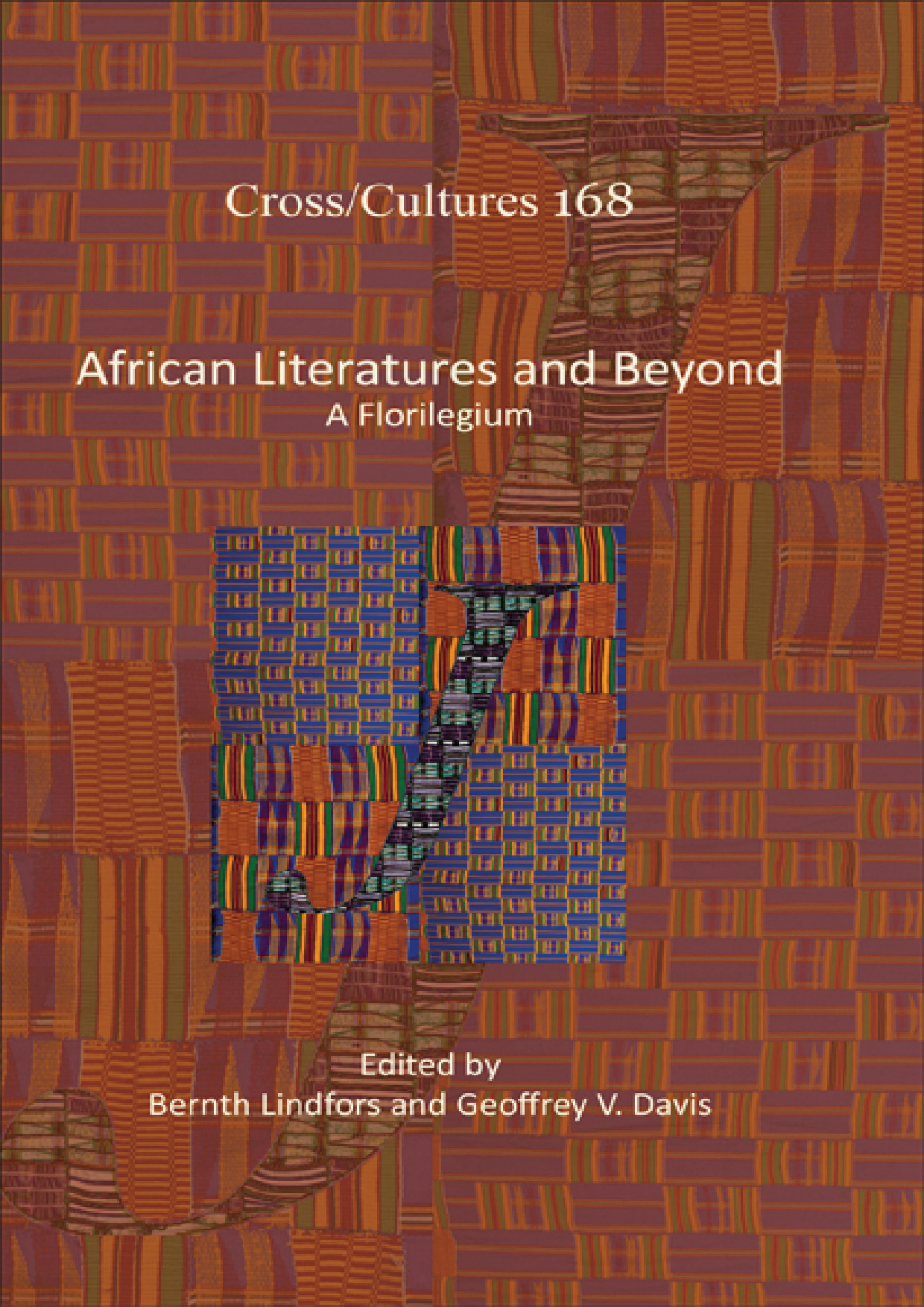
Cross/Cultures 168

African Literatures and Beyond

A Florilegium

Edited by
Bernth Lindfors and Geoffrey V. Davis



African Literatures and Beyond

CROSS CULTURES

Readings in Post / Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English

168

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African Literatures and Beyond

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Preface

James Gibbs has been a leading scholar of anglophone African literature for nearly half a century. He began by producing two MA theses, one on “Aspects of the Nigerian Dramatic Tradition” at the American University in 1967, and another on “Drama and Nationalism: A Study of Ibsen, Synge and Soyinka” at the University of Bristol in 1972. He then went off to teach in Ghana, where he started writing about theatrical performances he had witnessed. Not long afterward, while teaching in Malawi, he reported on drama festivals, conferences, and tours of the university’s travelling theatre troupe, in all of which he was actively involved. During these years in Africa, he continued to write about Wole Soyinka, publishing a series of authoritative bibliographies, biographical essays, study guides, and critical analyses on the growing body of works by this prolific Nigerian author. In 1980 Gibbs edited a pioneering volume of *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, and he went on to complete a doctoral dissertation on “Wole Soyinka: The Making of a Dramatist” at Leeds University in 1984, parts of which informed his critical study *Wole Soyinka* (1986).

Since then Gibbs has solidified his reputation as one of Soyinka’s most insightful interpreters by continuing to produce dozens of well-informed studies of his life and works. In addition, he has made major contributions to scholarship on Ghanaian literature by compiling *Ghanaian Theatre: A Bibliography* (1994), co-editing an issue of *Matatu* entitled “Fontomfrom: Contemporary Literature, Theatre and Film” (2000), and bringing out a collection of his own articles in a volume called *Nkin-Nyin: Essays on Ghanaian Theatre* (2009). His appraisals of African playwrights, poets, and novelists – particularly those from Ghana, Malawi, and Nigeria – have appeared in numerous books and journals, and he has commented incisively on such matters as censorship, publishing, broadcasting, literary competitions, book fairs, and the teaching of African literature in schools and universities. One of his most practical contributions has been the compilation of *A Handbook for African*

Writers (1986) which was amplified and reissued as *The African Writers' Handbook* (1999).

Gibbs's work as editor has been particularly significant. In addition to preparing an anthology of *Moralities for Modern Africa: Eight Plays* (1976) and special issues on Soyinka for *Research in African Literatures* (1983) and the *Literary Half-Yearly* (1987), he has served as reviews editor for *African Literature Today* for many years and was one of the founding editors of *African Theatre*, the leading journal in its field. Much of his creative energy has gone into collaborative ventures of this kind.

James and his brothers, wife, and children administer the Morel Trust, a charitable foundation that funds worthy projects throughout the world. The Trust has made numerous grants supporting African theatre productions and the distribution of books and journals to African university libraries. Such generous assistance has helped to promote artistic and scholarly activity on African campuses.

The contributors to this volume are colleagues of James Gibbs who have benefited greatly from knowing him and wish to thank him for his friendship and honour him for his impressive intellectual achievements. The present gathering of essays and creative writing is meant to celebrate both the man and his works.

⌘

Introduction

The essays and creative writing collected here as a tribute to James Gibbs reflect the wide range and diversity of his own academic interests. The main focus is on African literatures, but comparative studies involving literatures produced elsewhere – particularly Europe, India, and the Caribbean – command attention, too. Most contributors discuss specific works of fiction, drama or poetry, or else comment on the cultural significance of roles played by individual missionaries, scientists, performers, and scholars. The book concludes with a handful of literary contributions expressed in a variety of forms.

The first geographical region explored is West Africa. Mpalive–Hangson Msiska and Sola Adeyemi deal with salient aspects of Wole Soyinka's oeuvre, Msiska by examining notions of hegemonic power in his dramatic and critical works, and Adeyemi by studying postcolonial strategies of persuasion in his novel *The Interpreters*. Awo Mana Asiedu then comments on the contemporary relevance of the earliest Ghanaian play, Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*, which was written and first produced in 1916, and Eustace Palmer, by contrast, surveys five popular plays written in English by Sierra Leonean playwrights but not published until 2008. Gareth Griffiths's essay reviews the career of Joseph Jackson Fuller, a Jamaican-born missionary who spent forty years in the Cameroons, leaving there in 1888 as the British were handing over territory to the Germans; Griffiths relied on Fuller's unpublished autobiography and letters to reconstruct the difficulties he faced as a black missionary during this time of transition.

The spotlight then shifts to Eastern and Central Africa, with Jane Plastow describing the emergence and demise of radio drama in Eritrea broadcast in the Blin language; Pia Thielmann examines a novel written by Jonathan Sijawandani that tells the story of a youth captured by Muslim Arab slave traders in Malawi who five years later was returned to his family and re-embraced Christianity, thereby attaining happiness; and Geoffrey V. Davis provides an account of his visit to Zimbabwe in 2012 to assess the country's cultural needs and to recommend ways in which the international community could help to meet them.

South Africa is represented by two essays, the first by CHRIS DUNTON, who examines poetic devices and rhetorical strategies employed in four poems on an historical event that were composed over a span of sixty years in three different languages; and the second by RAOUL J. GRANQVIST, who investigates the activities and observations of Anders Sparrman, an eighteenth-century Swedish naturalist who was sent to South Africa by Carl Linnaeus to collect information on the Hottentots.

