbean people as "aquatic" and not "terrestrial" and most importantly points to the profoundly migratory quality in suggesting that the Caribbean Sea, unlike the Mediterranean, explodes outwards, constantly impelling the people in the region to travel, to exploration and to devise mobile identities for themselves.

What is key to the recent revival of Caribbean *mestzaje* or creole identity is the objection to cultural fusion for a definition of culture whose unfolding cannot be, as Benítez-Rojo says, "captured by the cycles of clock or calendar" (1996: 11). In order to advance his theorizing, Benítez-Rojo uses postmodernism and chaos theory. The starting point for theorizing a specifically Caribbean identity among francophone writers goes back much earlier to a contestation of Césairean Negritude. The ground for this theorizing had been prepared by Fanon, but he had never managed to liberate his ideas from Sartrean existentialism. Edouard Glissant, however, from his earliest work has followed the lead

of his compatriot Frantz Fanon in attacking Negritude, Marxism, and indeed all ideologies of resistance and *marronnage* for their essentialist conceptualization of identity and for their reductionist perspective on the ambiguities and complications of the Caribbean historical experience. From the outset, Glissant set out to complicate the picture of the maroon as founding father for Caribbean societies. In his rereading of the binaries of hill and plain, defiance and acceptance in Martinican history he both questions the possibility of writing history as a grand narrative and calls for the reconceptualization of notions of power and submission. In his major book of essays, *Le discours antillais* (1981) (*Caribbean Discourse*, 1989), Glissant proposed the concept of *antillanité* to respond to the specificities of island space located in the Americas by exploring areas of Caribbean experience that are normally overlooked. In so doing he demonstrates the capacity for survival in fragile Caribbean communities that remain in constant and intimate contact with metropolitan powers. He too focuses on the Caribbean Sea as a zone of submarine rooting thereby insisting on the need for a model of belonging that transcends the polarizing alterity of ethnocentric thought and conceives the Caribbean in terms of "a multiple series of relationships."

As much as a theory of creolization, Glissant's ideas also represent a creolization of theory in the region, that is, the possibility of an emergence of Caribbean self-representation. Glissant's problematization of identity politics in the region is based on the key theoretical construct of "relation" or interrelating. It echoes in some ways Harris's idea of a crosscultural esthetic but with less emphasis on fulfillment and resolution. This term is crucial to Glissant's earliest meditations on the interdependence of perceiving subject and external reality. In his novels subject and object constantly elude each other's grasp. The seer is seen; the narrator narrated; the protagonist invariably acted on. The subject cannot dominate or master reality and is incapable of establishing a transcendental self. In this way Glissant achieves a radical redefinition of the concept of the subject and the process of subjectification. The subject is always unstable and hybrid. Identity is never fixed or pure. The other is for Glissant not only ever present but integrated within the self. This ideal of mutation and interdependence in establishing identity puts Glissant squarely with the ranks of those like Harris, Benítez-Rojo, and Walcott who attempt to theorize the relational possibilities of Caribbean identity. Glissant does not, however, blunt the radical edge of this vision of radical plurality and has arguably gone further than his fellow theoreticians in adding a postmodern edge to his theorizing. Creole for Glissant, because of its always transcending itself can never constitute a category or a knowable specificity. It is always in a state of becoming.

To the same extent, the west for Glissant is also in a constant state of flux and, therefore, should not be seen as a monolithic bloc to be resisted but a more complex entity, which Glissant has termed "le Tout Monde."

This radically nonessentializing aspect of Glissant thought has made his ideas difficult to understand and appropriate in the region. For instance, the *créolité* movement in Martinique, which is the only important cultural movement in the contemporary Caribbean, has borrowed heavily from Glissant's theories and produced numerous novels that chronicle the survival of marginal groups, in a language that mimics the Caribbean's capacity for spontaneous creativity, and subversive play. As the most full-blown expression of a creole esthetic, *créolité* as proposed by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant (*Eloge de la Créolité*, 1989) is a creative ideological response to Glissant's call for exploring a Caribbean specificity by recognizing the diverse and regenerative space of the Caribbean. Yet, *créolité* often lapses into a kind of cultural nationalism and a longing for a creole plenitude. In contrast, Glissant's vision is so profoundly deterritorializing that he even abandons his own idea of "antillanité" and its essentializing ending.

It is this interrogation of essentialist theories of identity that has led Glissant to use models like chaos theory and the Deleuzean rhizome in order to describe an unstable system of identity formation. The creole language itself is seen by Glissant as exemplary of the relational possibilities of a culture that is the product of juxtaposed, fragmented language communities. Glissant's ideas attempt to address directly the peculiarities of the Caribbean's origins or genesis. He has recently devised the term "digenèse," or digenesis, to describe the Caribbean's peculiar beginnings, which cannot constitute an origin or a genesis but a series of crossings and recrossings. This leaves Glissant's thought with the thorny question of what Fanon termed the "pathological mimeticism" that haunts the Caribbean. Would this open-ended concept of identity not simply erode island specificity? Glissant's response is the revival of the idea of opacity or the theorizing of difference beyond static polarity or exclusionary construct. His concept of the archipelago as ground that is not grounded or island space in a trajectory suggests a vision of plurality where irreducible rocks of identity enter constantly into relational forcefields across the Caribbean Sea. Glissant here is attempting to grasp the full force of the Caribbean's "irruption into modernity" in envisaging a global extension of the Caribbean's exemplary experience. Archipelization, therefore, becomes a model for envisioning an ideal relationality between freed opacities.

Even though the movement of *créolité* has claimed Glissant as its "maitre à penser," there are other elements of contemporary Caribbean thought that

are more closely tied to the deconstructive thrust of Glissant's ideas. Not surprisingly, the rejection of the idea of filiation for an emphasis on identity as synchronic interrelating has been of great significance to Caribbean writers who choose to live and work outside of the archipelago and who do not see themselves as exiles. For instance, if we take writers as diverse as Caryl Phillips originally of St. Kitts, the Guadeloupean novelist Maryse Condé, and the Haitian writer Dany Laferrière, we see the extent to which the ideal of unexpected filiations and border crossings in Glissant's ideas are echoed, consciously or not, across the region's contemporary writing. The anti-utopian thrust and the pervasive laughter of much of Condé's writing often invokes a kind of iconoclastic disorder as the pieties of ancestral home and rooted identities interrogated in her fiction. Her novels neither write back to Africa, or to Europe but are constructed around a series of ironic, paradoxical encounters that keep opening new zones of contact among cultures, ideas, and individuals. Similarly, the provoking eroticism of Laferrière's work has taken the postmodern tendencies of Glissantian writing in the direction of a subversion of the heroics of the former nativist ideologies in the Caribbean. In a sense identity politics in the Caribbean have come full circle. The key issues posed by the Haitian Revolution in terms of the ambiguities of the Caribbean's relational identity have been revived in the present, perhaps in the most provocatively thoroughgoing fashion.

Note

1. Louis Joseph Janvier, *L'égalité des races*; Anténor Firmin, *De l'égalité des races humaines*; Hannibal Price, *De la réhabilitation de la race noire par la République d'Haïti*.

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African literature and post-independence disillusionment

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During the years of anticolonial struggle Africa's nationalist leaders had a better idea of what they were fighting against than of what they wanted to replace it with. Beneath the heady euphoria of independence, there were few framing political principles or social visions with which to navigate the difficult years of nation building that lay ahead. Instead of specific restructuring programs there were only vague gestures towards economic self-reliance, democratic modernization, and detribalization. In the place of a constructive political ideology and training in multiparty parliamentary practices, Africans were given high-sounding rhetoric, personality cults that urged them to identify their charismatic leaders' personal fortunes with their own, and nostalgic communalist myths that, under the guise of socialism, would shortly be used to entrench totalitarian political systems. Thus it was not surprising that by the end of the 1960s most of the makeshift national democracies with which the departing imperial powers had hurriedly patched over the continent's social and ethnic fissures a decade earlier had given way to one-party states or dictatorships. In Nigeria intractable tribal rivalries plunged the fragile nation into genocide and civil war while neighboring Ghana floundered into a morass of institutionalized corruption and political repression. For the majority of Africans independence did not bring unity, social justice, peace, or prosperity, but division, inequality, political violence, and economic stagnation.

At the end of the independence decade it was clear to African writers and intellectuals that national liberation had been a selective affair, mainly consolidating the power of indigenous professional elites with whom the colonial regimes, in former administrative colonies like those of British and French West Africa, had maintained a long-established political dialogue. The chief aim of this dominant middle class was to wrest economic power from its ruling foreign counterparts, albeit under the camouflage of a populist nationalism. It lacked, however, developed industry, commerce, and capital resources, being content to serve – in Frantz Fanon's characterization in *The Wretched of the*

Earth (1967: 120–25) – as a neo-imperial business agent and client-bourgeoisie, and, without any productive initiative of its own, was able to satisfy its demand for western luxuries only by raiding the public coffers.

The writers of the post-independence decade were, of course, themselves disaffected members of this class, alienated by its hedonism but sharing its privilege in the midst of widespread illiteracy and squalor, and estranged from the mass of the people by their own variants of foreign luxury in the form of progressive political liberalisms and western literary techniques. It may be, as Neil Lazarus has suggested, that some of these writers initially confused national liberation with social revolution, mistakenly ascribing a coherent social purpose to the nationalist movements and a revolutionary consciousness to the awakening masses, and that the disenchantment which quickly displaced the utopian rhetoric of the nationalist period was the product of their disappointed idealism (1990: 10–32). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, novels of contemporary life by Wole Soyinka (*The Interpreters*, 1965), Chinua Achebe (*A Man of the People*, 1966), and Kofi Awoonor (*This Earth, My Brother*, 1971) painted depressingly similar pictures of social and spiritual paralysis and appeared to exude the same pervasive pessimism and despair. In these works the first postcolonial administrations stagger to an exhausted standstill, the economy defunct, the state bankrupted by reckless overconsumption and brazen government racketeering, while a power-hungry soldiery waits in the wings. The protagonists wearily resign themselves to social injustice, the duplicity of politicians, and the impossibility of radical change. Independence is complacently regarded as a gigantic confidence trick and its failure accounted for, melodramatically, in terms of conspiracy theory and sabotage, the personal betrayals of leaders and parasitic government elites. This glib defeatism was, however, more apparent than real, for the novelists' disillusionment also turned skeptically upon itself and its own sources. The wry fatalism and bitterness of this writing were informed by deeper perceptions of the original fragile promises and unrealistic hopes of African nationalism; of the low political consciousness of the masses which, from the beginning, rendered them vulnerable to cynicism and lowered their resistance to corruption; and, above all, of the contribution made by traditional prestige and patronage systems to contemporary venality and the decline into dictatorship.

Tradition and the past are not exempted from the shrewd, deflatory realism of this fiction but are shown to be deeply implicated in contemporary corruption. Nepotistic influence, tribal favoritism, and discreet theft are integral components in a prevailing patronage network which, when translated from the local to the national scale, issues in wholesale bribery, embezzlement, and

all manner of political cronyism, vote-buying, and intimidation. In the post-independence world vestigial survivals from traditional rites and ceremonies afford a spurious legitimacy to perverted modern practices. Kola-nut offerings are twisted from tokens of hospitality into shameless bribes, while welcoming panegyrics are made the occasion for ostentatious pomp and display, and lengthy village funeral rites the pretext for the fraudulent prolongation of holidays. The extended family system, once a traditional bulwark against social discord, now accrues corrupt privilege and power for a few "big men" and their families at the expense of the wider community and its group economics are made a façade for parasitic dependence. Finally, the traditional society's autocratic political structures – more often monarchic and hierarchic than democratic and egalitarian – are shown as lending themselves only too readily to authoritarian and dictatorial forms of government in the postcolonial as in the colonial world.

These features – the mystification of independence and its discredited utopian pretensions, the problematic continuities of past and present, the perennial omnipresence of corruption – are much in evidence in the early novels of the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah. They paint an excoriating picture of sterility and stagnation under an indolent ruling bourgeoisie whose cravings for western commodities and cultural kudos lead to public theft and fraud on a colossal scale. But the modern materialist malaise and dependency complexes are not merely middle-class afflictions. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), an anonymous railway clerk, called simply "the Man," battles to retain his integrity against an avalanche of temptation that engulfs the whole social order, from his acquisitive family and a corrupt influential cousin in the government to bribe-proffering traders, venal fellow clerks, and a fare-stealing bus conductor who invites his detector to a share of the loot. Everyone from the politician to the lowliest clerk aspires to western patterns of consumerism and privilege and apes European manners, dress, and speech. In the next novel, *Fragments* (1970), contemporary Ghanaians are compared to cargo cult-worshippers in their attribution to the white world of godlike powers of invention and their superstitious awe of foreign-educated "been-tos" who serve as transmission lines for the trinkets of western technology. In Armah's third book, *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), white-imitative aspirations – to bourgeois comforts, class hierarchies, and American mistresses – have even infiltrated the fabric of African revolution, and the African writer, seduced by western estheticism, has to borrow the literary styles and techniques of the former colonial oppressor to bewail his people's continuing oppression. By these indirect controls – economic strangleholds, cultural

exports, educational programs – the west is seen to maintain a posthumous presence in Africa and to secure its entrapment in a cycle of neocolonial dependency.

The devolution of western-imitative values from power centers in these novels results in a totalitarian cultural mentality that causes the oppressed to emulate their oppressors and the popular will to become indistinguishable from that of the leaders. Thus, during the long retrospect to the decolonizing years in *The Beautyful Ones*, the Man is only briefly beguiled by his friend Teacher's utopian fantasy of the masses as a source of messianic revolutionary energy, preferring to see them as merely see-sawing from a dismissive to a collaborative cynicism as they turn from the early nationalist leaders to the post-independence regime. In the dystopian vision of this novel anyone who does not rush to join the scramble after imported luxuries is outlawed. Honest men are redefined as criminals, collusion as heroic, and the exposure of fraud as sabotage.