The next section of the book, dealing with other parts of the world, is the most diverse. KOFI ANYIDOHO offers a pan-African perspective on orality and performance. LYN INNES and GORDON COLLIER discuss the cultural impact of the presence of blacks in Ireland since the eighteenth century, noting their contributions to 'liberation' politics, performing arts, and multicultural nation-building. BERNTH LINDFORS records the responses of Swedish audiences to the famous African-American actor Ira Aldridge, who performed as Othello and Shylock at Stockholm's Royal Theatre in the summer of 1857. ANNE ADAMS interviews Theodor Wonja Michael, an Afro-German Africanist who, while working as a journalist, magazine editor, performer, and postgraduate student, amassed a large collection of books on Africa that he deposited at the University of Bayreuth. In another interview, CHRISTINE MATZKE talks with Gabriel Gbadamosi, an Irish-Nigerian playwright whose *African Moon* had its world premiere in a German municipal theatre in 2012. ECKHARD BREITINGER follows with an historical survey of German explorers, scientists, and storytellers who have created romantic and revolutionary visions of the Caribbean, and LEIF LORENTZON moves discussion in yet another direction by offering a comparison of the ways in which African and Indian authors have sought to nativize the English language in their novels. Then JAMES CURREY and LYNN TAYLOR discuss *African Literature Today* and *African Theatre*, two important journals with which James Gibbs has been connected.

The final section features poems by JACK MAPANJE and KOFI ANYIDOHO; short stories by CHARLES R. LARSON and ROBERT FRASER; plays by FEMI OSOFISAN and MARTIN BANHAM; and a brief account, by LYN INNES, of a dramatic reading in London of a script by James Gibbs commemorating the creation of Harold Pinter's first play, *The Room.*

⌘

Cultural Studies, Power, and the Idea of the Hegemonic in Wole Soyinka's Works

Mpalive–Hangson Msiska

Introduction: Theorizing Power

For some time now, I have been thinking of the particular ways in which over the years Wole Soyinka has dealt with the question of power in both his creative and critical works. I have come to the conclusion that what emerges from his oeuvre is the representation of power as fundamentally adaptive, even as it is driven to absolutism. However, this 'will to power' as totality, though having a real and significant impact on both its perpetrators and its victims, is presented as incapable of saturating the whole political and social formation, as there are always countervailing forces beyond the 'hegemonic power-formation'. These forces, whether conceived of in terms of class or other configurations of communal marginalization, do not have a pure autonomous existence outside the determination of the real exercise and experience of power. They are, in a nutshell, determined by the contingent 'hegemonic structure' they occupy, and so, too, is their capacity for resistance. Nevertheless, in that over-determined scene of power and counter-power, structured in a particular way at a given historical and cultural moment, there always remains the possibility of the 'redemptive remainder' resurfacing.

I have also been intrigued by the extent to which Soyinka's ideas are in mutual articulation with those of cultural studies, particularly with those of the Birmingham School, suggesting an intellectual conjuncture beyond that mythological assumption of an easy commensurability between knowledge and political geography. Soyinka's view of power resonates strongly with those of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and others who in various ways have sought to rethink the way dominant power is constituted in relation to the dominated. Indeed, in his essay "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and Other Mythologies," Soyinka employs some of Raymond Williams's s critical terms, especially his concept of "structures of feeling" in relation to the nature of power and music.[1] Much ink has been spilt on the decisive originality of cultural studies' deconstruction of traditional concepts of power, particularly Marxist ones, but noticeably there has been very little similar effort to recognize the contribution of postcolonial African writers and thinkers, in general, to the emergence of the new dispensation of *nouvelle critique*, post-Marxism, or poststructuralism. Of course, there has been the formidable presence of Kwame Anthony Appiah, Biodun Jeyifo, Simon Gikandi, and one or two others. Nevertheless, on the whole, the Cultural Academy has sometimes found it difficult to take full cognizance of the theoretical production of the so-called margins when such work did not fit easily into reigning conceptions of patterns of 'Third-World knowledge'. It can be contended that the tendency to organize the theoretical output from Africa and other formerly colonized countries under the designation of 'postcolonial theory and literature', commendable as it is in many respects, may have had the unintended effect of repressing the critique of classical Marxism and poststructuralism emanating from the cultural struggles of decolonization.[2] The critique of colonial power and neo-colonial relations by African critics and writers has had a profound effect on the way power is read and understood today. It is within that larger discourse of the liberation and decolonization of knowledge that Soyinka's particular engagement with the question of power in postcolonial Africa should be placed.

The labour of transforming dominant Marxist ideas of power was not confined to the realms of progressive Western movements such as cultural studies, as standard textbooks on the matter would have it, but was also being carried out by postcolonial writers and thinkers as part of a political aesthetic committed to the unveiling and transforming of the fundamental hierarchical relations of power between the West and developing countries. However, the project also entailed a critique of models of postcolonial development and formation produced within postcolonial countries themselves. As Soyinka has pointed out on a number of occasions, especially in his famous essay "The Autistic

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[1] Wole Soyinka, "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and Other Mythologies" (1981), in Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn, 1988): 164.

[2] Similar reservations have been raised by Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* 9.1–2 (July 1987): 27–58.

Hunt, Or How to Marximise Mediocrity," and also in "The Critic and Society," for instance, the dominant tendency within Marxism in Africa, in the 1970s in particular, was to reproduce the received ideological and theoretical framework, often in a mechanical fashion, without due regard to the historical and cultural specificity as well as contingency of the African context, to which it was being applied.[3] This entailed a replication of the dominant economic model in which literature, regarded as part of the ideological superstructure, was seen as merely mediating dominant ideology unless it specifically articulated a class-affiliated perspective or a clearly defined party line. Soyinka found this form of uncritical adoption of ideas external to African cultural experience irritating and even, perhaps, suggestive of a profound lack of commitment to the task of epistemological decolonization. He counsels that, in Africa,

> We must take into account but reject the burden of bourgeois development of other societies, reject the framework of their bourgeois values and conceptualizations yet, in the process, ensure that concepts which are termed bourgeois in the societies of their origination also correspond to the values of bourgeois development of our own societies. For this, we do not even need to prove first the existence of a bourgeoisie or coerce social groups into identical class structures of other societies. […] The existence of classes, however, is a universal reality: What remains permanently contestable is the *universality* of concepts and values attaching to each group.[4]

Thus Soyinka retains the notion of economic differentiation as a fundamental unit of the reality of socio-political formation and also the conviction that in Africa, as elsewhere, access to the means of social and economic well-being, however defined, is organized in ways that substantially facilitate some and hinder others. In his view, the analytical and descriptive language of critique must always not only be inflected by the local, but must also be revalorized in terms of the specific formation under consideration. For him, an important aspect of contemporary African specificity is its particular narratives of historical and metaphysical becoming, which embody the diverse but nevertheless related cosmologies or world-views of the continent. Contributing to the debate on the status of Marxist thought in the nationalist project of cultural formation, he contends:

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[3] Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," 168. See also Soyinka, "The Autistic Hunt; or, How to Marximise Mediocrity," in Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn, 1988): 279–314.

[4] Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," 169.

> There is more than matter for suspicion when our Leftocrats, for instance, take on the mantle of abuse from European Leftist criticism as it automatically attaches itself to the sheerest idealist suggestiveness in any form of literature. My theory is that it is a guilty reflex, a defense mechanism. The Leftocracy feels it is on trial when it detects any trace of idealism in the arts and literature, precisely because the hard evidence of revolutionary history is that, while the motivating force of social transformation does exist within the realm of socio-economics, power that manifestation of idealist craving has proved a durable partner and an uncertain quantity within such transformations. This is a most embarrassing language, one which belongs to the 'mushy' world of psychology, an upsetting factor even within the internal history of revolutionized societies.[5]

He argues that the problem of power has not been adequately theorized within Marxism, as it does not fit in well with the Marxist scientific materialist approach to ideology. However, instead of admitting this as a theoretical and methodological limitation of Marxism itself, most of the critics concerned repress it into the catchall category of 'idealism', in effect displacing it into an untheorizable problem. In Soyinka's view, this is not accidental – it is a function of the fact that critical practice itself, including the Marxist approach, is implicated in questions of power, as it partakes of the indeterminacy of the affectivity of power. He remarks:

> Power and music – these constitute two of the least addressed products and strivings of the human kind by radical criticism. Like music, power lacks completion, cannot be quantified or reduced to the language of historicism: It stands outside history. It reaches out constantly towards a new repletion, towards indeed an essentiality, a concept of the Ideal. This element of the idealist is therefore present in the fanatic radical critic, for he becomes a surrogate of authoritarianism for a system which is challenged by the one value that knows itself, like music, to be incomplete. What is manifested here, to situate it bluntly but succinctly, is a conflict of interests that straddles both the metaphysical and the political. Marxism has created for our Leftocracy a system that declares itself complete, controlled and

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[5] Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," 169.

> controlling: an immanent reflection of every facet of human history, conduct, and striving, an end known in advance and only delayed by the explicable motions of economic production and development.[6]

Although there is the suggestion of power as transcendental and outside history, it is evident that Soyinka sees power as not contained or limited by a given ideological or historical formation – it is always in excess of its particular manifestation. It is in this respect that he considers Marxism itself as subject to the operations of power, most pronounced in the tendency within Marxism towards total knowledge and truth and, additionally, in the conception of ideology as an invariant system that replicates itself in given historical epochs. For Soyinka, there is no ideological or theoretical system that can escape the politics of power, especially its affective potency, which it has in common with music.

It is remarkable how Soyinka's chastisement of his African brethren is similar to Raymond Williams's criticism of some of his Marxist comrades in Europe. In a similar vein, he argues that any theory of power that neglects the dimension of lived experience is likely to distort the way in which actual individuals lived out their lives. As Williams sees it,

> The most interesting and difficult part of any cultural analysis is […] that which seeks to grasp the hegemonic in its active and formative, but also its transformational processes. Works of art, by their substantial and general character, are often especially important as sources of this complex evidence.[7]

In my view, Soyinka's analysis of power in his creative work has attended to that zone beyond the formal theoretical categorization of power, presenting the phenomenon of power as a complex ever-adaptive process into which the classical notions of class and the conventional forms of socio-political difference do not offer adequate insight. It is not just the inclusion of the theoretically undomesticated that we find in Soyinka's practice, but also an elaboration of formal theories of dominance and domination. That is most evident in *Opera Wonyosi* (1981), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), and *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), among others.

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[6] Wole Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," 169.

[7] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977): 113–14.

Opera Wonyosi and the Unequal Symbiosis of the Rulers and the Ruled

In *Opera Wonyosi,* Soyinka gives us a view of power not only in which there are hierarchical relations, but also when the rulers and the ruled are additionally involved in mutual determination. Although the ruled are at the mercy of the rulers, they are not passive victims – they are shaped and determined by the ruling ideology, but not wholly constrained by it. Macheath's and his gang's intricate linkage to the Boky Imperial House most aptly demonstrates this point. One illustrative link between the two is that, on his wedding day, Macheath has the same expensive food as that destined for the Emperor's banquet.

> MACK: […] This is the best food to be had anywhere today. And that is no idle boast […]
>
> BABA: Splendid plates. From Hotel Intercontinental. Same firm as makes the emperor's cutlery.
>
> DARE: To tell you the truth, ma'am. Everything is the same as the emperor will have on his coronation. The salmon is from Lafayette, by special appointment Fishmongers to His Imperial Majesty. Specially flown from France last night. No problem slipping in among the crates at the airport. Came through the VIP lounge – a Right Royal Salmon I tell you.
>
> MACK: I promised you a royal banquet.
>
> JAKE: *Imperial* banquet if you don't mind, captain.[8]

Macheath is presented as a subject who identifies with the fundamental values of power as defined and practised by Emperor Boky. He is perhaps the most loyal subject – ideologically speaking, that is – of his Imperial Highness, privileging the Self over the collective at any expense, just as the great man himself does. Macheath has cultivated the same taste in expensive and exotic things as his leader, though without the financial means to sustain his high living. It is thus not only a matter of poetic justice when at the end of the play Emperor Boky pardons him, but also a tacit recognition, even affirmation, of Macheath as the ideal subject of the decadent postcolonial formation produced by the leader. Indeed, as Chief Anikura, Macheath's reluctant father-in-law and adversary, poignantly puts it,

---

[8] Wole Soyinka, "Opera Wonyosi," in Soyinka, *Six Plays* (London: Methuen, 1984): 322. Further page references are in the main text.

> Well, does that surprise you? It shouldn't. We men of influence – of power if you like – respect one another. We speak the same language, so we usually work things out. As for you lot,
>
> Remember it's not everyday
> The emperor's courier timely arrives
> Repairing wrongs, sustaining rights
> And neatly installing the back-to-square one. (403)

If Macheath is the subject of the Sovereign, par excellence, he is also the dangerous mimic selfhood that, in Homi Bhabha's term, returns the 'hegemonic' gaze both as itself and as Other. He is the embodiment of the Boky ideal, but also, in his 'transgressive excess', its grotesque alterity, undermining the elitist intentions of Boky's self-fashioned imperial image.[9] The reproduction of imperial pomp among the criminal class foregrounds the real relations between Boky's practice and his 'hegemonic imaginary', in which the subjects are given the illusion that the postcolonial formation is a space in which class differences between the ruled and the rulers are levelled out, the promise embedded in the rhetoric and vision proffered by the nationalism of decolonization. However, there might be an erasure of difference, but that is only in terms of the transgression of the boundary between political morality and amorality. According to Chief Anikura, this new 'rhetoric of morality', the obsession with appearances and self-representation, is not to be trusted.

> And watch out! Beware certain well-tuned voices
> That clamour loudest: 'Justice-for-all'!
> A ragged coat does not virtue make
> – Here I stand as your prime example –
> Nor is the predator a champion of rights,
> A brave Robin Hood equalising the loot
> It's too easy to declare society fair game –
> For proof, my son-in-law is more than ample. (403–404)

It is not only self-presentation that is an unreliable index of identity, but also the category of class. In this production and enforcement of the hegemonic ideology of acquisitiveness, the notion of class becomes subordinate, if not irrelevant, to the formation of an 'acquisitive hegemonic bloc'. In addition, it is noticeable that through Macheath the Robin Hood myth is being subverted. Macheath is indeed a kind of Robin Hood, but one who, unlike his historical counterpart, thinks of himself first and only, without regard to the plight of the poor. It is in this manner suggested here that populism itself is not immune from being abused by the postcolonial 'negative hegemonic alliance' of Boky and Macheath.

---

[9] See Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Stuart Hall recalls that one of the most profound ideas the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies found invaluable was Antonio Gramsci's notion of the 'historic bloc'.

> "Hegemony" in Gramsci's sense requires, not simple escalation of a whole class to power […] but the process by which a historical bloc of social forces is constructed and the ascendancy of that bloc secured. So, the way we conceptualise the relationship between 'ruling ideas' and 'ruling classes' is best thought of in terms of the processes of 'hegemonic domination.'[10]

However, the essentialization of the 'historic bloc', as inherently a coalition of progressive forces, which we have in Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall among others, is called into question in *Opera Wonyosi*, as Macheath and Emperor Boky constitute a kind of 'negative historic bloc' that brings into dominance the individualist anti-collectivist regime. In this case, it is possible to argue that Soyinka's work not only articulates some of the key concerns of cultural studies, but that it also demonstrates their explanatory limit when transferred to the postcolonial terrain, where the specific elements of that formation demand that such concepts be re-interpreted, if not wholly re-thought. What Soyinka considers is the question: what happens when the very language of revolutionary emancipation gets appropriated by 'the hegemonic', or when the formerly 'counter-hegemonic' continues to employ the same rhetoric when it has reconstituted itself as the 'new hegemonic' and one that has abandoned its former emancipatory role and power? The classic Marxist response to this, of course, as suggested by Robert Young, is to argue that such ideological departures are merely detours from the fundamental trajectory of historical elaboration.[11] To be fair, although Hall does not offer concrete examples, he is well aware of the possible limitation of Gramsci's concept when transferred to the discourses of empire, race, and the postcolonial.[12] Indeed, it will be around such questions that cultural studies will seek to specify its distinctiveness from classical Marxism.

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[10] Stuart Hall, "The problem of ideology: marxism without guarantees" (1986), in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley & Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996): 43–44.

[11] Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990).

It is also significant that the 'new historical bloc' in *Opera Wonyosi* involves identification with the former imperial rulers and their ideology, as Boky re-invents himself in the image of a European sovereign, Napoleon. His affiliation with Europe involves consuming the Other, so to speak, an ingestion of European culture that is within the same paradigmatic category of power as the cannibalism of *Madmen and Specialists*. Boky insists on importing food, as well as concepts of self-representation and political formation, from Europe, principally as a way of authenticating his cosmopolitanism. In this instance, Soyinka suggests that cosmopolitanism might also be the discourse through which social difference and unequal social relations are produced and legitimized in postcolonial societies. It is nevertheless of particular significance that it is from the European past rather than its present that Boky draws his models of subjectivity, ideology, and political formation. He re-invents himself as a new Napoleon in order to outdo his fellow dictator Idi Amin, who has already amassed most of the available titles.

> He apes me. I appear in a uniform […] Amin sees me, and straightway orders a duplicate, complete with medals, plus a few more he's dreamt up. […] So there was I, constantly embarrassed by this apishness. I made myself Life-President, he followed suit. I thought maybe I'd beatify my person and become a saint. But I knew him. He'd simply add another title to his court list […]. Well, that's how confused the man is – Saint Alhaji. […] nothing less than a black Napoleon. Now you must admit that was really original thinking – that was really outclassing that nigger – I mean, how do you top the Imperial crown? (332–33)

While Boky is able to spot the contradiction in the idea of a "Saint Alhaji," he cannot equally see it in the notion of a "black Napoleon." For Soyinka, it is this myopia of vision that is precluding Boky from recognizing that he, as Emperor, does indeed proverbially have no clothes, as in reality he is neither an Emperor nor a Napoleon and so is equally guilty of the illusions of grandeur of which he accuses his fellow competitor, Amin.

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[12] Stuart Hall, "New ethnicities" (1989), in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. Morley & Chen, 445.

Nevertheless, the assembled ‘historical bloc’ is also framed as an amalgamation of different temporalities, similar to the structure of Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests*, where the postcolonial is the space of the return of the pre-colonial, with its various permutations of power. We can thus postulate that Soyinka configures contemporary hegemonies in postcolonial societies as the reappearance of previous models of hegemony. It is significant that in the reproduction of imperial pomp and identity, the postcolonial leader deploys the emblems of power from which presumably he had sought to disengage during the struggle for decolonization. Soyinka is asking an important question here about the material representation of power in the postcolonial formation: is the postcolonial leader’s preoccupation with colonial symbols of power not really a fulfilment of the not-so-repressed wish to be colonial, to touch the magic of power represented and personified by the imperial sovereign rather than fashion a new and distinctively postcolonial language of power and identity? In this sense, then, we can, using Raymond Williams’s terminology, speak of the ‘emergent postcolonial hegemonic’ as harbouring ‘residual’ forms of its colonial past. It is such ‘residual colonial cultural forms’ that will often forestall the effort to achieve a genuine postcolonial emancipation.[13] This is certainly the case in *Kongi’s Harvest*, where the central conflict revolves around Kongi’s attempt to embed traditional semiotics of power in a postcolonial authoritarianism, seeing himself as heir to both the ‘hegemony’ of tradition and that of colonial rule.