Armah's is a heavily symbolic realism, incorporating a poetic historical vision and owing something to the graphic scatology of the African oral tradition. In the first novel corruption is imaged by the detritus of consumer materialism and Armah's exuberant hyperbole pushes this imagery to the extreme, endowing voices, figures, and movements with consumptive or excretory functions and lavishing orgies of description on the mountains of undisposed-of waste which a decade of unproductive consumption has heaped in streets, parks, and latrines (the consumer-elite who produce the waste also embezzle the public funds allocated for its disposal). During his climactic escape through a latrine hole at the fall of Nkrumah in the 1966 coup, the corrupt politician Koomson represents at once the nation's collected excrements, the ills of the moribund regime that must be expelled before a new era can be born, and, by extension, the accumulated, unexpurgated evils of Africa's colonial and precolonial history of which postcolonial corruption is the legacy. The first two novels' snapshot retrospections from contemporary figures to their ancestral prototypes – slave-chiefs, factors, and traders – indicate that the past is no place to look for an alternative to the present, while modern expediency and greed tap the debased, destructive energies of traditional ritual practices and folk myths. In *Fragments* a profiteering outdooring ceremony for a newborn child causes its death by exposure, and local folk legends fall into the hands of propagandizing poetasters and mediamen who mask their sycophantic opportunism as traditional respect for elders. The implication is that all the corrupt matter of Africa's history is still extant and the failure to jettison the old has contaminated the new.

In the complex, shifting vision of Armah's first three novels the African past is both a betrayed ideal and a mine of temptation, potent with its own corruption. In his experimental fourth book, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), the destructive historical evils of slavery and corrupt power are placed, more simplistically, against the corrective dogma of a pristine, precolonial African "Way," an indigenous spirit of communalism that Armah hypothesizes as Africa's true self. This mythologized "Way" is in fact reinvented, might-have-been history (and what might yet be if its conditions are adhered to) and its ideals are repeatedly betrayed by aberrant leaders in its pursuit across the centuries by a fictitious pan-African brotherhood. *Two Thousand Seasons* represents Armah's attempt to find a more African focus and democratic base for his writing and to shed, along with his membership of a privileged western-educated elite, the concomitant Euromodernist literary influences that were plainly discernible in the finely orchestrated motifs and descriptive tableaux of his first three books. In this work there is a shift from historical realism to myth and race memory, and from naturalistic to simulated oral narrative, using a pluralized narrative voice to speak for the whole social body over a thousand-year period. What is perhaps most significant in this work is its attempt to rehabilitate and revalorize African oral culture and to conceive its values and forms in a polemical way: for example, as unsullied alternatives and possible modes of counterdiscourse to the evils of the post-independence era and, specifically, as sources for a populist egalitarianism, albeit distant and theoretical, to offset the neocolonial elitism of the present.

By contrast, the Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem presents a less qualified view of both the African past and the oral tradition. On the first page of his novel *Le devoir de violence* (1968) (*Bound to Violence*, 1971), the reader is informed that the task of the *griot*, or oral historian, is to celebrate great historical events and uphold sacred traditions. Ouologuem's own iconoclastic reinvention of Sahelian history, however, is not a celebration of divinely sanctioned glories and epic conquests but a bitterly ironic indictment of feudal despotism and savagery. This history, represented by a thousand years of the fictional kingdom of Nakem, is a gruesome catalogue of terror, carnage, sorcery, and depravity, tempered only by sporadic outbreaks of human dignity and respites from oppression. The ruling dynasty, the legendary Saifs, are connoisseurs of cruelty who meticulously mete out ingenious torture and death to offenders or to unfortunates who learn too much about their secret evils, easily outstripping their imperial rivals in their wanton disregard for human life.

The wily Saif ben Isaac al-Heit, whose half-century reign stretches from the pre- to the postcolonial period, characterizes his dynasty as "wanderers in

disaster" but the catastrophes are either of its own making or are quickly turned to its advantage. The violence of the title is not that of white conquest but is the age-old aboriginal legacy to which Africa is bound and which resurfaces in slavery, internecine warfare, and colonialism. Each of these the vindictive Saifs manipulate to serve their own bloodthirsty power struggle, gratifying their cannibalistic lusts in their slaughter of the Masai and Zulu, and acting out a charade of honorable service to France while secretly murdering inconvenient colonial administrators. Out of the Saifs' perennial violence is created a new breed of humiliated Africans, the doomed "negraille," or "niggertrash," who are born into slavery, are blackmailed, drugged, or tortured into submission by the Saifs' evil agents, and finally develop a fatalistic, imbecilic vocation for degradation, from which neither colonialism nor its successors can liberate them. In the twentieth century, these modern serfs are led off mindlessly to their deaths defending foreign powers in two world wars and even when their most gifted sons are selected for foreign education and diplomatic service, it is only to serve as gullible instruments in the devious intrigues of the Saifs. At the dawn of independence al-Heit continues to enjoy a godlike omniscience and invulnerability, and the intended inference is that Nakem's first native administrators and ruling elites will be as much his creatures as the medieval serfs from whom they are descended. All that can be said in Saif's favor is that he is the book's sole counterforce to colonialism, constantly undermining and manipulating his imperial masters with his consummate scheming and inciting neighboring colonies to do likewise. That Ouologuem should provide African nationalism with such a disreputable prototype is characteristic of his ironic vision.

Even in Armah's early novels of contemporary life the positive elements of the past have a powerful residual existence, either through the dignified oracular utterances of grandparents or through ritual and mythological subtexts that rehabilitate lost orders of value. In Ouologuem's more extreme and radical vision, however, disillusionment with the postcolonial present is retrojected into the ancestral past, which appears to exist chiefly to bequeath to contemporary Africans a legacy of criminal violence, duplicity, and perversion. Like *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Bound to Violence* narrates the odyssey of a whole people over a millennium, but here the ancestral destiny is nothing so positive as the redemptive communalism inherited by the disciples of the "Way." It is simply the unchanging and apparently unchangeable feudal order of Nakem that has miraculously survived into the twentieth century: the barbaric tyranny of the Saifs, on the one hand, and, on the other, the perpetual servitude of the "niggertrash." Ouologuem not only contemptuously debunks the notion

of autochthonous egalitarian value structures but finds no evidence for any precolonial, indigenous values outside the undifferentiated feudal context of master and slave, preferring to see African history as a continuum of indigenous colonialism and despotism running from early Negro overlords, through the Arab and European invaders with whom they were eager to collaborate, to post-independence elites (appropriately, el-Heit's hired killers are schooled in the same sadistic techniques – asps, poisons, sorcery – as their ancestors). In spirit, the appalling Saifs have ruled from time immemorial and are our contemporaries and successors.

Ouologuem's satiric targets in *Bound to Violence* are the francophone Negritude writers and their opiate romance of the African past, and contemporary leaders who glorify the splendors of black civilization to divert attention from the abuses of the present, in some cases (Mali's Modibo Keita) even claiming descent from medieval despots. It may be, as Wole Soyinka has suggested (1976: 101), that Ouologuem, to guard against these dangerous oversimplifications, inoculated himself with a powerful antidote of cynicism. The contempt is provocatively overdone and is at times self-mockingly tongue-in-cheek: for example, Ouologuem mischievously queries the existence of native art and literature by misattributing indigenous Songhai chronicles to Arab historians and having Saif's witch doctor fabricate phony antique masks and concoct African religious art and folklore to humor the "Afrolotrous" German ethnologist "Shrobenius." *Bound to Violence*, however, is not purely a work of iconoclastic nihilism. Its radical fabulative strategies inquire into the ways in which history is constructed – through judicial records, oral epics, folklore, chronicles – and demonstrate in the process that remembered legends preserved in the oral memory may be no more reliable in their recounting of the past than recorded histories of selected "facts" kept by the colonizing powers. Moreover, orature, like any other form of discourse, is not politically innocent. At the outset of Ouologuem's fabulation the *griots* are identified as apologists for a tyrannical political system, members of the same hereditary caste as the Saifs, and no less collaborative with the feudal status quo than the scribes and chroniclers with whom they colluded to enshrine the Songhai emperor Askia Mohammed, the original of al-Heit's medieval ancestor, as the pinnacle of Sahelian civilization (to this end the multivocal narrator deliberately mixes up episodes from the oral epic of Askia Mohammed with those from the *Tarik* chronicles). The oral tradition is here regarded not as the repository of African values in opposition to western literate cultures, but as no less a betrayer of the African people than modern writers who employ the literary styles and techniques of the former colonial oppressor.

Thus Ouologuem borrows from oral discourse only to challenge the ideologies that it encodes and upholds. Instead of imparting a solemn dignity to the *griot*'s rhetoric, he delivers a sardonic pastiche of oral narrative in which traditional prayer tags and invocations are scurrilously attached to horrors and atrocities, contesting both the heroism of the subject and the value of the narrative form that heroizes it. As the negritudinous farrago served up to Shrobenius by Saif selects only those elements of Sudanic history that glorify it, Ouologuem's counterorature presents only its primitive cruelty and enslaved misery. Both versions are, of course, imaginative projections, self-consciously placing biased constructions on the past to suit the polemical needs of their authors and raising reflexive doubts about their own authenticity. The implication is that, given the immensity of Africa's historical vacuum and the impossibility of objectivity, Ouologuem's historiographic metafiction of the Saharan past is probably as accurate as that celebrated by the oral epics of Askia Mohammed and Sundjata, and certainly more reliable than the "Shrobenian" version.

In *Les soleils des indépendances* (1968) (*The Suns of Independence*, 1981), by the Ivory Coast writer Ahmadou Kourouma, both the dynastic past and the post-independence present are subjects for satire. For the two one-party states straddling the ancient Malinke kingdom of Horodugu, independence means only taxes and dues, forced labor and prison camps, famine and loss of trade. In the capitals the French live on in neon-lit neocolonial luxury while hordes of ferocious beggars attack and rob the market women who feed them. The last of Horodugu's legitimate Dumbuya rulers is the protagonist Fama, an odd mixture of degraded hauteur and comic hubris whom the ironic narrator appears by turns to indulge and deride. Demoted by French colonialism and ignored by one-party socialism, Fama is now an aging and sterile ex-trader scrounging alms at funerals, his ancestral kingdom shrunk to a few decrepit sun-baked huts and a handful of starving, toothless old villagers. Though an illiterate and impoverished pariah figure, he nurses grandiose aspirations to party office and, embarrassingly, still struts the part of a proud Dumbuya descendant, affecting to scorn all "sons of slaves," whether they be colonial or party officials.

Fama's vision of independence, though warped by wounded vanity and delusions of grandeur, provides the focus for the author's political satire on one-party administrations and their dismal histories – whether socialist or capitalist – of exploitation and dispossession. One regime forces farmers into "self-help" bridge-building projects as harvests rot, while the other vindictively backdates opponents' party dues for the whole period spent in opposition and

imprisons people merely for dreaming antigovernment conspiracies. What is perhaps more problematic about Kourouma's novel is that its sardonic modern narrator seems to associate himself with Fama's dynastic Dumbuya beliefs, so that most of his narrative is written from, and its events structured and explained by, an apparently obsolescent worldview. According to this worldview, approaching calamities are always heralded by omens and can be averted or mitigated by seeking out the correct propitiation rites from the fetish priest. By the logic of this process, a plotting minister could have survived an antigovernment conspiracy by the timely sacrifice of an ox, and Fama himself would not have embarked from his village upon a journey to imprisonment and death if he had heeded the far-sighted priest's inauspicious omens. The implied metaphoric message for the new one-party rulers whose dull officialdom has "unmagicked" Africa is that what they need, instead of Muslim marabouts to watch over their personal destinies, are communal early warning systems, modern equivalents of the fetish, to apprise them of their people's unrest and prescribe remedial action. Thus safeguards against future dangers can be found in the divination practices of the traditional past.

Whatever Kourouma himself, as a modern writer, thinks of all this, he demonstrates a deep imaginative sympathy with his Malinke culture and invests with a tragic dignity Fama's faith in the irrepressible vitality of his Dumbuya dead and the manner (devoured by the sacred crocodile) by which he joins them. Kourouma's portrait of traditional life is anything but romantic. But Horodugu, with its squalor, ritual slaughter, and rich hunting lore, remains stubbornly and resiliently itself, a kernel of African identity that pre- and postdates Islam, colonialism, independence, and one-party socialism (all equally foreign to it). Fama's view of his civilization may not be the reader's or the author's but his worldview indisputably has integrity and authenticity, and something of it will still be there when the suns of independence have passed away.

In Somalia, which became independent in 1960, local political conditions were even less favorable than in West Africa to colonial models of parliamentary democracy, which were quickly undermined by inveterate clan rivalries and finally swept away by General Siyad Barre's Soviet-inspired coup in 1969. Barre pledged to eliminate the corrupt microtribalisms of clan and lineage but his divide-and-rule tactics, trading promotions and preferments to play one lineage off against another, actually strengthened tribal divisions and clan nepotism over his twenty-two-year reign. His regime's strange confection of Marxism and Islam in fact contained little of either, merely using them as camouflage for dictatorship by a clan oligarchy and family dynasty. With the

influx of Russian personnel in the early 1970s and the rapid growth of security services under KGB-trained police chiefs, totalitarian coercion and terror – arbitrary arrest, detention and torture, public executions – became routine features of postrevolution Somali life. Ministers fell from favor at the nepotistical whim of the dictator, following a precarious trajectory that might lead them, at any moment, into exile or to prison and the scaffold.

This frightening period of Somali history is the subject of Nuruddin Farah's somber trilogy of novels, *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship* (1979–83), which presents a deranged Orwellian world of disappearing dissidents, unpersons, and rewritten history. In *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), Soyaan, a government economic adviser, mysteriously dies after an official dinner, apparently murdered for subversive, anti-Soviet activities. The regime then falsifies the facts of his life in order to turn him, posthumously, into a revolutionary hero, and efforts to reconstruct the last weeks of his life run at every turn into a wall of government obfuscation. Under an obscurantist dictator, Somali reality has become an opaque hermetic text, and the plot to murder and mythologize Soyaan proves to be ultimately unravelable.

Though the Barre regime was propped up by foreign powers – first Russia and then, after the Ogaden War, America – Farah's trilogy does not attribute its power abuses to western interference but presents "the General" as answering to some authentic, fundamental need in Somali experience. Military despotism proves to be but domestic patriarchy writ large, the authoritarian family predisposing the population to dictatorial forms of government. In *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Sardines* (1981), domestic and political oppression are mutually reinforcing, invoking each other's authority and sanctioning each other's violence. When Samater, another government minister, evicts his tyrannical mother Idil, he brings the wrath of the state down upon his head, while Soyaan's policeman-father Keynaan, by conniving at the death and defamation of his dissident son, stamps out subversion at both political and familial levels. This repression, moreover, thrives on oral conventions that, in societies with few written records, are ripe for political abuse and lend themselves to tyranny as readily as domestic traditions. The General's surveillance network of spies and informers is recruited from illiterates working entirely in the oral medium, without arrest warrants, death certificates, or files on detainees. The oral world is ruled by rumor, gossip, and speculation that maintain the atmosphere of suspicion and insecurity, of being "kept guessing," required by the dictator (in *Sardines* a Somali poet notes that the ear, the primary organ of both the oral culture and the General's police system, is shaped like a question mark). Thus Farah seeks neither to rehabilitate indigenous traditions, like the

later Armah, nor to discredit and repudiate them, like Ouologuem, but rather to show how they have been implicated in the tribulations and terrors of the independent state.

His vision of both domestic and politicized oral traditions is finally, however, a scrupulously fair-minded and balanced one. Although the extended kinship group is seen as a prop for familial parasitism and clan tyranny, the western nuclearized family that displaces it is revealed to have its own subtle tyrannies, particularly in its single-parent variant. In this country of pontifical parents, the intellectual tyranny that the cosmopolitan Medina, in *Sardines,* forces upon her eight-year-old daughter is almost as oppressive as the physical obedience demanded of Samater by Idil. Even Keynaan and Idil are allowed to have their say, berating the new western-educated "privilegentsia" for producing nothing to replace the coherent structures they are destroying and demonstrating that traditional values are at least better able to cope with dictatorship than western individualism. The oral tradition is also a double-edged sword, both reactionary and radical in its usages, alternatively in league with and opposed to the forces of authoritarianism and obscurantism. In the barely literate figure of Dulman, the singer who smuggles abroad subversive cassettes recorded direct from the poet's mouth, Farah presents a revolutionary image of an ancient oral Somalia in a century of high technology, fighting despotism with its own weapons. Deeriye, the veteran national hero of *Close Sesame* (1983), is a living reminder of this rebellious oral tradition that endowed poets with political influence and armed legendary nationalist warriors like the Sayyid with the added power of the spoken word.

In this last volume of the trilogy Farah is concerned to redeem and reinstate not only a debased oral tradition but two other elements of Somali culture perverted by the General's regime: patriarchy and Islam. In the endearing figure of Deeriye, a loving monogamous husband and grandfather living harmoniously with children and grandchildren, there appears, for the first time in Farah's writing, a patriarch who is not a tyrant and who thus serves as an alternative, nonauthoritarian model for both the domestic and national households. Deeriye is also a devout Muslim and the Koran, bowdlerized by the regime's ideologues for praise names to deify the dictator, now energizes ideals of brotherhood and neighborliness that cut across clan divisions and cement opposition to tyranny.

Ideals, however, do not generate remedies. In the complex vision of the four writers featured here, the failure of African independence is traced, variously, to unpropitious domestic and tribal traditions, crises of cultural self-confidence, neocolonial economics and materialism, and indigenous historical legacies

of corruption and violence. Redress or relief for disillusionment is sought in Africanization, renascent communalism, democratic liberalism, and orature, and in alternating demystifications and curative mythologies of the African past. None of these, singly or combined, have proved to be the "open sesame" to the closed door of postcolonial dictatorship and the blocked path to genuine independence.

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"Postcolonial" African and Caribbean literature

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Postcolonial literature is usually produced by such younger writers as Caryl Phillips in England and Calixthe Beyala in France, who are part of minority diasporas in what were colonizing nations; they are especially, but not exclusively, those born and raised after independence. This literature is a result of the massive migrations of recent decades and the growing global economic market in which education and jobs are available to those from former colonies. One explanation of these diasporas might be "We are here because you were there" (Frankenberg and Mani 1993: 293). The "postcolonials" have replaced the "colonials" as the persons moving from one culture to another. The large-scale movement of people from their countries of origin is a salient feature of the contemporary world.

Postcolonial literature is distinct from theories of postcolonialism and postcolonial studies. While the term "postcolonial" is used historically to mean literature written after the era of colonialism, postcolonial cultural studies critically analyzes the continuing relationship of colonial powers to those they had colonized and often treats nationalist governments and their nativist culture as reactionary or neocolonial. Postcolonial studies are anticolonial; most forms of dominance are viewed as imperial and those dominated as colonized victims. Postcolonial analysis tends to be antagonistic to literary art; elite culture is to be deconstructed to reveal its hidden assumptions, including complicity with the colonizers. The colonizers' culture is to be appropriated to resist, to answer back.

While postcolonial literature is anticolonial in its treating of problems resulting from colonization and imperialism, such as economic and racial domination and discrimination, many texts are about the ageless problems of learning new cultural codes, and the conflicts between immigrants and their new land, between tradition and modernization, between generations. If similar to some earlier immigrations, however, postcolonial movements of people can be distinguished by the visible differences between most immigrants and the

majority of the population in the countries to which they have emigrated. Whereas it used to be assumed that people had to choose between past and future, origins and new home, postcolonial literature is often concerned with the process of transition toward some new cultural identity, not a choice between former roots and assimilation. These new cultural formations, especially where the tensions are unresolved, are sometimes defined as "hybridity" (see Bhabha 1994).

Writers born after the colonial period often take a critical view of the power and social structure of the nation state and distrust fixed identities. Postcolonial literature might be considered postnational, part of the fragmentation of the social and cultural hegemony of the modern nation. During a time when many writers are not resident in their countries of origin, thinking about national origins may be an outdated concern. In European countries, classifying artists in terms of national origins or colonial histories can become a form of rejection or paternalism: "That's not bad for a North African writer." When Calixthe Beyala first came to France she was considered a Cameroonian writer. As her prestige has grown, she is seen as a French writer.

Classifying by color also creates problems. Any writer of partly black skin is sometimes misleadingly assumed to be part of an African literature. Jackie Kay, whose father was Senegalese and mother Scottish, grew up in an adopted Scottish family. Her sympathy for the oppressed is evident in her poetry, but does this make her African? Marie N'Diaye, whose Senegalese father left her French mother when Marie and her brother were infants, has no connection with Africa. Yet, because of the color of her skin she has sometimes been criticized for not writing about the African immigrant community in France or the problems of Africa. The racialist implications are evident. Even among those who have lived within black communities, some writers refuse to be considered part of an African diaspora. Anthony Phelps, from Haiti, considers himself an American (by which he means from the New World, not from the United States); he knows little about Africa: "Though it may be convenient to group all non-white creative artists of black origin together . . . that systematic grouping nonetheless reflects a desire . . . to maintain the separation of the races, to preserve Europe's colonialist gaze" (Phelps 1994: 144).

Diaspora, from the original meaning of the dispersal of the Jews from Israel, implied at one time a group awaiting return to a homeland, but a sense of exile from home is not necessarily part of contemporary "diasporas." Many people might be more accurately described as "transnationals" as, given the ease of transportation in the modern world, they live part of the time in their countries of origin, or move from one western country to another.

Others are permanent immigrants to a western power, where they will be a minority, not easily assimilated because of color or religion, and often, in the present cultural climate, uninterested in complete assimilation. What they write reflects this experience. Although postcolonial theorists often treat all African and Caribbean immigrants as if they were alike, distinctions must be made, including social class, the country to which they come, and the age at which they arrive. The perspective of those who remember life before independence differs from that of those who came to the former colonial power when young. Still different will be that of second- or third-generation children of immigrants, for whom the country of origin may only be a tale told by their elders. Instead of the children of immigrants being part of an Afrocentric or Caribbean milieu, they may become part of a third culture, black British or *beur* for example, what is called a hybrid culture. (*Beur*, the name for second-generation immigrants to France from North Africa, is Arab pronounced backwards, in the slang of the Paris suburbs.) Rather than adopting their parents' culture from which they are by birth and education separated, or the culture of the former colonial power, they construct a new one. Such hybridity results when there is a large enough community to sustain a new culture, and when there is a new generation born, or at least educated, in the country of immigration. There are now several generations of North Africans in France and West Indians in England. While there are young people in Britain and France born of African parents, they are not yet groups with their own literature.

Partly because of this concern with the social conditions of immigrant life and the construction of a new culture, much literature is autobiographical or prose fiction. There are no major francophone poets to rival Léopold Senghor, Léon Damas, and Aimé Césaire at the height of the Negritude movement, when lyrical nostalgia and cultural assertion were prominent themes. In England, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar, who began their literary careers as poets, have turned to fiction, as has Caryl Phillips whose first works were plays. This prevalence of fiction may also reflect the market place, with greater interest of both readers and literary critics at present in narrative prose and autobiography than in lyric poetry.

African writers born after 1960 and moving to France after they reached young adulthood remain attached to their native lands, or to Africa as a continent. Their novels are concerned with the problems of post-independence countries; the corrupt independent governments of Africa are a theme in the work of such writers as Caya Makhele (*L'homme au landau*, 1988, The Man in the Baby Carriage) born shortly before independence in Congo, but long

resident in France. Even some younger writers in France deal primarily with Africa, such as Jean-Luc Raharimanana, born in Madagascar in 1967 (*Lucarne*, 1996, Skylight) and Abdourahman Waberi, born in 1965 in Djibouti (*Pays sans ombre*, 1994, Country without a Shadow; *Cahier nomade*, 1996, Nomad Notebook). Waberi remembers schooling in a colonial atmosphere, since Djibouti gained its independence only in 1977. His work continues to invoke the French colonial or neocolonial presence in his native land, as well as the corruption of the independent government.

Among the writers born in France of sub-Saharan African parents, the two most prominent are Simon Njami and Yodi Karone (see Jules-Rosette 1998). They treat questions of African identity from different angles. Njami was born in Switzerland of Cameroonian parents; his contacts with Africa were initially limited to visiting his grandparents. His writing is often concerned with Africans in France, particularly the intellectual who is uncertain of his place, questioning what it means to be black, trying to define the relationship between African Americans and Africans. His influences are varied, including black American literature. In *Cercueil et Cie* (1985) (*Coffin and Company*, 1987) Njami incorporates Chester Himes's detectives into a story set in Paris. *African Gigolo* (1989) describes uprooted Africans who seem to belong to no culture and who envy the American roots of black Americans. Njami edits an art magazine, *Revue Noire*, and has mounted exhibitions of African photography. Yodi Karone whose father was a political exile from Ahidjo's Cameroon, and who lived for a time in North Africa, uses Cameroon as a setting for some novels (*Le bal des caïmans*, 1980, Crocodile Ball; *Les beaux gosses*, 1988, The Beautiful Kids). The characters in these novels are more aware of their identity as Cameroonian than are Njami's.

Few authors still use the realistic style of earlier writers describing African life in France. In its mixture of genres, voices, and registers of language, postcolonialism has affinities to postmodernism. Henri Lopes's *Le pleurer-rire* (1982) (*The Laughing Cry: An African Cock and Bull Story*, 1987) is composed of a number of narrative perspectives and combines elements of traditional languages with the street French spoken in African cities. His more educated characters, steeped in French culture, can make multicultural puns, such as the lake with manatees (*lamantins*) that becomes "le lac de Lamartine" (see Anyinefa 1998). Blaise N'Djehoya, whose family was part of a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses in Cameroon, marginal to the dominant culture, sees himself and his peers as a new group of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, making a contribution to Europe. In his *Le nègre Potemkine* (1988) (The Black Potemkin), standard French slang, *petit nègre,* English, allusions, and puns are mixed to create the hybrid language

of the expatriate intellectual: a language which illustrates the mixture of cultures, ideas, and images in the late twentieth-century world resulting from a breakdown of any notion of an integrated culture, of a center, of an organic nation or people. Beyala in *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992) (*The "Little Prince" of Belleville*, 1995), echoing Antoine de St.-Exupéry's classic *Le petit prince*, incorporates several voices, speaking in different registers, mixing African words with French, a way of expressing diverse sides of a cultural experience that cannot be reduced to one perspective or even one language. Barnabé Laye blends African myth from his native Benin, poetic invocations of the spirit world, with a realistic evocation of life in Paris (*Mangalor*, 1989).

The plays of Koffi Kwahulé, born in the Ivory Coast in 1956 and resident in France since 1982, reflect the mixture of cultural influences on a postcolonial writer. The black boxer in *Cette vieille magie noire* (1993) (That Old Black Magic) is an American who has sold his soul to a Faustian devil-manager. The heroine of *Bintou* (1997) is the daughter of a North American family of immigrants to Paris. *Fama* (1998) is based on Ahmadou Kourouma's novels set in West Africa. Kwahulé's plays are accompanied by a similar mixture of types of music, from the Spanish guitar music of Joaquin Rodrigo through 1930s French popular music to Billie Holiday.