The Hegemonic, the Residual, and the Production and Reproduction of Kongis

Thus, the play illustrates most perceptively Raymond Williams’s characterization of ‘the dominant’ in its historical elaboration. In his re-reading of the Marxist epochal definition of the different stages of development, Williams argues as follows:

> The emphasis on dominant and definitive lineaments and features is important and often, in practice, preserved for the very different function of historical analysis, in which a sense of movement within what is ordinarily abstracted as a system is crucially necessary, especially if it is to connect with the future as well as with the past. In authentic historical analysis, it is necessary at every point to recognise

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[13] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–27.

> the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance. It is necessary to examine how these relate to the whole cultural process rather than only to the selected and abstracted dominant system. Thus "bourgeois culture" is a significant generalising description and hypothesis, expressed within epochal analysis by fundamental comparisons with "feudal culture" or "socialist culture."[14]

Indeed, it can be contended that in *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka seeks to detotalize the concept of 'the hegemonic' as unitary and an absolute antithesis of that to which it is opposed. It is in this context that he satirizes the epochal description of history, as a series of mutually exclusive phases, offered by the Fourth member of the Reformed Aweri Fraternity created by the postcolonial leader, Kongi. The Fourth Aweri sees the impending harvest ceremony Kongi has arranged as an occasion when

> Danlola, the retrogressive autocrat, will with his own hands present the Leader with the New Yam, thereby acknowledging the supremacy of the State over his former areas of authority spiritual or secular. From then on, the State will adopt towards him and to all similar institutions the policy of glamourised fossilism. (81)

Thus the emergent postcolonial formation comes to be defined in opposition to the 'political archaic' of the 'residual pre-colonial culture' in a conception of 'hegemony' as a formation of a hierarchy of levels of power, with the postcolonial as the most recent and most advanced stage in a progressive teleological drive towards development. The Fourth Aweri sees the prospect of making a radical break with the past as a mark of a modern approach to politics in contrast with the old ways of the Oba Danlola and his Aweri Council, which emphasized cultural and historical continuity with the past. Clearly, in this instance, the postcolonial formation is defined as an erasure and disavowal of history and genealogy, with the only concession being given to the idea of history as a succession of autonomous modes of 'political hegemony'. That is certainly evident in the Fourth Aweri's exchange with the First:

> FIRST: I suggest we pattern ourselves on our predecessors. Oh I do admit they were a little old-fashioned, but they had er… a certain style. Yes, I think style is the word I want. Style.

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[14] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121.

> Yes, I think we could do worse than model ourselves on the old Aweri.
>
> FIFTH: You mean, speak in proverbs and ponderous tone rhythms?
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> FOURTH: I'm afraid that is out anyway. Kongi would prefer a clean break from the traditional conclave of the so-called wise ones. […] We might consider a scientific image. This would be a positive stamp and one very much in tune with our contemporary situation. Our pronouncements should be dominated by a positive scientificism. (70–71)

It is argued that the 'new hegemony', based on a scientific worldview, has no local progenitor except perhaps European Marxism. It is equally significant that the Fourth Aweri reproduces the kind of historical determinism that Soyinka has denounced and so, too, Williams. In the foreword to *Opera Wonyosi*, commenting on a statement by a critic that the play should have had a class perspective, Soyinka argues that he does not "intend to give any 'intellectual' audience the comfort of seeing their material situation as the *inevitable* consequence of their socio-historical condition" (299). Evidently, Soyinka regards the idea of historical determinism as a form of 'false consciousness' that rarefies the real conditions of postcolonial existence into an abstract political scheme that absolves the intellectual class from the task of taking personal responsibility for their actions and their consequences for the general populace.

As far as Williams is concerned, he has been particularly critical of a similar tradition in Marxism, which posited the historical process as part of the fundamental natural laws:

> From this sense of determined conditions it is easy to understand the development of a Marxism which stressed the 'iron laws', the 'absolutely objective conditions', of an 'economy', from which all else followed. In this influential interpretation, Marxism discovered the 'laws' of an objective external system of economy, and everything then followed sooner or later, directly or indirectly, from these laws. But this is not the only way in which the sense can be developed.[15]

Thus, for Williams, as for Soyinka, determinacy conceptually excludes human agency from historical development, presenting humanity as a passive receptacle of natural scientific laws or as at the mercy of an imposed 'false consciousness' from without. One of the virtues of *Kongi's Harvest* is that it demonstrates that adherence to the doctrine of historical inevitability is a matter of ideology, and one chosen in determinate circumstances and with particular personal objectives and interests. In other words, "historical determinism," is an ideological concept that serves the needs of particular 'power-formations'. The "positive Scientificism" of the Aweri and Kongi is revealed as a ploy to amass power by using the language of science to disguise the determined pursuit of the absolute control of the Republic of Isma, and, furthermore, to conceal the presence of agency within a discourse imagined and represented as objective. Thus in *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka shows that historical materialism is itself a form of 'false consciousness'. That is also true of Dr Bero's appropriation of scientific materialism in *Madmen and Specialists* in order to legitimize his adoption of cannibalism as the most potent expression of power.

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[15] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 299.

The human content of the official ideology is even more marked on the occasions when Kongi forgets to perform his carefully crafted image and allows himself to be carried away with excitement at the magnitude of power that he has or that he anticipates acquiring after the harvest ceremony, once he has got rid of the traditional power-structure represented by Danlola, Sarumi, and others. One such moment is when he and the Secretary of the party consider how they should project the image of Kongi, the Leader, at the coming ceremony:

> SECRETARY: Of course my Leader. And a benevolent Spirit of Harvest. This year shall be known as the year of Kongi's Harvest. Everything shall date from it.
> KONGI: [*stops suddenly.*]: Who thought that up?
> SECRETARY: It is among the surprise gifts we have planned for our beloved Leader. I shouldn't have let it slip out….
> KONGI: [*rapt in the idea.*]: You mean, things like 200 K.H.
> SECRETARY: A.H. my Leader. After the Harvest. In a thousand years, one thousand A.H. And last year shall be referred to as 1 B.H. There will only be one Harvest worth remembering.
> KONGI: No, K.H. is less ambiguous. The year of Kongi's Harvest. Then for the purpose of back-dating, B.K.H. Before Kongi's Harvest. No reason why we should conform to the habit of two initials only. You lack imagination.
> SECRETARY: It shall be as you please my Leader.
> KONGI: Now you see why it is all the more important that everything goes forward tomorrow as I wish it? I want the entire nation to subscribe to it. (92)

Moreover, Kongi and his secretary are even reconfiguring the fundamental coordinates of time in line with the ideology of Kongism, raising the question: 'if temporality can itself be modified, is it possible to have an objective historical process as desired by Kongi and some versions of Marxism, including postcolonial ones?' It is thus the very arbitrariness of Kongi's transformation of time that reveals the unscientific nature of historical time, even as it is presented under the cover of an objective science, for, in the final analysis, it is all a function of power and ideology, at the mercy of the Kongis of this world, and of their whims and fancies. This recalls the collapsing of different historical and cultural frames in Emperor's Boky's self-invention as a postcolonial Napoleon. Thus, the notion of Kongi as the inevitable successor to the Oba in accordance with the progressive and teleological historical development of society from feudalism to enlightened socialism is shown to be palpably willed and constructed, indicating that there is nothing inevitable about the phase of postcolonialism itself, neither 'colonial hegemony' nor in relation to traditional African authority. It is further suggested that the contents of the 'emergent hegemony', whether regarded as an intrinsic aspect of class consciousness or as a manifestation of an external law of historical formation, are neither inevitable nor the only form in which the 'emergent' can manifest itself at a given particular historical moment.

Thus, in *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka presents the 'emergent as relational', but also as one among a 'multiplicity of contending power-formations'. In this regard, its particular shape, as observed by Williams, is determined by the other elements in relation to which it defines itself. Indeed, in the play, we are presented with two particular forms of 'the emergent' and 'the hegemonic'. Both Kongi and Daodu represent the new formations of power that seek to dislodge the feudal order of Chief Danlola. Whereas Kongi seeks to stage his as an antithesis to Danlola's 'hegemonic structures', Daodu and Segi employ Danlola's location, the space of traditional authority and power, as the space of a more humane modern form of politics that adapts the traditional to the modern and vice versa. It is thus also possible to argue that, rather than being merely a matter of a contrast between anti-traditionalist and pro-traditionalist attitudes to power, it is also a question of the strategic manner in which both camps still wish to preserve tradition, of how they translate and place tradition, or what Williams would describe as 'the archaic', into an 'active residual' component of the postcolonial contemporary.[16] After all, Kongi has retained a version of Danlola's former Aweri Council and Daodu is using modern methods of agriculture in order to grow the most revered traditional crop, the yam. In this respect, the key difference between the two sides is a matter of the different political ends to which they put tradition. Kongi adapts it into a personal cult of hero worship, whereas Daodu and Segi employ it in the hope of achieving communal social and economic progress.

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[16] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–27.

The play also offers examples of two other forms of 'hegemony' as well. There is the 'residual cultural hegemony' of the colonial era, serving as the 'political unconscious', from which Kongi as the nationalist figure seeks to disengage, but there is also a sense in which Kongi himself, particularly in relation to Segi and Daodu, represents 'the new hegemonic' and one that, for that matter, exhibits its power in terms reminiscent of colonialism.[17] Thus, Soyinka is suggesting that 'the hegemonic' never installs itself as a singular instance and that at a given moment there might be different formations of it. Furthermore, it is suggested that 'the hegemonic' must never be seen as closed, but as always open-ended and adaptable.