Seeking to move beyond an Africa that becomes stereotypical after their years living in another culture, authors have written plays with no clearly identifiable setting. Just as *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (himself a migrant, or exile from Ireland) takes place in a land of "everyman," so plays in French by Kossi Efoui (*La malaventure*, 1993, Unfortunate Adventure), Michèle Rakotoson (*Un jour ma mémoire*, 1990, One Day My Memory), and Léandre-Alain Baker (*Les jours se traînent, les nuits aussi*, 1993, The Days Drag On, the Nights as Well) might be about personal or political conflicts anywhere in the world. Such "universalization" of setting is more likely to be successful in drama than in novels.

How to find a personal center of identity after years in Europe can be a problem, and, for those long in exile, subject matter is likely to change. Tierno Monénembo, perhaps the finest Guinean novelist of his generation, who was a political refugee from Sékou Touré's regime, began writing novels set in Guinea (*Les crapauds-brousse*, 1979, *The Bush Toads*, 1983; *Les écailles du ciel*, 1986, The Scales of the Sky). In *Un rêve utile* (1991, A Useful Dream), immigrant businessmen and women cater to the African community in Lyon. *Un attiéké pour Elgass* (1993) (A Fish Feast for Elgass) is set among Guinean refugees in the Ivory Coast. *Pelourinho* (1995) is the story of an African looking for the history of his family among the inhabitants of the former slave colony in

Brazil. Monénembo speaks of the precarious identity of the African exile, but, sometimes echoing the themes of the *créolité* authors of Martinique, sees a fruitful intersection of roads.

While Beyala's first novels, set in Africa and largely concerned with the situation of women in West African society, have little reference to France, she later portrays the world in which she lives, the world of a multicultural diaspora, the Belleville of her *Petit prince de Belleville.* Her themes include the experiences of African immigrants in Europe, the problems of immigration, the choice between retaining a native culture or assimilating, and the fight against racism. In *Assèze l'Africaine* (1994) (Asseze the African) she describes the life of women who have illegally entered France and fear the police. Beyala uses the term "black" in French to define children of sub-Saharan parentage born in France. "Blacks" are a much smaller group in comparison to *beurs* or to those of Caribbean origin born in Britain.

Writers of African origin in France are aware of and occasionally review each other's work. They are discussed in such magazines as *Jeune Afrique, Sépia*, and *Notre Librairie*, where they are considered as African writers, not as part of an African diaspora. In French libraries they are classified under African literature. That publishing in France is often initially with Présence Africaine or L'Harmattan, both specializing in Third-World writing, shows the continuing marginalization of such writers. Editions Lansman, in Belgium (a country often treated as marginal by the French) has published a number of francophone African plays. The beginning of acceptance of postcolonial writers into the French mainstream and of a larger readership for their work can be seen by Waberi and Raharimanana publishing with Serpent à Plumes, and Lopes, Efoui, and Monénembo with Editions du Seuil.

Dramatists or filmmakers find it difficult to get their work produced in France. When a play by a postcolonial author is staged, the director will be French. "Francophonie" seems primarily an instrument with which to attack the dominance of the English language in the world; it is seldom directly a means of supporting work of Third-World origin. France, unlike England, still tends to regard sub-Saharan Africans as temporary residents.

Writers from the francophone Caribbean are better known in France than those of African origin; they are published by such prestigious presses as Gallimard. Since Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyana are "departments" of France, many writers consider their political situation to be colonial, not postcolonial, and are partisans of independence, differing in this from Aimé Césaire and the older generation. Most writers are "transnationals," spending time in metropolitan France and also in their home regions. One of the

best is Patrick Chamoiseau of Martinique, winner of the Prix Goncourt for *Texaco* (1992) (*Texaco*, 1998), a postmodern novel combining various voices and registers of language to narrate the history of Martinique. Maryse Condé, from Guadeloupe, who has taught in France, Guinea, and the United States, is another prize-winning novelist. She is against any simple categorization of the diversity of human experience: "Culturally, we are all metis" (Condé 1998: 4) – as seen in a character in her *Désirada* (1997; *Desirada: A Novel*, 2000) born in France to a Guadeloupean mother and a Haitian father: "In no way was he on the age-old quest for identity. He was a European . . . He did not long for a mythical past nor was his heart set on winning back a beautiful native land" (2000: 211); "His own universe was the dismal suburbs, the stadiums, and the soccer fields" (2000: 224). This is far from the nostalgia for Mother Africa or Haiti of the earlier generations.

North African writers long resident in France include Tahar ben Jelloun from Morocco, and Assia Djébar from Algeria, whose work often deals with the situation of women in her native land. The term *beur* for second-generation Maghrebi immigrants has connotations of the poverty and violence in Parisian suburbs (the French equivalent of American inner cities). Tahar ben Jelloun says that his children are bourgeois, not *beurs*. Soraya Nini's novel *Ils disent que je suis une beurette* (1993) (They Say I'm a "Beurette") questions the use of such terminology, particularly the patronizing feminine form. Leila Sebbar, whose mother is French and father Algerian, wishes to be considered a French writer and refuses to be classified as "a North African writer of French expression" (see Woodhull 1993). Her work reflects the problems of various immigrant groups. The young squatters in *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1984) (*Sherazade: Missing, Aged 17, Dark Curly Hair, Green Eyes,* 1996), whether from the Maghreb, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, or eastern Europe, have trouble with their traditionalist families.

Beur writing focuses on the situation of those of Maghrebi origin in France. Among the best-known authors are Mehdi Charef, whose *Le thé au harem d'Archi-Ahmed* (1983, *Tea in the Harem*, 1991; the title is a child's misunderstanding of "le théorème d'Archimède") was also made into a film; and Azouz Begag, whose novels (*Le gone du Chaâba*, 1986, The Kid from Châba; *Béni ou le paradis privé,* 1989, Beni or Private Paradise; *Les chiens aussi,* 1995, The Dogs Too) are published by Editions du Seuil, and have received favorable critical attention (see Mehrez 1993; see also Hargreaves 1991). Among his themes is the strain put on the Muslim family by life in Europe. Such literature is part of the new European multiculturalism; the influence of Maghrebi culture on popular French artistic forms – cinema, radio, stand-up comics, television, and

especially music – has been even greater. Raï music is not only popular but has influenced other ethnic and European popular musics and is imitated by young white French musicians.

Until the fall of Duvalier, Haitians in France thought of themselves as in political exile, and nostalgia for the homeland was a frequent theme. Recent generations are more likely to move to North America, and migration is thought a kind of emancipation, as in the novels of Jean-Claude Charles (*Bamboola bamboche*, 1984; *Manhattan blues*, 1985). Emile Ollivier says he is "Canadian by day and Haitian by night" (quoted in Dalembert 1998: 43). In *Les urnes scellées* (1995) (The Sealed Boxes) he asks whether a return is possible after years spent in a foreign land. Both the migrant and his native country have changed, and those who stayed and suffered resent those who return (a similar subject to Caryl Phillips's *A State of Independence*, 1986). Among the best-known novels of what is termed the third generation of the Haitian diaspora is Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985, *How to Make Love to a Negro*, 1989), in which there is no reference to Haiti. Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes and Memory* (1994), written in English, describes a young Haitian girl whose migration to the United States makes her question the way women in her community are treated. This theme is found in the work of many anglophone West Indian women who have migrated to North America.

Immigration from former colonies has a much longer history in England than in France and the African and Caribbean communities there are larger. The West Indians who arrived around the time of the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948 are called the Windrush generation. Originally considered by the British as temporary post-war labor, they stayed and were joined by others including students and writers seeking qualifications, publishers, and adventures. Andrew Salkey, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, and V. S. Naipaul all came to England from the West Indies in 1950. The idea of a black British culture is by now accepted, and its history traced in *Windrush* (1998) by Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips. *Empire Windrush*, edited by Onyekachi Wambu (1998), is an anthology of "fifty years of writing about black British." For some critics and journalists, "black" is used to describe all non-European immigrants, including those from the Indian subcontinent, and has been used from the 1970s onwards to create a political community of colored or nonwhite minorities. In contrast to France, where Africans and Martinicans seldom socialize, and the small Indian community is separate, in Britain the various immigrant groups cooperate and intermarry.

In England there are black drama companies, theaters, and directors, and more productions of plays by black writers than in France. Publishers and

journals – such as New Beacon Press, Peepal Tree Press, Dangaroo Press, *Kunapipi*, *Wasafiri* – are devoted to Caribbean and "Commonwealth" literature, including the work of immigrant and black British writers. Heinemann and Longman publish black literature intended for the educational market. There are also more critical studies of African, Caribbean, and postcolonial authors published in England than in France. Such educational publishing reflects the openness of the British educational system to the study of texts from formerly marginalized communities, and has developed from the study of Commonwealth literature. Even in French universities, there are anglophone postcolonial texts on the syllabus more often than francophone texts.

Such writers as David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, and Caryl Phillips are part of the literary mainstream in England, and have good publishers. Quartet Books actively seeks new authors in English and in translation from French. Besides English-language writing having a potentially larger market than work in French, there is greater acceptance of varieties of English. Purity of language is less important in the anglophone world.

Samuel Selvon, who, although of East Indian descent, identified with black West Indians, was one of the first Caribbean authors to write about immigration to England. Selvon's fiction assumes a black British culture mixing various peoples, creates a London black literary speech, and maps black life in London, rather than memories of "home" (*The Lonely Londoners*, 1956; *Moses Ascending*, 1975). David Dabydeen, born in Guyana of East Indian parentage, was brought as a child to England and educated there. His first published book, *Slave Song* (1984), mixes standard English with Guyanese Creole in poems based on medieval lyrics. The interplay of various registers of language might be compared to that of N'Djehoya in French. Dabydeen's early novels, partly autobiographical, are told by Guyanese narrators in Britain (*The Intended*, 1991; *Disappearance*, 1993), who speak about the difficulty of going "home." These are sophisticated, elaborately structured novels with echoes of earlier literature. Dabydeen has also written or edited books about blacks in England, including *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Arts* (1985) and, with Paul Edwards, *Black Writers in Britain, 1760–1890* (1991).

Dabydeen's generation wants to show the long history of a black presence in England and its culture. Their perspective has been influenced by the creation of Black British Studies, associated with the British West Indian Stuart Hall (who has studied immigration and sees "race" as a social construction), and by Paul Gilroy's attack on Negritudist essentialism as a hand-me-down

inversion of European racism. Gilroy proposes a modern Black Atlantic that developed over the centuries between Africa and its diaspora cultures. Somewhat earlier writers, such as E. Archie Markham, a poet and novelist, appear less self-consciously or ideologically black. Indeed Markham's writing, except for occasional allusions, could be that of any Englishman. He likes to experiment with technique and, sympathetic to feminism, at times has used the persona of a woman.

Caryl Phillips, born in St. Kitts but brought to England by his family when he was only one year old, has a multinational perspective. His first novel, *The Final Passage* (1985), treats of Caribbean immigration to England. In *The Nature of Blood* (1997), the main character is a Jewish woman liberated from a death camp. Part of Phillips's novel concerns Jews and blacks in Venice before Shakespeare's time. Like Leila Sebbar in France, he notes parallels between oppressed groups: blacks and Jews, poor whites and poor blacks.

Phillips has also written novels about the slave trade. His *Crossing the River* (1993), along with Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994) and Dabydeen's poem "Turner" (1994), shows a trend towards historicism in recent black British literature (see Ilona 1995). These writers want to counteract seeing history solely from a white perspective. The slave trade and the Middle Passage created communities of blacks in the New World and Europe as well as Africa. Their black characters are not just victims or heroes, but complicated and conflicted people, part of world history, especially a black Atlantic history. D'Aguiar's novel, about a black father's guilt and love, shows that blacks had interesting stories even as slaves in America before the arrival of the ancestors of most white Americans. Dabydeen's poem focuses on the submerged head of an African in Turner's painting "Slavers." Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994), the story of a young child growing up in East Africa in the early 1900s, gives an East African perspective on the slavery prevalent before the arrival of the Europeans, as well as on colonial history. It is a sophisticated tale, with echoes of the biblical story of Joseph/Yusuf.

Popular black British literature, usually by those of West Indian origin, includes the detective fiction of Mike Phillips (*The Dancing Face*, 1997), James Berry's books of children's stories about blacks and immigrants, and the oral-dub poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson (*Dread Beat and Blood*, 1975) and Benjamin Zephaniah (*City Psalms*, 1993). While oral performance poetry usually is political protest, it can also be humorous, as in John Agard's *From the Devil's Pulpit* (1997). Black British female poets include Grace Nichols, whose poetry is both written for the page and performed (*Whole of a Morning Sky*, 1986). Such black popular literature hardly exists in France, although Bolya, from the former

Zaire, has written a detective novel (*La polyandre*, 1998). Because of the greater size of their community, popular literature in France is more often written by *beurs*.

Writers from Nigeria, or of Nigerian parentage, in England, include Adewale Maja-Pearce, of mixed English-Nigerian parentage, who has written criticism of African literature and the autobiographical *In My Father's Country: A Nigerian Journey* (1987). Biyi Bandele's plays and his novel *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond* (1991), are set in Nigeria. *The Street* (1999) is his first English novel, a magic realist revisioning of the black British and black immigrant scene in the 1990s. Buchi Emecheta writes of the problems of the African woman in England (*Second-Class Citizen*, 1977) and criticizes traditional Igbo culture and black nationalism from a feminist point of view (*The Joys of Motherhood,* 1979). Ben Okri, whose parents are from two different ethnic groups and who was born in England, mixes various Nigerian myths, modern African politics, and folklore in *The Famished Road* (1991), an example of African magic realism. Okri's early fiction (*The Landscapes Within,* 1981) was more directly based on life in Nigeria where he spent his teens before returning to England. The later books are set in an Africa without specific time or place. Emecheta and Okri are the first African writers in England who earn their living from writing; their market is primarily outside of Africa.

Many West Indian women writers resident in North America examine women's lives from a feminist perspective (see Junega 1995). They write about class, color, and gender biases, both in their native countries and in North America. Another theme is the tensions between life in warm, extended Creole families and that in modern nuclear families. The stories are often autobiographical; some are highly political. Among the most prominent women writers from the West Indies are Jamaica Kincaid (*Annie John*, 1983), Paule Marshall (*Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 1982), and Michelle Cliff (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 1989), resident in the United States; Dionne Brand (*Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, 1984), Claire Harris (*Drawing Down a Daughter*, 1992), and Olive Senior (*Arrival of the Snake-Woman and Other Stories*, 1989), living in Canada.

The major black Canadian writer is Austin Clarke, who has written many novels and stories about West Indian immigrant life in Toronto, including *When Women Rule* (1985) and *There Are No Elders* (1993). While Caribbean writing in Canada appears the work of recent immigrants, Clarke's fiction covers several decades of immigrant life, tracing changes in attitudes as one generation of settlers regards newcomers as outsiders. Canada also raises the question of the merits of a national cultural mosaic in contrast to American and French ideals of assimilation. In 1971, Canada adopted a policy of multiculturalism;

the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act proclaims a liberal stand on immigration. Literature by West Indians in Canada does not reflect this official policy of multiculturalism. Although resident in Canada for several generations, Clarke's characters are still relegated to the margins of society. Several authors, including Neil Bissoondath, claim that official multiculturalism is a sort of apartheid (Ramraj 1996). The problem of how to be different and not considered inferior remains.

"Home" and "nation" have become more complicated in the contemporary world. Derek Walcott and Maryse Condé claim that the writer's home is within his or her own mind. For Walcott, "my only nation is the imagination" (quoted in Hargreaves and McKinney 1997: 199). Condé wonders if "an identity is not simply a matter of choice, of a personal decision based on the possession of certain inner values" (1998: 4).

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40

Modernism and Postmodernism in African literature

ATO QUAYSON

It is not insignificant that Chinua Achebe, recognized as one of the world's best contemporary novelists, gestures towards a Modernist sensibility in the title to his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). This refers to a line from W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1922), in which, writing via an apocalyptic lens, the Irish poet describes the historical disruptions that occur in the encounter between epochs:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all convictions, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

Achebe's novel also reflects upon this theme but from a thoroughly African and Igbo perspective in which all levels of the narrative discourse, from language use to characterization and the sense of spatiality, help establish the terrible effects of the colonial encounter. Another of his novels, *No Longer at Ease* (1961), also refers to a Modernist poem, this time T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" (1927). Eliot's idea of being neither within nor outside the possibility of salvation, of being both of the old order and of the new, and the nagging sense of loss and alienation that this produces is translated by Achebe into a representation of the predicament of Obi Okonkwo, an educated African in early post-independence Nigeria caught between the *mores* and expectations of his traditional upbringing and the western forms of self-actualization sharpened by his travels in the west and by his sojourn in Lagos as a senior civil servant. The contradictions of his situation progressively lead him to serious ethical compromises. If Achebe, along with other African

writers, made gestures towards Modernism, it was not in the form of a mimicry of western forms, but because those forms revealed a sense of things that the African writer felt could be appropriated and cross-mapped onto the African structures of feeling undergoing transformation via the inescapable cultural exchanges with the west. Thus it is, that in the novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, J. M. Coetzee, Assia Djebar, Tayeb Salih, Yambo Ouologuem, the plays of Wole Soyinka, Athol Fugard, Mohammed Ben Abdallah, Femi Osofisan, and the poetry of Christopher Okigbo and others, we see the shaping of an African Modernism.

As a term, Modernism in the European context has a long and somewhat elusive history. Dating roughly from the 1890s to the start of the Second World War, Modernism, far from being what Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane describe as "the movement toward sophistication and mannerism, toward introspection, technical display and internal self-scepticism" (1991: 26), must be understood primarily as the necessity of the writer to work under a particular historical strain.[1] The historical strain that western Modernist writers had to work under could be traced to various factors including the uneasy threat felt across Europe of the vulgarization of bourgeois sensibility due to the growing dominance of mechanical/mass reproduction, the encounter with otherness (through colonialism and empire) and its conversion into a form of alienation effect, and the perceived sense that this growing crisis of consciousness required particular forms of esthetic expression via techniques of introspection, stream-of-consciousness, and a limited point of view. Especially innovative theories were put out by writers and critics such as Henry James, T. S. Eliot, and Percy Lubbock to undergird the necessity for these techniques.

Whereas the historical strain affecting the western Modernist writer could be traced to these and various other sources, that affecting the African writer on the other hand has to be explicated in relation to the strain of colonialism, of the processes of nation-state formation following colonization, and of the constitutive ambiguity of being forced for certain significant purposes to operate in a colonial language both during and after empire. The issue of language use is of particular interest to literary commentators, for when we speak of a "colonial language" we have to think not just in terms of the language itself, but of the entire esthetic and discursive apparatus of which it is an expression and which it serves to naturalize. If the particular configurations of these three factors come together as the definitive strain of history against which an African Modernism might be explicated, the most robust debates around the issue have been staged precisely as a means of understanding what

Modernist experimentalism might mean in pushing forward the liberation of the African. Thus, in the much-cited debate between Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980), on the one hand, and Wole Soyinka, the primary target of their attacks, on the other, the main issue is whether or not narrative and dramatic experimentation leads to an intolerable state of incomprehensibility that ultimately serves to becloud the pressing issues of deploying the literary-esthetic domain for purposes of liberation. For the troika, "African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literature. It has its own traditions, models and norms" (1980: 4). In Soyinka's response, he correctly diagnoses this as a form of romantic nativism co-extensive with the theories of Negritude proffered by Léopold Sédar Senghor and others. For Senghor, Negritude represented "the sum total of civilized values in the black world," and embraced an African ontology, an essential African way of perceiving reality and the relations between beings and forces in the universe. Additionally, the theory of Negritude was meant to indicate certain binary oppositions between western rationality and African feeling, with an attempt to privilege the African sense of things above that of the west (see Nkosi 1981). Soyinka's response to Senghor's Negritude and to the nativism of Chinweizu *et al*. is that counter to all these largely romantic assertions, Africa is as much a place of airplanes as it is of clay pots, and that its syncretic mix requires an attendant confluence of various artistic forms that would properly celebrate its historical diversity. As he famously put it, "the tiger does not go about announcing its tigritude; it pounces" (Soyinka 1975: 41).

But there is another implication that derived from the troika's attacks that touches on an important representational element in African Modernism. Clearly, part of their worry was the degree to which the experimentalism of people such as Soyinka and others also revealed an undue focus on the individual, an individualism that is the main motive force behind the modulations of perspective manifested in Modernist writing. For Chinweizu *et al*. this state of affairs was intolerable and signified the collapse of communal sensibility under the ravages of a western-inspired individualism. In practice, however, African literary writers defined a middle space between communalism and individualism rather than veering blindly between the two. Thus when Achebe criticized Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969) for representing an unmitigated sense of anomie quite alien to Africa, he was in a sense criticizing what he thought was an extreme focus on the individual sensibility to the detriment of the external world. But Achebe's own later writing veered in the same direction. It is not idle to note that in his own *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), written twenty-two odd years after his previous novelistic offering,

A Man of the People (1966), the sense of extreme anomie saturates the novel and reflects the gloom that had effectively settled on people living in 1980s Nigeria.

One of the representations of the crisis of individuals caught between individualism and communalism in African literature is to be seen in the various thematizations of the figure of the artist as interpreter and/or interpreted. The title of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* points to this reality, with a particularly telling conversation between his characters capturing this sense succinctly:

> 'Well, I don't know what Lazarus wants, but my editor could use a center spread on a prophet with a difference, for the Sunday edition.'
> Bandele looked at him, 'Is that all?'
> Sagoe turned, 'What do you mean, is that all?'
> 'Never mind, it's not important.'
> 'No, go on, what did you have in mind?'
> 'Nothing.'
> 'Why don't you go ahead and paint him, Kola? Then I would use the painting in my feature, give it some kind of dimension . . . I don't know how exactly, the idea is just winging its way into my brain.'
> . . .
> Bandele was mocking, lightly. 'Sagoe has his story, Kola has filled another heavenly space on his canvas, what are you getting out of it, Egbo?'
> Egbo turned angrily on him. 'What are you getting out of it?'
> 'Knowledge of the new generation of interpreters.'
> Sagoe exploded. 'You sound so fuckin' superior it would make a saint mad.'
> 'Just be careful. When you create your own myth don't carelessly promote another's, and perhaps a more harmful one.' (Soyinka 1965: 178–79)

Here, the conversation between the four friends moves steadily away from practical concerns with how to represent a semi-lunatic prophet they had encountered, to the very status of the hermeneutical implications of that representation. The sudden angry outburst at the end coincides with the declaration of their status as interpreters, a status that carries with it the danger of shuffling mythologies and replacing one mythology with another of equal dubiousness.

Soyinka is not the only one to write of protagonists who feel themselves the subjects or agents of interpretation. This esthetic self-consciousness in the sense both of self-reflexivity and of esthetic hypersensitivity is very much evident in the Modernist writing of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and others. In African writing, a similar concern is suggested by a plethora of such figures, among them Amamu in Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* (1972), Kofi Baako in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1974), Obi in

Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1961), The Magistrate in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), Mustafa in Tayib Saleh's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), Nyasha in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Mugo in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and the narrator of Dambudzo Marechera's novella *The House of Hung*er (1978). In all of these texts, the protagonists are burdened with the knowledge of their position as the consciousness of society. Progressively, this self-awareness becomes the singular condition of their identity and the means through which they relate to their communities or societies. Sometimes the burden of this awareness is carried beyond the content of the narrative discourse to shape the very modulations of the narratorial perspective, producing either a variety of overlapping viewpoints, as in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), or a dualized and shifting perspective that collapses the viewpoints of the first-person participant narrator and another figure who becomes the narrator's central interlocutor, as in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*; or a largely fragmented stream-of-consciousness narrative form, as in Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*. In all of these, it is the angst of living in the interstices of improperly realized change that generates the burden of the self, which is in its turn represented through various Modernist techniques.

Postmodernism as a term is even more elusive than Modernism, and raises issues of a different order for African literature. For Fredric Jameson, writing in his celebrated 1984 essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Postmodernism is marked first by the reconceptualization of the historical past as merely raw material for pastiche rather than a meaningful referent in relation to which understanding of the present moment is sought, and second by the breakdown of the linguistic signifying chain such that the referential qualities of language are overshadowed by its status as a collection of "pure material Signifiers" (1984: 71–72). This depthlessness then marks the problem of the subject's orientation to the objective world due to the disorientating processes of late capitalism. Whereas Modernism is often grounded on an implicit assumption of rational order and organization, and tends to reflect upon problems with the rational ordering of knowability, Postmodernism is usually devoted to exposing the constructedness of knowledge as such.

A cynical spin on these discussions is provided in Nigerian philosopher Denis Ekpo's assertion that Postmodernism is nothing but the hollow cry of the overfed children of hypercapitalism:

> The crisis of the subject and its radical and violent deflation – the focal point of postmodern critique – are logical consequences of the absurd self-inflation

> that the European subjectivity had undergone in its modernist ambition to be the salt of the earth, the measure and master of all things.
>
> For cultures (such as ours) that neither absolutized, i.e. deified, human reason in the past nor saw the necessity for it in the present, the postmodern project of de-deification, de-absolutization of reason, of man, of history, etc., on the one hand, and of a return to, or a rehabilitation of, obscurity, the unknown, the non-transparent, the paralogical on the other hand, cannot at all be felt like the cultural and epistemological earthquake that it appears to be for the European man. In fact, it cannot even be seen as a problem at all . . . when such a being settles for the indeterminate, the paradoxical, the strange and absurd, it is probably because he bears no more resemblance to the man as we know him, especially here in Africa; he is a post-man whose society, having overfed him and spoilt him, has delivered him over to irremediable boredom. Nothing therefore, stops the African from viewing the celebrated postmodern condition a little sarcastically as nothing but the hypocritical self-flattering cry of the bored and spoilt children of hypercapitalism. (1995: 122)

Thus, in Ekpo's terms, Postmodernism is the sign of a recognition of insurmountable limits, limits that become even more pronounced after the collapse of empire and the concomitant rise of voices that displace the centrality of western discourses. This understanding of Postmodernism, which transfers to the level of a global systemic crisis a recognition of the loss of the hitherto unquestioned centrality of certain cultural values, has its parallels in Jean-François Lyotard's view of Postmodernism as a sign of the general suspicion of metanarratives, whether these metanarratives are seen as Enlightenment rationality, the dominant purview of patriarchy, or the centrality of the west (see Lyotard 1984).

For some commentators, Postmodernism is the operationalization of concepts developed initially within Poststructuralism. At a rather basic level, as Jameson notes, it is the split in language between the sign and its referent, and the understanding that language does not actually name an objective reality that has acted as the main import from Poststructuralism into Postmodernism. The split between sign and referent is then taken as also homologous with a series of other splits such as those between history and its narrative representation, and between the author's intention and the meaning(s) of the text. A number of strategies are devised to support these informing premises. They include a focus on indeterminacy, ambiguity, and deferral; on the deliberate fragmentation and misarticulation of the text, whether this is conceived of as social or literary; on the proliferation of aporias where meaning is deliberately made unretrievable; and on a carefully parodic style that appropriates everything from tradition, history, and other genres and regards nothing as

sacrosanct. There is also a focus on surfaces, on play, on the dissolution of boundaries and on narrative and other jumpstarts that cannot be related to any teleology. Key theoretical terms in Postmodernism are dissemination, dispersal, indeterminacy, hyperreality, normless pastiche, bricolage, difference, aporia, play, and the like. In this regard, what emerges from the various commentaries on Postmodernism is the degree to which almost anything can be taken as Postmodernist, provided it satisfies the two central conditions of the radical decentering of subjectivity (coded as Subject, History, Meaning, Tradition, or the System) and of the celebration of the political value of this contestation, whether this decentering is done in seriousness or in jest.