Moreover, in the failure of the revolutionary forces raised by Daodu and Segi, one learns that 'the emergent' does not always evolve into 'the dominant', suggesting that beneath Williams's model of historical succession there lingers the old problem of Marxism, that of determinism, which Williams had sought hard to slay, but which nevertheless like a determined, uncharitable sphinx still raises its ugly head from its ashes. However, Soyinka's view of the inability of 'the emergent' to move progressively into the position of 'the dominant' does not necessarily imply the impossibility of a successful transition to a more emancipatory and transcendental political ideal, since the emergent can always continue to subsist as the 'subterranean dominant', as Daodu's forces do by the end of the play.[18]

Madmen and Specialists and the Subterranean Dominant

Indeed, the contestation over power in *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) is fundamentally between 'the dominant' and 'the hegemonic', on the one hand, and the 'subterranean dominant', but officially 'marginal formations of power', on the other.[19] In the play, power is reconfigured as cannibalization, as a political practice of consumption, since 'the hegemonic' constantly consumes its antagonistic Other. However, the oppositional forces themselves try to cannibalize the rulers, too, whenever and wherever they can. This process, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, is uneven, human, and messy, and without any guarantee of success, but has nevertheless an abstractable rationality and structure that one can focus on analytically in order to understand the intricacies of power in practice.[20] Thus, in *Madmen and Specialists* we are offered a complex study of power in which the will to 'absolute hegemony' is thwarted by the very drive towards its attainment as well as by the emergence of a subversive 'historical bloc', an alliance of a variety of excluded forms of marginal power interacting together to resist 'hegemonic rule', but not as an absolute antithesis of it, outside the determination of 'the dominant', but as both a part of it and its excess as well as its possible supersession.

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[17] For the idea of the "political unconscious," see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1981).

[18] For the notion of the 'subterranean', see Mpalive Msiska, "Geopoetics: Subterraneanity and Subversion in Malawian Poetry," in *Essays on African Writing*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995): 73–99.

First of all, *Madmen and Specialists* is an analysis of the idea of the State as an abstract and impersonal embodiment of the postcolonial national will, the repository of collective power. The State is mainly portrayed as having become so abstract that it has elevated bureaucratic rationality to such rarefied heights that power has become an end in itself. For Dr Bero, the specialist, and his political allies, unlike for Kongi, it is no longer just a question of what status power can confer on them, but more the pleasure it affords them by its sheer possession. Here, what emerges is the notion of power as a material good, as an object bought and sold or forcibly or deviously obtained rather than as an idea or concept. In other words, the leadership views power as a fetish or commodity. However, the conception of State power as an impersonal instrumentalist tool of rationality is itself revealed as part of the ideological intentionality of the regime rather than the reality of power itself as manifested within the actuality of political formation. Just as in Kongi's discourse of historical materialism, the formation of 'hegemonic power' in *Madmen and Specialists* conceals human agency and motivation. Yet it is evident that the ideas and acts of individuals, such as Dr Bero, demonstrably contribute to the determination of the 'power-formation' constituting the State. In reality, the State is an embodiment of the ideology of 'the hegemonic', indicative of its characterization by

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[19] Wole Soyinka, "Madmen and Specialists," in Soyinka, *Six Plays* (London: Methuen, 1984): 221–93. Further page references are in the main text.

[20] Stuart Hall, "The problem of ideology: marxism without guarantees," in *Stuart Hall*, ed. Morley & Chen, 25–46.

Louis Althusser as quintessentially the expression of the ideological will of the sovereign, but 'the hegemonic' never discloses the ideological status of its power.[21] If in feudal society, such as in Boky's, it is the monarch that is the sovereign, in the modern 'State formation' represented in *Madmen and Specialists*, it is the military establishment that serves such a purpose. Here, the separation of the ideological State apparatuses from the State coercive forces, which in Althusser's model is presented as the norm of modern political formation, is effaced and the two strands of power are subsumed in 'the strong State', in which the division between the State and civil society is obliterated.[22] It can also be contended that this kind of 'State formation' serves as a formal hybridization of the zone of civility and that of the State, as opposed to a synthesis of the ideological content of the two spheres. On the whole, the representation of the State as abstract and impersonal is revealed, to paraphrase Althusser, as an imaginary relationship to the real power-relations within the postcolonial formation.[23] This is seen as fundamentally a dominating transgressive mode that seeks to absorb into 'the hegemonic' all possible sources of autonomous 'power-formation', in order to preclude the prospect of 'counter-hegemony'.

More than that, the play shows how an overweening craving for power exploits the essential ambiguity underlying power, its dual potential for good and evil, privileging the latter, but concealing the fact that this is the case. This is best exemplified by Bero's appropriation of his medical knowledge for death and destruction. The classic duality of the *pharmakon,* the idea of medicine as both a cure and a poison, is deployed to produce a 'false consciousness', as it were, around Bero's newfangled deadly medical practice.[24] Bero's degeneration begins when he uses his knowledge of traditional herbs, acquired in his previous experiments to blend modern and traditional medicine, to poison opponents of the government when he enlists in the army medical corps. His father, who is looking after military convalescents, immediately detects his son's handiwork on the victims, alerting him to Bero's transformation and his newly-found identification with the State 'power-formation'. Bero's commendable research into traditional medicine, which enables him to extract curative compounds from local herbs, wins him the admiration of the local community, and in some ways is a commendable contribution to the recovery of the submerged, even repressed traditional scientific cultural practices of the Continent. However, this potentially healing and empowering strategy and knowledge is sacrificed on the altar of an insatiable desire for individual power, self-promotion, greed, and violence, as Bero violates his Hippocratic oath, switching from being a medical specialist to a specialist in death.

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[21] See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1969), in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London: New Left Review, 1971): 160–66.

[22] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 160–66.

[23] "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 160–66.

[24] See *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

However, he does not limit the abuse of traditional medicine to himself, as he clandestinely uses his sister to collect the poison for him while he is away in the army, without informing her as to what he really does with it. Here, Bero's obsession with power sees him appropriate the home, the domestic space, for the cannibalistic politics of 'the hegemonic'. Indeed, he has so successfully concealed his evil deeds that his sister still regards her herb-collecting as an antidote to the carnage and mayhem of the battlefront, as a peaceful 'counter-hegemonic' endeavour. She confides in him, saying,

> We heard terrible things. So much evil. Then I would console myself that I earned the balance by carrying on your work. One thing cancels out another. (246)

In fact, her act of 'counter-identification' with dominant ideology has already been appropriated for 'the hegemonic'. Aware of the power he now has over her, Bero cruelly disabuses her of the illusion that she is contributing to a humanitarian cause, highlighting the extent to which her manifest relationship to the hegemonic is in fact a product of her 'false consciousness', rendering her a true subject of 'the dominant ideology'. When she overhears him boasting to the local Christian Priest about the pleasures of cannibalism and then, not quite sure what to make of it, she seeks assurance from him that it was all in jest, he mercilessly unveils her complicity in his project:

> SI BERO: [*Laughing*]: You know, for a moment I nearly believed you.
> BERO: Oh? [*Turns and looks at her pityingly.*] You didn't? [*Pause. They look each other in the face. Her laughter dies slowly.*]
> SI BERO: Oh God.
> BERO: Out of your world, little sister, out of your little world. Stay in it and do only what I tell you. That way you'll be safe.
> SI BERO: [*Vehemently.*] Abomination! (251–52)

Si Bero's labour of love for a brother she adores and respects has, without her knowledge, turned her into a cog in the State's murderous machine. In addition, her role 'resignified' as enforced labour as Bero makes it clear that she is at his mercy and that her survival depends on her obedience to him and the State. Thus Bero is not only an embodiment of evil power but also its active disseminatory agent, through which the evil of the public sphere invades the domestic world of the village and its ancient healing powers. He is the palpable means by which 'the hegemonic' cannibalizes all other forms of power within the political formation.

However, Si Bero's case also highlights the untidiness of power in the postcolonial formation in that seemingly innocent aspects of the traditional social structure and its values, such as kinship, might be used to bring one willingly or otherwise into 'the hegemonic formation' of power. Her loyalty to her brother and its role in her unwitting contribution to the negative use of power dramatize what Raymond Williams describes as the complexity of the lived experience in which ethical purity may not always be easily sustainable, as one seeks to reconcile different claims on one's loyalty.[25] Yet, it is in examining and understanding such areas of difficulty, as Wole Soyinka does, that our interpretation of power can transcend simple oppositions.

Nevertheless, it is Bero's appropriation of home for State violence that unwittingly proves his undoing. Si Bero gives an undertaking to the Earth Mothers not to put their knowledge to any harmful use and she herself observes the injunction strictly. It is Bero's violation of the prohibition that, in a trajectory reminiscent of the logic of tragedy, brings him into conflict with the Earth Mothers. In a gesture of restorative justice, they set fire to the house while he and his father, whom he has murdered, are still inside. Even though the reason they destroy Bero is clearly his arrogant threats against them and also his patricide, it is largely his surreptitious co-option of not only the domestic space but also of the whole village and its autochthonous knowledge into the State's inhumane ideological power-structure and practices that arouses their righteous anger. It is significant that the Earth Mothers spare Si Bero in their supreme act of vengeance, for they realize that she, like them and many others, has been an innocent victim of a clandestine political effort that, unbeknownst to them, has entrapped and transformed them, into subjects of 'the political hegemonic'. Their position of marginality and distance from 'the hegemonic' has been violated. It is the recognition of this fundamental character of power and its perennial abuse of subjects and lack of respect for cultural practices deemed sacred in tradition that ultimately stirs the Earth Mothers into *counter-violence*:

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[25] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–27.

> IYA AGBA: [...] It's a good night for settling accounts.
> IYA MATE: She's a good woman.
> IYA AGBA: Get it ready. Get it ready. I'll not be a tool in their hands, not in this ripe state – No! Too much has fallen in their hands already, it's time to take it back. They spat on my hands when I held them out bearing gifts. Have you ever known it different? (283)

To Iya Mate and Iya Agba, Bero's abuse of the people and valued indigenous forms of knowledge is merely the latest manifestation of an old and merciless dispossession of the resources of a people so totally oppressed that they can no longer hope to escape the insatiable political monster whose hydra-like tentacles reach even the remotest village.

The role of the Earth Mothers as Bero's nemesis is also instructive of the efficacious redemptive capacity of margins, serving as sites of counter-knowledge beyond effective official surveillance and regulation. Bero's and the government's elaborate concern with the visible enemy or dissident blinds them to other and perhaps more formidable sources of opposition. They focus on those that have seemingly openly departed from the known government creed, the dissidents Bero has liquidated. However, they have not reckoned with the possibility of a subversive remainder beyond the range of their official knowledge – that is, the Earth Mothers – indicating the limitations of the postcolonial State's 'panoptic, all-seeing power'. It all suggests that the regime's image of itself as invincible is in fact its very Achilles heel, for there are agencies not easily legible, as they are written in languages from which the modern State, in its pursuit of a negative and elitist cultural hybridity, has been alienated and thus cannot comprehend.[26] Besides, the Earth Mothers signify the subversive inhabitation of the body politic by a radical alterity that escapes the official gaze and bides its time for the final moment of reckoning. In this regard, they perform a similar transgressive mimesis as Daodu, Segi, and Danlola in *Kongi's Harvest* when the latter comply with Kongi's wishes in order to subvert them dramatically at a moment of their own choosing.

It is worth commenting a little more on the contents of the 'counter-hegemonic knowledge' that the Earth Mothers deploy against the arch-agent of political violence, Dr Bero. As Iya Agba tells him, they are members of an indestructible ancient cult and one that is more autochthonous than the government's newfangled crudely instrumentalist scientific materialism. As they make it clear to Bero: "Not any cult you can destroy. We move as the Earth moves, nothing more. We age as Earth ages" (273). Here Soyinka affirms the efficacy of traditional means of engaging with authoritarianism, asserting the value of the spiritual resources offered by the indigenous cosmological system in general to any conception and construction of redemptive agency and cultural practice aiming at dealing effectively with the corruption of postcolonial power mainly predicated on the adoption of a distorted and shallow discourse of a hybrid modernity. It is perhaps the suspicion that, for once, he may be in the presence of an unconquerable Otherness that arouses Bero's curiosity to inquire further into the identity of the cult:

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[26] See *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Rabinow.

> Bero: But you're afraid to tell me the name.
> Iya Agba: I try to keep fools from temptation.
> Bero: (*instantly angry*). Watch it, old woman, your age earns no privileges with me.
> Iya Agba: Nothing does from what we hear. So you want to know what cult, do you?
> Bero: I can ask your – pupil.
> *He turns round to go back to his house.*
> Iya Agba: She won't tell you. Take it from me. She won't. (273–74)

In fact, Bero's and the regime's indiscriminate way of identifying subversives gives ample proof of the imprecision of their analytical tools. What is also revealed here is the will to omniscience or totalizing knowledge of the hegemony, which, in its very desire for absolute apprehension, betrays a profound anxiety about its own effectiveness.[27] The fixation on the material means of meaning-production exhibited in Bero's overwhelming drive to include everything within his narrow ideological frame reminds one of the Professor's intense ambition to reduce the metaphysics of the word to the graphology of the letter in Soyinka's play *The Road* (1965). Significantly, it is suggested that Bero's cannibalism is, on a deeper level, a desire to acquire the power to consume and absorb any form of alterity into one's system of signification, whether that system be understood in terms of the corporeal body or as a body of knowledge. We are thus dealing here with a 'consumptive' as well as a

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[27] *The Foucault Reader*.

'cognitive hegemony'. As Iya Agba bluntly tells him, his quest to cancel out all difference in the name of power has fetishized complexity to such a degree that it is incapable of recognizing simple truths. She tells him: "Your mind has run farther than the truth. I see it searching, going round and round in darkness. Truth is always too simple for a desperate mind" (274). She counsels that in order for him to apprehend other forms of knowledge, he has to stop deploying the regime's interpretative protocols injudiciously and universally:

> Don't look for the sign of broken bodies or wandering souls. Don't look for the sound of fear or the smell of hate. Don't take a bloodhound with you; we don't mutilate bodies. (274)

Here the desire to produce a model of power as total knowledge is shown to lead to ignorance of the obvious, rendering such knowledge unusable in the everyday context of lived experience. This is knowledge as alienated from life and thus no longer a sufficient basis of effective power, save for the illusion of it. It is noticeable that Bero defines power so singularly as innately negative that he assumes that the Earth Mothers must be such, prompting them to differentiate the moral content of theirs from his. Indeed, it can be seen as a mark of the distance Bero has travelled from his former self, as an honest medical professional, that he no longer imagines power as anything other than destructive. Through the construction of an autochthonous agency of resistance, Soyinka articulates his belief in the importance of traditional religions and culture in general as a site for retrieving the postcolonial polity from the abyss of the corrupt and destructive power represented by Bero. He regards this as a much-needed prelude to the process of refashioning an African postcolonial modernity that contains within it a humane and enabling ethic of power. In this way, the valorization of traditional religion serves as a strategic supersession of the postcolonial State's violence and offers a source of countervailing values. He suggests this by recasting the problem of power in Africa as a problem of culture in which such violence should be regarded not only as an instance of universal barbarity but also as an expression of a substantive departure from authentic African concepts and practices of power, particularly those associated with such religious and curative practices as those of the Earth Mothers. In this way, the process of developing a full conceptual grasp of power and the resources for nurturing it into a source of discernible social good can begin in earnest. This is not, of course, a crude nationalism, but a reaffirmation of the need to mine indigenous cultural, political, and cognitive values in order to ground whatever forms of postcolonial hybridity are fashioned in the African soil to ensure that their roots grow deeply and robustly rather than being attached to the indigenous shallowly and superficially, as in Bero's nefarious interest in traditional medicine or as in Kongi's desire to use the Yam Festival merely as a way of establishing himself and supplanting Obi Danlola's spiritual and political hold over Isma.

However, it needs to be recognized that Soyinka does not essentialize the virtues of the 'indigenous episteme', but, rather, emphasizes its ethical performance. In *Madmen and Specialists*, he is contending that postcolonial modernity in Africa has abandoned not only the positive values of traditional culture but equally those of Europe and that, as a consequence, it has aligned itself with destructive forces – whether local or imported – and has turned the postcolonial moment into a re-enactment of the violence of colonial conquest and administration. Indeed, it is here that Soyinka, as in *Opera Wonyosi*, appropriates eighteenth-century European satire as a means of exposing the real conditions of postcolonial power, demonstrating that Dr Bero's particular combination of African and Western knowledge is neither the necessary condition for nor the outcome of postcolonial cultural hybridity. Old Man represents a more constructive form of hybridity. He effects a transgressive mimesis, insinuating himself with the forces of evil, but going even a step further, accepting the ubiquity and power of evil and using that position as a vantage point from which to transform his and others' consciousness of the power conditions of the political formation, in the process conquering the fear of repressive governmental brutality. His adoption of cannibalism as a rhetorical device for bringing home the horror of the civil war is reminiscent of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal."[28] Both Old Man's modest proposal and Swift's legitimize cannibalism on utilitarian grounds. The Priest recounts that, before leaving, Old Man had said, "I'm going to try and persuade those fools not to waste all that meat" (250). Old Man exploits the rhetorical potential of satire for a revealing critique of postcolonial power.

His aim is to employ what Homi Bhabha has, in a different context, described as "sly civility," a strategic but counter-identification with 'the hegemonic'.[29] In pursuit of his project, Old Man justifies cannibalism not only as economic but also as a rational practice in conformity with the scientific ideology of the regime. He identifies a syllogistic flaw in the destruction of human life without consuming it. He argues, "All intelligent animals kill only for food, you know, and you are intelligent animals" (267). Therefore, man must eat what he kills even if it is human flesh; there really is not much difference. Given that the regime's violence is deployed through a scientific discourse of rationality, Old Man's syllogistic subversion attacks the very heart of the regime's validating ideology, showing it up as basing its brutality on a profound fallacy. Old Man undermines the founding 'epistemic power' of the regime's ideological edifice. Furthermore, he demonstrates how, even in its most ruthless application of scientific principles, the regime still needs to retain a notion of the sanctity of human life, at least that of its elite.

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[28] Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents or the Country and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick* (London & Dublin: W. Bickerton, 1730).

[29] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.*

We are once again confronted with the impossibility of pure rationality or science as the legitimating basis of absolute power, as Soyinka reminds us of power's way of confounding absolute categories, what he terms its "lack of completion," a sort of Derridian deconstructive 'supplementarity'.[30] Thus there could be no greater threat to the regime's ideology and practice than Old Man's philosophy of *As* which, in its transgression of the limits of the most transgressive expression of power, proclaims a freedom which diminishes the value of the very life of the agents of death, for they still need a concept of human dignity in order to protect themselves from self-destruction. It is the perpetrator's illusion of absolute difference from the target of violence that Old Man shatters, claiming to have "robbed them of salvation" (267). He rephrases the statement, saying, "I put you all beyond salvation" (266). Effectively, he deprives them of the symbolic means of conceptualizing redemption through an ideology of selective attribution of human identity, of the power to locate themselves beyond 'the hegemonic' ideology they have installed. It is additionally because the capacity to fashion evil power is endless, though Bero and the government delude themselves into thinking that it is their exclusive preserve, that Old Man succeeds in superseding the limits they have set for themselves and confounds them by giving them a taste of their own medicine, so to speak.