And yet, as Brian McHale suggests in his *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), it is also observable that there are significant overlaps between Modernism and Postmodernism. McHale struggles in his book, as do all others who have attempted to define the two terms together, to account for both the differences and the overlaps between esthetic expressions conventionally placed under either one or the other of two labels. Following the work of Dick Higgins, McHale makes the observation that Modernism and Postmodernism are governed by two different esthetic dominants, namely, the impulse toward articulating epistemological problems, on the one hand, and, on the other, that toward the expression of ontological ones. These are some of the questions that for him fall under the two categories:

> **Modernism** (epistemological): How can I interpret this world of which I am part? And what am I in it? What is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it, and to what degree of certainty? How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability? How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?
>
> **Postmodernism** (ontological): What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? How are the worlds to be changed and which of my selves is to do it? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? How is a projected world structured? (see McHale 1987: 96–111)

Thus, as he demonstrates through detailed textual analyses, the esthetic devices that the two genres use are regulated by specific epistemological or ontological predispositions. However, at the same time, McHale is conscious of the fact that it is not possible to radically demarcate between the two orders of questions.

As he notes, "Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions – the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bi-directional, and reversible" (1987: 11). Following a path similar to McHale's, it is possible then to trace the degree to which epistemological and ontological predispositions are revealed in African literary texts at the level of both form and content, and that help to map out their Modernist or Postmodernist inflections.

Whereas Modernism could be said to offer a threshold for experimentation with narratorial perspective, the representation of interiority and of the relation between such interiorized consciousnesses and their surrounding social milieus, Postmodernism, on the other hand, simultaneously celebrates a sense of exhaustion as well as of an exhilarating sense of playful possibilities. And if western Modernism was marked predominantly by a thematics of alienation, Postmodernism is revealed as concerned primarily with the fragmentation of the subject and the difficulties in shoring up a sense of identity. In African literature, however, fragmentation and alienation are coextensive on a continuum of crises since it is arguable that the historical strain that defines the crisis of the western subject is rendered more acute under the conditions of the progressive incoherence of the African postcolony. Therefore, much of postcolonial African literature can be conveniently mapped onto a continuum marked by the configuration of epistemological and ontological elements, thus making the boundaries between Modernism and Postmodernism often fluid in the context of the literature.

Mediations of Modernism in African literature

How are these various insights to be applied to the field of African literature? As often turns out to be the case, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* acts as a critical touchstone for evaluating some of these questions. If, going back to McHale's typology of forms, an epistemological problematic defines the Modernist and an ontological one the Postmodernist, then on a certain reading Achebe's well-known novel is neither of the two, seeming to fall squarely within the realist tradition best exemplified in the nineteenth-century English novel. And yet, even without the Modernist experimentation that is to be seen later in the work of Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and J. M. Coetzee among others, there are a number of particularly acute epistemological concerns in the novel that indicate a Modernist predisposition.

The first thing to note about *Things Fall Apart*, and which has been remarked upon by many commentators, is the degree to which the language of the novel is clearly the mimesis of an indigenous or at least non-west sensibility. In this the novel shares a similar sensibility with Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1987), Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985), and Binwell Sinyangwe's *Cowrie of Hope* (2000). Achebe himself asserts in an early essay, "The Novelist as Teacher" (1975), that his main motivation for writing the novel was to correct the false depictions that western novelists such as Conrad and Joyce Cary had used in portraying Africa. In this regard his perfection of a richly textured "indigenous" English, full of proverbs and the forms of Igbo orality, serve as an important corrective to the vapid representations of linguistic incoherence provided in the work of western writers. And yet even in this Achebe was being thoroughly Modernist. As Michael North has persuasively shown in *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994), western Modernists such as Eliot, Stein, Conrad, and Pound regularly undertook a form of mimicry and racial masquerade in their writing. However, far from this being merely an attempt to claim primitivism as an assertion of a return to purity, the mimicry of dialect and the play among rival languages has to be seen as the breakdown of both the privilege that the standard enjoyed, and the myth that there could be a "natural" alternative. As North further suggests in his discussion of the mutual encounter of Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso with African artifacts, in both cases the writer and the painter accomplished the step away from conventional verisimilitude into abstraction by a figurative encounter with race. This was not so much a return to primitivism (though it cannot be denied that this must have been part of the attraction) as a desire to disrupt the representational regimes that had regulated literature and art respectively (North 1994: 59–76).

It is precisely this double location of indigenous orality – partly as a celebration of the "familiar" to the African but estranging to the European, and partly as a sign of impending and inexorable loss – that best defines Achebe's Modernist sensibility in his use of language in *Things Fall Apart*. For even as in the novel he is at pains to assert the viability of an indigenous way of life, he also discloses the gradual erosion of the transcendental basis for the self-evidence of the cultural value-system being represented. This is seen not so much in terms of particular questionings, captured most adroitly by the novelist in the character of Obierika, as in the very ways by which larger historical processes coincide with internal schisms in the local cultural imagining that in their turn generate a newly emergent order that comes to threaten a displacement of the old order. Thus the coming of the Christians, for instance, instigated the process by which people were inserted into a new religious sensibility, gained

access to education, and got progressively integrated into the colonial administrative apparatus as court clerks, interpreters, etc. Furthermore, Christianity also provided the lineaments of a new esthetic sensibility, one that seemed on the surface geared toward pragmatic or instrumental ends. Within the culture itself the figure of the lazy Unoka provides the key to the problematic status of this non-instrumental esthetic sensibility. For unlike all sensible people in the culture, Unoka elects to be a flute-playing esthete who refuses to participate in the labor processes of the society. He sustains himself through persistent borrowing, putting off his creditors with a clever manipulation of proverb rhetoric. When he dies of an unnameable disease, he is buried in the Evil Forest. However, this non-instrumental esthetic is given repeated articulation through the folktales that Ikemefuna tells, and ultimately, through the beautiful songs the earliest Christians sing, which stir a particular longing in Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, and leads him to leave his home to join the Christians. It is important to note the degree to which this non-instrumental esthetic sensibility is both a means by which an unexpressed longing in the society is given articulation, and conjoined to its homologous (Christian) counterpart from outside the culture, becomes the conduit for alienation from it.

Starting from the coming of the Christians, the effect of alienation is always present in the historical processes that have consolidated this non-instrumental esthetic. This is because, even if appearing on the surface to be non-instrumental, this esthetic is embedded within a new form of colonial relation whose purpose its apparent non-instrumental function is partially to disguise. The struggle between an organic esthetic (instrumental or otherwise) indigenous to the culture and an esthetic (instrumental or otherwise) that comes with colonialism might then be interpreted as the struggle between two different ways of knowing, interpreting, and relating to the world.

The next level at which the epistemological dominant of the novel is disclosed is in the implicitly scientific ethnographic bias of the narrator. This is best grasped in the consistency with which the magical and potentially extrarational aspects of Umuofian culture are submitted to the control of a carefully objective rather than mythical course of events. Though a broad vista of the magical and supernatural is opened up in the depiction of the gods of the land and in the fluid contact between the tribe and their ancestors, at no time is there any suggestion that these supersede the human capacity for comprehension and control. There is no disruption of the sequence of cause and effect, of cause *before* effect, and of both cause and effect as graspable within the workings of the objective realm. This is in spite of the fact that the narrative itself undertakes a series of frequent digressions to nestle

various mythical stories and folklore within the dominant narrative. Even in this digressive movement, there is a clear suggestion of the rational control of events and their submission to a nonmythical causality. Supernatural factors such as Ani, goddess of the earth, *ngadi nwayi*, one-legged old woman and active principle of Umuofian war medicine, and other supernatural beings are reported rather than displayed. There is no sense in which any human action, even when the permission of the gods is ritually sought, unfolds by way of supernatural motivations. Both characterization as well as causality are firmly within the ambit of rational representation.

There are many occasions in the narrative when there is a threatened disruption of the principles of realist representation, but the scientific ethnographic mold is never allowed to be completely subverted. The emergence of the *egwu-gwu* from the "bowels" of the earth to sit in judgment exemplifies this tendency. With the emergence of the masked *egwu-gwu*, a new mythical ethos is suggested. Their entry is described in tones of awe and their physical appearance is meant to strike fear in the gathered villagers. Their whole appearance is aptly described as a "terrifying spectacle." But this awe-inspiring picture is quickly undermined when it is revealed that the women in Okonkwo's household recognize the gait of one of the *egwu-gwu*: "Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second of the *egwu-gwu* had the springly walk of Okonkwo . . . But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves" (*Things Fall Apart*: 64–65). The emergence of these surrogate spirit-beings is shown to depend upon a tacit social pact clearly regulated by a suspension of disbelief. For the silence that the women impose on themselves is designed to maintain the belief-value of the spectacle. The "spirits" are not allowed to take over the texture of the narrative. The *egwu-gwu* do not fly, or metamorphose, or dissolve into thin air but behave within the prescribed ambit of reality and depend upon a tacit social pact for their authority. (One can only speculate as to what the effect of a dead-pan García Márquez-like touch to the proceedings concerning the *egwu-gwu* would have had on this section, or on the narrative in general. The self-imposed constraints of the realist representation are critical for what the narrative does or does not do.)

Both at the level of the fictional characters' interpersonal existence and in the relationship between the narrator and the reader, the sense of the supernatural is contained in the background to the narrated events. The characters do not respond to the materiality of the events as though the events were impelled by the supernatural. And this is despite the fact that their belief-systems are based on the implicit assumption of the power of deities. The deities are reported

ethnographically, without any room for the manifestation of the characters of these deities *in themselves*. They impinge upon but do not invade the text. Even when the narrator seems to be leaving a margin for the supernatural, this is rapidly foreclosed by the fact that almost everything is explained to the reader in order to locate it within the patterns of real-world causality. This scheme of things is a central organizing principle of the novel.

In *Things Fall Apart*, there is a high level of specification of cultural details as well as a concentration on the incidents and problems that ground the imagined African community. And this community is grounded as rationally knowable and coherent according to the rules of everyday life. Even the rich proverbial language for which the novel is justly famous is meant to give the text a simultaneous cultural density as well as greater ethnographic specificity. The language offers a way of knowing the imagined traditional culture with an anthropological immediacy. But in this mode of representation, Achebe is constrained to evacuate the mythological expressive modes of setting, characterization, and narrative unfolding dominant in traditional oral genres. He renders this traditional culture "knowable" through the scientific realist modalities that govern ethnographic writing. It is of course evident that Achebe does not deploy any of the better-known Modernist techniques of stream-of-consciousness or degrees of interiorization, arguably techniques that indicate the possibility of a problematic knowing triggered and sustained by a rigorous attention to the interaction between internal states of mind and an external environment. But the Modernist sensibility is to be discerned in the implication suggested in his writing that the radical alterity of the depicted Igbo culture, irrespective of its seeming difference, is still amenable to a scientific epistemological paradigm of categorization and interpretation.

But perhaps the most important epistemological conundrum that the text presents us with is that of the place of the *chi* in the Igbos' self-perception and the connections that this concept has with the novelist's sense of historical unfoldment. The concept of the *chi* points to the belief in a personal god, personal fate, if you will, but in such a way as to defy easy explanation. When Okonkwo's gun goes off at Ogbuefi Ezeudu's funeral and kills the dead man's son to trigger his own exile from the clan, it seems that his *chi* has begun to say "no" to his self-affirming "yes." It raises in a stark way the issue of individual autonomy. Since the *chi* is not a visible physical entity, the culture's understanding of it is expressed through a variety of proverbs and ritual dispositions. But for the implications of the *chi* to be fully grasped, a whole range of relations have to be understood: the hierarchical ones between men and women, the relations of exchange and reciprocity, the link between a proverbial language

and a rapidly changing world, the economy of exclusions that peripheralize certain constituencies in the culture despite its essentially meritocratic impulse (*osus*, twins, "effeminate: men," etc.). In other words, the question of autonomy cannot be grasped except through a form of embedding that takes the whole range of possible and potential social relations into account. And yet, on closer examination, the concept of *chi* in the novel also serves to raise a question about the knowability of history. The utter elusiveness of the *chi* parallels to a certain degree the problematic status of the historical processes that affect the culture and lead things to fall apart. When the white man first comes to Umuofia, he is perceived as easily explainable within the conceptual scheme available in the culture. What are these but a bunch of "clucking hens," as Okonkwo asserts derisively? They are *efulefu*, effeminate men who can do no harm and who should either be chased away immediately or just tolerated as a nuisance that would hopefully vanish in due course and without a trace.

The Umuofians of course turn out to be tragically wrong. In my view, however, the significance of the misinterpretation is not that they failed to recognize history when it walked into their midst in the form of the white man, but that this potential for misrecognition inheres in any human encounter with historical processes as such. In the novel the unknowability of historical processes as they unfold is paralleled to an uncanny degree by the elusiveness and unknowability of the *chi* concept. In other words, there is a homological conceptual structure in the novel that is only discernible when the *chi* concept is seen as the parallel of the unknowable face of a tragic history. One might even venture to argue that the *chi* is thus a historicizing concept that the culture deploys to explain personal fortune and culpability rather than wider details of historical unfoldment. Both the *chi* concept and history, then, might be thought to raise identical epistemological questions, one articulated at the level of the personal, the other at the level of the collective. Furthermore, and shifting the focus, it might be argued that the concept of *chi* raises a problem for history itself, since it problematizes the self-evident centrality of a fully autonomous being to historical understanding that is so much an implicit assumption in modern historiography. History, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his essay "The Time of History and the Times of Gods" (1997), stands for a particular formation of the modern subject for which gods, spirits, and supernatural beings are not thought to have agency in the world. A text such as *Things Fall Apart* disrupts this dichotomy by narrativizing the tragic fall of Okonkwo and his clansmen partly through the prism of the historical irruption of colonialism and partly as the work of the recalcitrant and not wholly predictable

chi concept. *Chi* is an epistemological concept whose implications are as much historical as they are personal.