Ultimately, Soyinka argues that there is nothing inherently corrupt in power or in cultural hybridity, but it is the underlying motivation and consequences of their use that determine the particular character of discourses and practices of power. Bero chooses to be evil, just as Old Man elects to dedicate his ultra-transgressive philosophy to the redemption of the disabled victims of war from being merely subjects of dominant ideology. Bero's agency is willed rather than being merely a function of a structural contradiction of subjectivity or ideology. His choice is not a matter of historical or of any other form of determinism, nor is Old Man's – their respective choices are made on differing ethical and moral considerations as well as uses and definitions of power. So, even if the postcolonial is constituted as a permanent dialectical interplay between good and evil power, Soyinka suggests that there remains the possibility of using this site as a negation of negation in the manner of Old Man's *As* and the Earth Mother's "herbal fumigation," but that requires making a definite choice of ideological affiliation. The Earth Mothers choose to counter-identify with 'dominant power' and to align themselves with the other marginalized zones of power, such as those represented by Old Man and Si Bero, together constituting an 'historical bloc' of the 'counter-hegemonic forces'.

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[30] Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," 169; see also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr., ed. & notes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (*De la Grammatologie*, 1967; tr. 1976; London: Routledge, 1986): esp. 313–16.

Conclusion

Through the example of Emperor Boky, Kongi, the Leader, and Dr Bero, the Specialist, we learn a lot about the insatiability and voraciousness of power, its drive towards the possession and annihilation of anything in its way, and, as Soyinka would put it, about its incompleteness. Additionally, we are made aware of the countless ways in which negative power disguises itself, including wearing the garb of 'civilization' or sophistication as well as that of tradition, parading itself in a three-piece suit as well as in an *agbada*. Through Old Man, it is evident that power can be undermined by its own logic, by 'the emergent' inserting itself strategically in 'the dominant' and 'the hegemonic'. Old Man's radical agency is produced within the terms of his contingent discursive and political context. Through Daodu, Segi, the Earth Mothers, and even Macheath we are made to see how in every formation of 'the hegemonic', there are 'informal' and 'unofficial' 'emergent' forms of power. Additionally, the three plays educate us on the return of the repressed if it is not included in the dominant template of power; also about the impossibility of fully incorporating all such sites of potential subversion, which renders every 'hegemonic formation' provisional and potentially transitory. Overall, the texts examined suggest that the study of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled must go beyond the clear and formal outlines of power-relations as manifested at a given historical moment, and seek to recover the broader processes which produce, or reproduce and transform, power subjectivities and practices. If that is to be achieved, it is the multiplicity of cultural practices in which power is embedded that must always be attended to. Soyinka has done exactly that by drawing on the genre of satire, the eighteenth-century form in particular, in order, as he puts it in the foreword to *Opera Wonyosi*, to expose the underbelly of corrupt postcolonial power in Africa (300).

Nevertheless, Soyinka offers an example of a productive cross-cultural creative practice, embedding the European satirical form in the African cultural soil, by putting it to distinctly local postcolonial deconstructive purposes. In a sense, my attempt to read Soyinka in relation to cultural studies is a way of paying homage to the spirit of his critique, to his injunction that the study of African culture and literature should employ local cultural reference points, but must do so in dialogue with useful international currents of thought, those that help deepen our understanding of the indigenous and its potential as a resource for devising and implementing an appropriate and enabling transformation of postcolonial formation in Africa.[31] This kind of critical enterprise is especially important now as a way of correcting the impression sometimes given that theorizing about African literature began with the emergence of postcolonial theory in the 1980s. It offers a context in which we might begin to appreciate the distinct contribution Africa has made to the reconceptualization of the notions of power and 'hegemony' through the critique of colonialism and postcolonialism as well as of similarly unequal political formations. Principally, Soyinka offers us a self-reflexive approach to the nature of power and one that is informed by an awareness of the profound and infinite reproducibility of both positive and negative forms and instances of power.

From this perspective, what differentiates the ruled from the rulers is not an essential moral worth nor their innate class outlook but, rather, the fact that they have the potential for learning from their experience of being on the other side of 'hegemonic power' and employing the perspective of that vantage point to change the overall 'power-formation' for the better or radically appropriating it for their own purposes, or, as Raymond Williams suggests, countering the endless adaptability of 'the hegemonic' with an adaptable articulation and practice of resistance.[32] The only guiding principle in all this must be the desire and imperative for justice. As Soyinka puts it, "For me justice is the first condition of humanity."[33] I would like to add, if I may, that in relation to *Opera Wonyosi*, *Kongi's Harvest*, and *Madmen and Specialists*, it must also be a condition of power.

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[31] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976): vii–xii.

[32] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 108–14.

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[33] Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1972; London: Vintage, 1994): 94.

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Interpreting the Interpreters

The Narratives of the Postcolony in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

SOLA ADEYEMI

Introduction

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POSTCOLONIALISM in recent years encourages a re-examination of the narrative strategies and arts of persuasion employed by African writers, many of whom use certain methods to evoke the discourse of plausibility and probability in their fictional creations. Early Nigerian writers in particular, during the period immediately after liberation from British colonial rule in 1960, used their rich oral antecedents, myths, cultural beliefs, and traditional values, combined with values and language inherited from the colonial past, to forge a creative link between their ideas, their ideals, and contemporary issues, and to predict a course for their young nation. Wole Soyinka, for instance, in his novel *The Interpreters* (1965), produced a running commentary on the affairs of the newly independent Nigeria by using inference and associations to describe acts of equivocation and ambivalence among the new African elites and to expose political and religious apostasy. Through humour and subtle suggestion, Soyinka revealed the racial bigotry and social intolerance in Egbo and his co-interpreters, the characters in the novel modelled on the young elites who were taking over the roles previously occupied by Europeans in the civil service, the universities, journalism, and other forms of civil life.

In this essay, I briefly sketch the narrative strategies employed by Soyinka in representing sex and violence as discursive agents to further the agenda of fracturing in postcolonial fiction, projecting an image of his country and predicting its future. Violence in this case refers specifically to the type caused and created by incidents unplanned through neglect or ignorance, such as accidents on the road or physical violation. My purpose is to offer a tentative exploration of such narratives as they inform Soyinka's fiction.

Representative Narration

The Interpreters as a novel has no central or event-driven, monolithic plot; it is instead a sequence of scenes and lyric descriptions that follow chronologically the interactions of a group of characters over a period of some months, interrupted by flashbacks, recollections, and projections. This is an exploratory narrative technique in which the action shifts between two fast-developing Nigerian cities – Lagos, the then capital, and Ibadan, the university city and centre of cultural activities – as well as their surrounding areas: lagoons, roadsides, etc. The main characters are university graduates who studied at British and American universities and have returned to the country to take up positions vacated by the departing Europeans. The novel, written within five years of political independence, focuses on this group of intellectuals who mainly meet over drinks in bars and nightclubs to discuss and reflect on the country's fortunes, and interpret the reality of the young nation. According to Biodun Jeyifo,

> The brilliance and energy of members of this group – as well as their mostly idealistic but often self-absorbed and confused involvement at the margins of the political life of the new nation – are imaginatively rendered by Soyinka […] in his portrait of the group of artists and intellectuals who act as a collective protagonist.[1]

Or, as Olakunle George states, the novel deals with the adventures and neuroses of a group of male intellectuals in the urban environment of Lagos in post-independence Nigeria; included among them are female colleagues, especially Dehinwa, but their "adventures and neuroses" are mostly muted in the narrative.[2]

As Jeyifo further remarks,

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[1] Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004): 4.

[2] Olakunle George, "Missionary Moments: Achebe and Soyinka," an unpublished paper delivered at the African Novels and the Politics of Form Conference. Department of English, University of Pittsburgh, 2006.

> *The Interpreters* is the work of a youthful writer writing about self and milieu with the mixture of exultant panache and playful levity in the use of language that most young, gifted writers display at the start of their careers. (4)

Such displays are sometimes construed as "conceits." For example, the very first sentence of the novel, "Metal on concrete jars my drink lobes," which, decoded, means the grating of iron tables in the "watering hole" – which produces a headache for Sagoe that affects his drinking – can be linked to Soyinka's preoccupation with the road as an image symbolizing the direction of the country: "the sound of the cars on the asphalt surfaces of the city streets is irksome to me, to my efforts to drink up like a man,"[3] suggesting a helpless feeling about a journey along an uncharted road. Soyinka's later preoccupation with road safety and the establishment of safety commissions for the road suggests that it is not merely the "sound of cars" that riles the writer, but the violent accidents, often fatal, that fill his consciousness with anger and despair, and disturb his attempt at savouring the pleasures of the watering holes.

By the time of the novel's publication, Soyinka was already a well-known dramatist and political commentator, and these activities are reflected in both the structure and the technique of *The Interpreters*. The central characters – Bandele, Egbo, Kola, Sagoe, and Sekoni – are presented as 'types' on a broad canvas already occupied by undefined other characters who make their entrances and exits as the narrative demands. They include travellers and identity-seekers like Peter (the German traversing Africa on an American passport); Joe Golder and other professional academics; religious types such as the 'born-again' Lazarus with his coterie of thieves, murderers, prostitutes, and thugs, including Noah, the pickpocket; the disreputable judge Sir Derinola; the corrupt politician Chief Winsala; as well as "accomplices" like girlfriend Dehinwa and mistress Simi. The main characters thus serve as types, allowing the novelist to explore the excesses and growing disillusionment of the educated elite in postcolonial Nigeria. Note, though, that each of these protagonists is a composite character drawn from the group of intellectuals who populated the culture of Lagos and Ibadan in the early 1960s, they also crop up now and again in the novelist's other works, such as *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), *The Road* (1965), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), and *Opera Wonyosi* (1981).