There is a case to be argued for seeing some of the African literary texts set in the city as expressing similar concerns to those in Achebe's rural novel. These concerns range from the connection between wage labor, technology, and the evolution of worker consciousness in Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1962); the processes by which a newly formed bureaucratic and state apparatus is approached by the people through the paradigm of the gift economy (normally coded as corruption) and the alienation and disillusionment it causes to a highly sensitive protagonist in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*; cross-racial marriages and the strains on familial relationships in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), and the connection between modernity and nervous breakdowns in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. There is an inexhaustible list of modernist themes and a vast range of African literary texts to be explored to which we can only signal here.

Bridgepoints and conjunctures between epistemological and ontological dominants

As we noted with McHale, there are always cases where the epistemological predisposition, pushed to a degree, tips over into an ontological one and vice-versa. In African literature, the scrambled predisposition has been evident in texts that represent psychologically traumatized characters struggling to make sense of their social environments, such as in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, J. M. Coetzee's *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), and Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974). Often, also, these traumas are represented as due to the difficult transition, or indeed problematic overlap, between tradition and modernity such as is the case in Soyinka's *The Road* (1964) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). In these Soyinka plays, a palpable sense of disjuncture between two different experiental domains is concentrated through the characters of the Professor and Elesin Oba, respectively. Even though these various texts are not the only examples of African literary texts that touch on these broad themes, what sets them apart is that the conjuncture of epistemological and ontological predispositions is strongly displayed at the level of formal experimentation, where the experimentation forces critical attention on a series of devices and mechanisms designed to alienate the content and render it not easily assimilable to any straightforward grid of interpretation, whether nativist, Modernist, or Postmodernist. An exploration of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi*

Is Dead, Calixthe Beyala's *The Sun Hath Looked Down upon Me*, and Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* serves to illustrate the elusive nature and range of these conjunctures.

Both Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972) and Calixthe Beyala's *The Sun Hath Looked Down upon Me (*translation of *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, 1987) center on the alienation of their protagonists. Furthermore, in both of them ontological problems are glimpsed through a narrow epistemological aperture. The notion of a narrow epistemological aperture seems particularly apposite for discussing *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, since the play centers a great deal on photographs and their implications. The emotional hinterlands of photographs are laid out before us by Styles in the first part of the play, with the opposite effect of bureaucratic flattening in the second half depicted in the drastic impact of the passbook regulations on the identity of Sizwe. Crucially, however, because the play oscillates between Styles's photographic studio and the animated photograph of Robert Zwelenzima (formerly known as Sizwe Bansi), it raises the question of what world we are looking at in the play. On the one hand the trick of the talking photograph seems to be a device to bring the past into the present context of the unfolding action. But on the other hand it speaks of a completely different world from that to which we have been accustomed in Styles's studio. It is a world of the streets, of police brutality, of the anxieties generated by the surveillance apparatus of the then apartheid state. It is also a world where alertness is not a choice but the vital condition of the disenfranchised black man and where the basic human impulse of empathy for a person found dead on the street kerb is an unaffordable luxury. The contrast provided in the action by the near-idyllic and humor-laden context of Styles's photographic studio in the first part and the implicit violence of the streets in the second then hints at the disjunctive effects of living in two seemingly incommensurate worlds.

With Beyala's novel, there is no respite from the tragic. Instead we get a concentrated view of the alienation of Ateba, the central character. She is an orphan whose mother abandoned her in early adolescence to pursue a life of prostitution. Ateba is brought up by her aunt, who is abusive to her and constantly reminds her of the unwanted burden that she is. When the novel opens, Ateba is in her late teens. The novel, though told by a third-person narrator, focuses intently on the thoughts and moods of the central character, thus providing us a highly poeticized sense of the workings of the character's mind. We are also made painfully aware of the decrepitude of her physical surroundings. Ateba lives in a ghetto called QG, which lies at the center of an unnamed Cameroonian city. It represents the debris and effluence of a badly

planned African city; the denizens of this inner city concentrate on scandal-mongering, drinking, and pursuing cheap sex. There are violent effects at the level of content: descriptions of fights, beatings, bloodshed, attempted rapes and deaths, and illnesses punctuate the narrative. What is more, there is a strong incidence of rabid male chauvinism in the work, represented in the novel by Jean, a man who comes to take up a room in Ateba's home. His sexual advances to Ateba are a straightforward expression of his chauvinism and he makes it clear that his purpose is to "tame" her. The domestic and external conditions under which Ateba has to live make her feel acutely alienated and much of the narrative is devoted to exposing her justifiably cynical views of her social and physical environment.

And yet the novel, though deploying recognizably Modernist techniques such as the serialization of the space of the city, the alienation of the central character, and the close interiorization of the character's consciousness, also hints at an entirely different ontological dimension impinging on the unfolding events. This is an invisible and inaudible interlocutor who periodically manifests herself in the text and mediates between Ateba and the reader:

> A sudden anxiety paralyses her when she enters the house. She's under the impression that she has suddenly been plunged into a maze with unknown offshoots running from it. The spirits of the ancestors spring up. Their groans illuminate the house and transform it into an enormous inferno. Ateba shrieks, her voice leaves her, the screams flow back into her body, one on top of the other. She can no longer command them, she no longer wants to be in command. Me, I lean over towards her, wipe her forehead, I tell her to open her eyes, to watch how a festive crowd is made up of sad men as the celebration is beginning outside. She refuses. I command her. She opens her eyes; I look at their stubborn glare I shake my head, won over. They will only see when the masquerade begins to slacken off underneath the dark vault of the bowers.
>
> (Beyala 1996: 19)

The narratorial "I" is here interacting with Ateba in the course of a momentary nightmare she is having. It is important to note, however, that these interactions sometimes also take place during Ateba's waking moments, *but that she never displays any consciousness of the presence of this interlocutor*. This invisible character appears irregularly, but often during moments of crisis. She acts like either a guardian angel or the voice of conscience, except that because she is never acknowledged, her role in Ateba's life appears completely redundant. Furthermore, she is powerless to influence the course of events and is often shown reacting to or anticipating problems that Ateba runs into. This spirit interlocutor thus serves as a device to demonstrate the presence of a

spirit world of women that impinges upon Ateba's life. It is an ontological inflection, but glimpsed through the narrow epistemological aperture that is foregrounded by the formal devices of interiorization and spatial serialization that are landmarks of Modernist discourse.

We are constrained most times to see the world through the eyes of the central character, but because another world exists of which she is completely oblivious there is a disjuncture instituted between us as readers and Ateba as character. It is a device geared towards the reader and not the characters within the novel itself. The relation between the alienated and anguished perceptions of the central character and the spirit realm, perceived only by the reader, is a relation of an epistemological dominant to an only partially revealed ontological problematic. This generates a sense of layering and of privileged but unsettling perspectival modulations since we are never sure who this invisible interlocutor really is. Thus we see a particular intersection of a Modernist theme (that of urban alienation) with a Postmodernist technique (that of the possibility of multiple worlds). That the contradiction is deliberately left unresolved gives the novel a peculiarly suggestive yet elusive quality.

Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) exemplifies what might be termed "symbolization compulsion." Simply put, this term designates a process in which the novelistic discourse insistently proliferates similes and metaphors even when these do not seem to promote either the plot or the narrative flow directly. Symbolization compulsion is meant to highlight the threshold of an acute epistemological enigma. On opening *Without a Name*, the first thing to be noticed is the coupling of abstract concepts with animating and anthropomorphizing details. Also noticeable is the unusual collocation of metaphors from disparate areas of experience:

> Heat mauled the upturned faces.
>
> The bus was fierce red. Skin turned a violent mauve. That is how hot the day was. The faces jostled and hurried, surrounded the bus with shimmering voices. The large black wheels were yellow with gathered dust. Mud had dried in the wide grooves within the tires. Small stones looked out from the mud. Thick layers of brown earth covered the windows and the rest of the body, but the bus still shone red. It was that red. It was so stunningly red it was living.
>
> Mazvita separated herself from the waiting red of the bus, colour so sharp it cut into her thought like lightning. Merciless, that red. It was an everywhere red which cracked the white and black shell of her eyes. Heat thundered beneath her feet. She retreated. She stood apart, anxious, waiting for the doors of the bus to burst open. She watched the door closed tightly against her entry. The bus sat in a rippling lake of rising heat and dust. The dust sucked the water from her eyes.

> "Nothing to load onto the bus?" The voice swooped towards her. It did not wait for an answer but swept past and landed on the trembling roof of the bus; it belonged to an agile black shape fastening beds, caged chickens, maize sacks, chairs and tables. (Vera 1996: 1)

We notice first of all the different qualities given the color red. It is not just an abstract color, but it also has the quality of being so "fierce" and "merciless" that it "cracks the white and black shell of her eyes." But it is not only the color red that is described this way. Faces, seemingly disengaged from the bodies that own them, metonymically "jostle" and "surround the bus with shimmering voices." This particular metonymic displacement is also applied to the voice of the person on the top of the bus. Not only does the voice feature in the text as a disembodied entity, it also "swoops" threateningly like a bird of prey. Finally, we notice the startling effect achieved by linking heatwaves to the ripples of water in "the bus sat in a rippling lake of rising heat." The features we notice here are consistently used in the first five chapters, producing a surreal stream-of-consciousness that makes little concession either to plot or to setting. In fact, it is only from the sixth chapter that we begin to see a pattern forming. The chapters, often no more than six pages long, oscillate between Mazvita's past in the village of Mubaira and her present condition in the city of Harari. However, even past and present are fragmented, with different trajectories of both epochs being woven into a structure of labile images. Much later, and after a severe demand for total participation by the reader, we gradually glimpse what might account for this particularly unsettling narrative device. The setting is 1977, in the thick of the *chimurenga*, Zimbabwe's guerrilla war of independence. People are terrified in the rural areas, and though some, such as her first boyfriend Nyenyendzi, believe strongly in the justness of the war, others like Mazvita desire only escape, "departures" as she calls it. Her hope is that in Harari she will be able to find a new self through the cosmopolitan mix of the city. This proves tragically chimerical.

Mazvita has clearly been traumatized, and this, as we are gradually brought to discover, is due to two main factors, both of which shift in priority from stage to stage of the narrative. The first is that she is raped by a soldier one morning on her way to fetch water from the village stream. The description of the rape scene is highly poeticized and allusive, with a great deal of attention being paid to the mist, the wetness of the grass, the color of the sky, and other such details. The next thing that accounts for her trauma is that she decides to strangle the disowned baby she has had with Joel, the man who picks her up and shares his bed with her when she first gets to Harari. She decides to

do this and to return to her village with the child strapped to her back, in a strange and futile question for ablution from the "motherland." It is only when we understand the traumatic roots of her state of mind that we can recontextualize the features of symbolization compulsion that proliferate in the text.

The symbolization compulsion is a narrative means of coping with the burden of traumatic memory. In fact, Vera provides a wonderful passage in the novella describing the precise mechanisms of this compulsion:

> Mazvita accepted the season of emptiness as her own particular fate. She grew from the emptiness. The emptiness lifted her from the ground and she felt something like power, like joy, move through her. The heaviness lifted from her shoulders and her arms, from her eyes which she had closed after the mist had collapsed into her eyes. Mazvita wished for an emotion as perfectly shaped as hate, as harmful as sorrow, but she had not seen the man's face. She could not find his face, bring it close enough to attach this emotion to it. Hate required a face against which it could be flung but searching for the face was futile. Instead, she *transferred* the hate to the moment itself, to the morning, to the land, to the dew-covered grass that she had felt graze tenderly against her naked elbow in the horrible moment of his approach, *transferred* it to the prolonged forlorn call of the strange bird she heard cry a shrill cry in the distance, so shrill and loud that she had had to suppress her own cry which had risen to her lips. The unknown bird had silenced her when she needed to tell of her own suffering, to tell not to someone else – certainly not to the man – but to hear her own suffering uttered, acknowledged, within that unalterable encounter. A cry, her own cry, would have been a release of all the things she had lost. But she did not cry then and so it was as if she had lost the world. And all the many things that contained that loss, continued to remind her of her pain. She *transferred* the hate to the something she could see, that had shape and colour and distance. The mist had taught her that morning is not always birth. (Vera 1996: 30; emphasis added)

Mazvita's crisis can be analyzed directly in terms of interpsychic transfer, or the crossing of interpsychic pathways. Freud (1926) describes trauma as pertaining both to the moment of the traumatic event itself as well as to the moment of recalling such an event. As he notes, trauma is due to the excessive excitation of stimuli with which the body's psychic processes are unable to deal, leading to a variety of symptoms and coping mechanisms. However, the traumatic event does not necessarily retain its original form in the process of retranscription during recall. In the case of the trauma of childhood, the traumatic event may be traced to the saga of familial relationships (from the oedipal complex and the so-called castration anxiety through to the emotional

interruptions of caregiving either due to separation, physical or psychological incapacitation, or death). But here, with Mazvita, the trauma is generated from the entire structure of transitionality as the concomitant effect of the coming-into-being of the (Zimbabwean) nation in its processes of violent unfoldment. Since trauma is partly a function of the unassimilability of the event when it occurs and partly that of recall, the notion of trauma raises the issue of its unstable referential locus. The referential locus of the trauma is in a sense deferred and has to be traced back through the post-traumatic stress disorders of compulsive symptoms, reiterated dreams, and the reactivation of negative affect during recall. Thus it is almost impossible to speak of a traumatic nexus that can be easily retrieved for evacuation.

Since the moment of her rape is unalterable (and unutterable, because she cannot cry out), Mazvita's mind transfers her anger on to the things in the environment of the rape that could be seen, that, as she puts it, "had shape and colour and distance." Everything that can be seen is saturated with the negative affect of the trauma, except the thing that caused the trauma in the first place, that is, the soldier. That key element is left repressed, thus creating a problem of locating the referential locus of this particular traumatic event. But there is also a transfer taking place at a more symbolic level. When she says that the shrill cry of the bird prevented her from uttering her own cry of anguish, this can be interpreted as a metaphoric transfer of her own anguish onto the bird. The bird articulates her anguish through its own shrill cry, as though bearing witness while simultaneously disenabling her from expressing it herself. It is almost as if the moment of the trauma is also a moment of a psychoexistential impasse for her and the narrative. The bird then appears symbolically to stand between a deus ex machina and a scapegoat, taking on the burden of the impasse while retranscribing the cry of anguish as an intransigent element of the physical environment itself.

This layered passage encapsulates the passages of compulsive symbolization depicted by the narrative more generally. The features we have already noted (of metonymic and metaphoric transfers, the anthropomorphization of abstract concepts, and the collocation of metaphors from different and seemingly contradictory aspects of experience) are all mechanisms defining the work of a text that is supposed to mime as closely as possible the conceptual epistemological problems brought on by psychological trauma. The entire narrative, then, might be described as mimetic of a *struggle for knowledge of the self*, but one that is constantly subverted by the work of traumatic memory, and thus raises ontological questions as well. For, if trauma disrupts memory, how are we sure that the world in which the self is to be reconstructed is not

a simulacrum of a desired but irretrievably lost world, or the space that might repeat the obliteration of the self?

Postmodernism and the ontological dominant

Orality is always a means of gesturing toward worlds of decidedly different ontological statuses. The recourse to orality has been one of the defining features of African literature, and for some critics is thought to demonstrate the continuity of impulses between an indigenous African world and that of literacy (see Irele 2001). But literacy engenders a constitutive ambiguity for African literary discourse because of its entanglement and naturalization of a western discursive apparatus. For others, however, this dichotomy is artificial since there is no "pure" location from which the so-called indigenous African world can be articulated in the first place. Orality in literature is then to be interpreted as a strategic choice made by the literary writer for ideological, esthetic, and other reasons. Sometimes, as in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the recourse to orality, even while hinting at different ontological worlds, is articulated firmly within an ethnographic mode of representation, thus subsuming ontological questions under epistemological ones. Sometimes, however, the very recourse to orality is a means by which radically to disrupt the boundaries between an epistemological and an ontological dominant. This takes place when an attempt is made to establish a radical equivalence between worlds of apparently mutually exclusive textures. Magical realism has been recognized as the genre that achieves this parity most successfully. The routes and motivations behind magical realism vary from place to place, but in African literature it is through the recourse to indigenous resources of orality that an African magical realism is articulated.

In African literature there have been many bold attempts at establishing equivalence between different ontological domains. The operative word here is "equivalence," since it is only when equivalence is established between radically different domains that the magical real takes effect. For such equivalence to be properly achieved, the world of the esoteric/spirit/mythical must not be in a relation of either ethical or normative hierarchy with the "real" world. It is not conceived of as either a nightmare from which to escape or a privileged location in which might be found succor from the ravages of reality. This is the form in which the relationship between the two contrastive domains is expressed in the work of Amos Tutuola, where his ghostly narratives are structured in the form of a picaresque rite-of-passage between the real world and that of spirits. In magical realism, the esoteric world is also not an attempt

to negotiate narrative impasse where an esoteric excursion raises and resolves some of the contradictions in the domain of the real. In Kojo Laing's *Search Sweet Country* (1986), for instance, the reference to Adwoa Ade, a "witch for Christ" who flies through the night skies of Accra, signals the intrusion of an ambiguous and relativized spiritual reality. This realm is the more ambiguous because though a witch, Adwoa Ade is taken by the many denizens of Accra as an agony aunt to whom they confess their hopes, fears, and vague ideas. Furthermore, the fact that her spiritual potential is projected outwards and perceived by others disrupts the unity and coherence of the world for them. But this disruption is beneficial rather than traumatic, as they are allowed to enter into a dialogue with the spirit-realm represented in the flying Adwoa Ade. Irony attends this particular quest for spiritual solace, partly because Adwoa Ade herself has unresolved problems when she descends into the flesh. Significantly, however, this narrative excursion marks an attempt at negotiating a deep and seemingly unresolvable problem in the novel, namely, the characters' fultile attempts to achieve an authentic mode of social existence in the face of the political and social incoherences that they have to confront on a daily basis (see Quayson 1995).

In magical realism the esoteric is also not a signifier of symbolic excess or an index of a heightened tension. Heightened tension is what we see, for instance, in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* (1962), where the magic dove with a talisman around its neck that leads Mai Sunsaye away from his home is immediately connected to the intrusion of evil political forces into the great chief's household. Subsequent to the appearance of the bird, enemies burn down his huts and his family is scattered. As the novel weaves together different lines of the lives of this once proud political family, there are constant references to the *sokugo*, the evil effect of the magic bird, but its power is broken once the negative political characters are confronted in the final showdown. In both *Search Sweet Country* and *Burning Grass* the esoteric domain is only partially figured and is not allowed to become one of the normative grounds upon which the structures of the text are established. It is in the work of Ben Okri that the equivalence between radically different ontological domains is most clearly established. His work can be taken to have set the benchmark for African magical realism.[2]

Like most African writers, Okri tries from the beginning of his career to find indigenous resources by which to organize his narratives. And like many other African writers before him, this comes after experiments with western forms of realism. *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) and *The Landscape Within* (1981) largely pursue a western paradigm of realism, even though there is a sense in

which, in the second novel, a gradual break with that mode is in the offing. With the short stories he begins to join a recourse to African mythologies and folklore to various forms of narrative experimentation. It cannot be an idle coincidence that *Incidents at the Shrine* and *Stars of the New Curfew*, published in 1987 and 1988 respectively, reproduce several aspects of the narrative schema of Tutuola's storytelling, though with significant refocalizations. Both collections are also noteworthy for the ways in which the contours of setting, especially that of the city, are conceptually remapped. The city is postulated as being coextensive with the hallucinatory experiential effect that the forest, village (or non-city) has on characters. Of the fourteen stories in the two collections, eleven have the city as the dominant context. In several of them, such as "Stars of the New Curfew," "Incidents at the Shrine," and "Worlds that Flourish," there is a dual movement between the city and the forest or village and the trajectory of the characters' movement traces a progressive entry into the world of the esoteric whose strongest expression seems to lie outside the city. This trajectory does not suggest a simple dichotomy between city and forest and real and esoteric, a dichotomy that was dominant in Tutuola's mode of storytelling. Instead, there is always the sense that the reality of the city itself is interwoven with esoteric significance so that the implicit dichotomy between city and forest is progressively problematized.

All these early experiments come to fruition in *The Famished Road* (1991), which won the Booker Prize, and its sequel, *Songs of Enchantment* (1993). In these works Okri devises a means by which to achieve equivalence between different ontological domains by perfecting what might be described as a mode of "animist" magical realism. Animism, the belief in a spiritual vitality lying behind all natural objects, formed the basis of conceptions of African culture by early western anthropologists and has come under serious attack by Africanist philosophers and scholars (see Hountondji 1983; Mudimbe 1988). Okri constructs his Booker-winning novel with this belief as its basic tenet. The animism here, however, does not have the same semantic field as that of anthropological usage, though it borrows something of that conception. The novel generates the impression that all things, from trees to photographs, have a potential spiritual vitality, which, according to the protocols of magical realist representation, can be foregrounded at any time. Okri's expression of such animism is clearly meant to stand as a surrogate for folk belief in the spirit world, but it could also be read as a literary defamiliarization of such belief rather than as their true replication. Okri's postulation of a universally pervasive animism can only be read as a magnification of certain indigenous folk beliefs for the purpose of problematizing their relationship between reality

and the other-worldly in literary discourse. All the different aspects of realist narrative such as character and setting are based on the implicit belief in the knowability of the real as it unfolds in three-dimensional space and linear time. To postulate representation based on a pervasive animism is to fracture that realist basis of belief by suggesting that not only is the real decentered because of its permanent interplay with the esoteric, but that neither is reducible to the other.

In *The Famished Road*, the entire work is narrated by Azaro, an *abiku* child who maintains contacts with the spirit world while steadfastly being committed to remaining in this one. The novel has a strange and unsettling quality not only due to Azaro's free movement between the two worlds but because the *mode of his movement is not within his own rational control*. In other words, he is a victim of the circumstances of his *abiku*-ness and lives in a permanent state of fluid liminality. The effect of the narrative is quite profound. Because everything is narrated through him without the intervention of a supervening third-person narrative consciousness, the entire work rehearses the frenetic fluidity that is Azaro's existential condition. The narrative cedes its form to the mode in which traditional cultures view their relationship to the world of spirits. But whereas the interface between the spirit world and that of humans is often seen as a sort of hymenal interface of dual realities, movement between which allows a measure of control through appropriate rituals, Okri's work suggests the total dissolution of boundaries. The novel qualifies for the description that Roland Barthes gives of texts that generate *jouissance*, even though one imagines that Okri's text would have startled Barthes in its extreme esoteric fluidity. This is not to suggest that there are no implicit hierarchies in the novel at the level of content. There are many indeed, and none so evident as that between Azaro himself, as a powerless spirit child, and all the various forces that take him as their focal point. And yet at the level of narrative structure and the unfolding of events, everything is equivalent to everything else. The spirit world is neither a primary focus nor a secondary value to the real world. It is equivalent to it. Thus all incidents occur on a sort of horizontal plateau on which it is almost impossible to know what follows what in terms of the story.

Metamorphosis is a dominant factor in *The Famished Road*. Settings as well as ordinary objects often change inexplicably because of the fluid relationship between the real world and that of spirits. Once, while lying asleep in Madame Koto's room, a seemingly inanimate object in the form of the statuette of an ancient mother suddenly speaks to him. Even stranger is the fact that she speaks to him through all the objects in the room: "Then I noticed that

everything in the corner was alive. The mirror banged itself against the wall, reflecting nothing. I sensed the wall moving, disintegrating beneath my touch" (*Famished Road*: 291).

Characterization is also governed by the same principle of fluidity. There are two sets of characters in the novel. One set has the coherence of real-world characters. Azaro's Mum and Dad, the neighborhood's photographer, and even Madame Koto all fall into this category. The second set involves all the various spirit figures that feature in the narrative. What is of greater significance, however, is the fact that certain real-world characters are described such as to make them seem supernatural. Such, for instance, are the madmen Azaro meets in the novel. The first one, encountered during one of his wanderings in the marketplace, is described as having flies around his face that "made him look as if he had four eyes." Extraordinarily, when he scatters the flies from his face, his two eyes are revealed to roll around "as if in an extraordinary effort to see themselves" (*Famished Road*: 17). The suggestion here is that in the context of the squalor and dispossession of the real world, characters of this world take on the absurdity and grotesqueness of the esoteric one. Another way in which characterization disturbs boundaries between the two worlds is in the fact that central characters such as Madame Koto and Azaro's Dad (alias Black Tyger) acquire greater esoteric potency as the narrative progresses. They both gain access to the spirit world, even though for quite different reasons. Whereas Madame Koto desires greater spiritual power to aid her in her business, Black Tyger channels the esoteric potential made available to him into a definition of a new form of social being that embraces all the wretched of the earth.

The animist ebullience that is a studied part of the narrative makes strange (in the Russian Formalist sense) both the realist protocols of representation as well as indigenous folk beliefs in spirits. This *en-strangement* derives from the relentless saturation of the mundane with esoteric potential. Furthermore, there are no clear cues as to when such potential would make itself manifest. From men's eyeballs to trees, from camera flashlights to powdered milk, everthing is seen as harboring a spirit potential. This excess of the esoteric is carefully constructed as a serial equivalent of the real such that it is undecidable which of them is either preferable or dominant. In this, Okri establishes equivalence between radically different domains such as to render problematic the very process of grasping the ontology of the worlds inhabited. His, then, is the only work that pursues the ontological dominant to its logical conclusion rendering questions of interpretation as details of the ontological problematic in the first place.

Conclusion

As I hope to have made clear from this account, it is best to see critical terms such as Modernism and Postmodernism as having social lives whose applications to different contexts require scrupulous grounding. The terms, even in their relation to western literature, have no clear application since literary texts often tend to confound taxonomic grids at every turn. If they are to be of any use, it is only in the degree to which they help us to focalize particular details or issues for discussion. They must be seen as primarily heuristic rather than definitive. If there is value in the attempt at defining such terms for application to African literary discourse, it lies not in any straightforward insights that might be disclosed but in forcing us to think carefully of fresh methodological procedures by which to try and square any terminology to the messy practices of literary discourse. The value, then, in attempting definitions is in the process of exploration, testing and grounding rather than in the end result as such.

Notes

1. The precise dating itself is subject to debate but these dates are those conveniently provided in the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), edited by Michael Levenson, where a rough chronology opens with the publication of the first volumes of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915) and ends with the start of the Second World War in 1939. However, as the essays in the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* go on to show, the dates themselves are useful as bookends and do not limit the inclusion of certain cultural, esthetic, and philosophical expressions that fall outside this chronological framework.
2. For a general introduction to the theory and practice of magical realism, see Zamora *et al.* 1994. For more extensive discussion of Okri's work, see my *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* (1997), chs. 5 and 6. See also Hawley 1995.

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