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[3] Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka*, 172.

Soyinka, around this time, was preoccupied with the theme of the road and its association with sudden death, truncated political and social existence, and the cost to the progress and development of the new nation. The road, literally and as a metaphor, goes in both directions – forward to the future but also backward into the past – revealing essences that were not yet mature and ideas that were just formative symbols in the imagination of the interpreters. What makes Soyinka's roads and the interpretations they breed more interesting, more exploratory, more darkly obscure, and, because of that, more dangerous, are the bends, the surprises that arise from poor planning provided by the departed colonial masters. There are potholes, concealed and angled secondary roads, a lack of signposts, sudden terminations, and an ambiguity surrounding ownership of the road, whether claimed by the forestry department, the police, the drivers, the Ministry of Works, or Nature. Like the physical roads, the economic and political routes after independence in Nigeria were unmapped, and Soyinka is able to use the metaphor of the road to depict the uncharted course of postcolonial progress in the new nation.

Transposing Codes: Representing the Interpreters in Other Works

In the poem "Death in the Dawn," where a white cock (male chicken) is presented as a sacrificial offering to ward off the anger of the god who has just taken a man's life, Soyinka presages the misunderstandings that will ultimately besiege the postcolonial political landscape:

> Traveller you must set forth
> At dawn.
> I promise marvels of the holy hour
> Presages as the white cock's flapped
> Perverse impalement – as who would dare
> The wrathful wings of man's Progression....
>
> But such another Wraith! Brother,
> Silenced in the startled hug of
> Your invention – is this mocked grimace
> This closed contortion – I?[4]

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[4] Wole Soyinka, *Idanre & Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967): 11.

This lament echoes the sentiments in other poems from this period, "In Memory of Segun Awolowo" and *Idanre*, as well as in the plays *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*. As in these works, the destructive moment is not necessarily the end of the story; it comes during the journey, paving the way for a re-orientation, a re-direction.

The theme of unexpected waste on roads is more graphically rendered at the beginning of Part II of *The Interpreters*, which describes Sekoni's death in a dawn car accident:

> Some competition there is below, as bridges yield right of way to lorries packed to the running-board, and the wet tar spins mirages to unspeed-limits to heroic cars and their cargoes find a haven below the precipice. The blood of earth-dwellers mingles with blanched streams of the mocking bull, and flows into currents eternally below earth. The Dome cracked above Sekoni's short-sighted head one messy night. Too late he saw the insanity of a lorry parked right in his path, a swerve turned into a skid and cruel arabesques of tyres. A futile heap of metal, and Sekoni's body lay surprised across the open door.[5]

There is, of course, a modernist echo here, as Olakunle George reminds us, of the fragile human body broken by the efficiency of technological 'progress', even as nature glowers relentlessly upon the landscape.[6] But the reality is different; the whole incident is defined by inefficiency, from the overloaded lorry to Sekoni's reckless speeding on a rainy dawn, to even the quality of the constructed road. This gives us the image of Sekoni's corpse with his beard matted with "blood and wet earth," an image that can at once signal waste and future carnage, in a clear link to the myth of Ògún, the Yorùbá god of iron, war and creativity, to which Soyinka continually returns in his writing. Sekoni's violent death, a sacrifice of his body, comes after the political immolation of his intellect on the altar of corruption and political expediency, and the fracturing of an idealistic dream conceived for the development of the newly independent country. We can aver that this is, for Soyinka, the beginning of the wasting of his generation, or the destruction of the generation of the first Nigerians who populate the pages of *The Interpreters* as well as those who, in *Opera Wonyosi*, set out to "expose, reflect, even magnify the decadent, rotted underbelly of a society that has lost its direction [...] in the confidence that sooner or later, society will recognize itself."[7] Sekoni as an icon represents the intellectual, endowed with energy and talent, who repeatedly ends up destroyed by the political technocrats he sets out to support.

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[5] Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann, 1970): 155. Further page references are in the main text.

[6] George, "Missionary Moments."

The reference to "bridges" in the above quotation is repeated as a scene in the Orisun Theatre skit of the 1960s, "Obstacle Race," where the Driver tells the Lady Visitor that the bridge is taken apart and washed piece by piece, as an explanation for the flooding of the road.[8] In fact, bridges feature extensively in Soyinka's early work, as if reminding us that the interpreters are not bystanders watching some hapless Noah being rescued from the hands of potential killers, but figures who try to reverse and revise the scripts being enacted by the political elites. And among the interpreters, Egbo, more than the others, symbolizes this image of a bridge that is sometimes imperfect, deficient or compromised.

Critics such as Eldred Jones and Biodun Jeyifo have maintained a line of interpretation that links Wole Soyinka as a figure in the Nigerian polity to the character of Egbo in *The Interpreters*. Among the interpreters, Egbo seems the most intuitive, the most reflective, and the most narcissistic. Egbo refuses to accept the throne of Osa, a small fishing community, after the death of his maternal grandfather, in place of his parents, who rightly should have become leaders but who had died in a boat accident. Not sure, either, of his role as a top bureaucrat in the Foreign Office of the newly independent country, he drifts midstream as the tide rises and falls, wavering like a reed and unable to make up his mind. "The former option binds him to the past, to ancestral heritage and indigenous cultural matrices, while the latter, potentially at least, opens out to the wider world and the external relations of the emergent nation,"[9] as well as to the future, which he despises as much as he loathes the past. "His reaction is 'panic' at the necessity of making some kind of commitment,"[10] prompting him to ruminate:

> Is it so impossible to seal off the past and let it alone? Let it stay in its harmless anachronistic unit so we can dip into it at will and leave it

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[7] Wole Soyinka, "Foreword," in Soyinka, *Opera Wonyosi* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981): iii–iv.

[8] Wole Soyinka, "Obstacle Race," *Before the Blackout* (Ibadan: Orisun Acting Editions [c.1965]): 37.

[9] Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka*, 174.

[10] James Booth, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981): 133.

> without commitment, without impositions! A man needs that especially when the present, equally futile, distinguishes itself only by a particular abject lack of courage. (121)

Yet, it is in the same water (of indecision, perhaps?) that he goes on a "pilgrimage" to rejuvenate himself or to purge himself of anguish, in the aftermath of Sekoni's death. As Gerald Moore states, it is also to the water that he returns when exhausted by a night of sensual adventure with his mistress Simi[11] or when he wants to explore the mystical. He occupies this liminal space between the past and the future, between the traditional diplomacy of the village council and the modern diplomacy of the Foreign Service. We can perhaps view Egbo as the mystical "mud" that moulds itself aloof from the river, denying any association while enjoying the cooling effect of the water as well as the traditional rootedness provided by the soil. In essence, he presents himself as the bridge, and to reinforce this linking image, he creates his "shrine" to Ogun on the riverbank beside a bridge, where he stretches himself on a rock to await his mystical destiny.

It is also to this place of pilgrimage that he brings Bandele's student with the cryptic statement, "Come, and I will show you a wonder" (127), which precedes another form of violence, the wanton desecration of a virginal figure who represents the future:

> Egbo drew her to him. The hardness was only an outside crust, only the stubborn skin on her self-preservation and it gave in his eager hands. The centre pure ran raw red blood, spilling on the toes of the god, and afterwards he washed this for her, protesting shamefacedly, in the river. And Egbo confessed, not since that night of Simi, have I been so nervous, so fearful of the venturing.
>
> She said, "My exams are next month. You must not try to see me again." (134)

Even her statement after this act seems to reinforce the violence that is lost in Egbo's self-absorption and his preoccupation with what he calls "ritual immolation." He does not even know the girl's name, and he only invited her to the preserve of his "god," his place of pilgrimage, to show her "a wonder" involving the sexual transformation of the virgin into a woman, an act of bridging past and future, in order to pursue the terrifying vision of the

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[11] Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka* (London & Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1971): 82.

"meaning" of life, of his existence, of the role of the interpreters in the new dispensation.

Soyinka in the same way reveals Professor's preoccupation with accidents in *The Road*:

> Below that bridge, a black rise of buttocks, two unyielding thighs and that red trickle like a woman washing her monthly pain in a thin river. So many lives rush in and out between her legs, and most of it a waste.[12]

To Egbo and the Professor, the future lies in intellectual pursuits and not in the germinated seed. Professor's obsession with accidents often transforms objective transcriptions of the events into an encrypted, illusory mental image of what actually happened, as in the following exchange between him and one of the habitués of his "shrine," Kotonu:

KOTONU:	There was this lorry…
PROF:	Before the event friend, before the event. Were you accessory before the fact?
KOTONU:	Even before the bridge, I saw what was yet to happen.
PROF:	[*puts down the pen. Softly –.*] You swear to that?
KOTONU:	It was a full load and it took some moments overtaking us, heavy it was.
PROF:	[*writing furiously.*] It dragged alongside and after an eternity it pulled to the front swaying from side to side, pregnant with stillborns. Underline – with stillborns.[13]

Exploratory Interpretation

The Interpreters comments on aspects of the moral order of the new pseudobourgeois elite, with passages highlighting specific features of social disorder such as corruption (and collusion) in the ranks of the political and bureaucratic elite, unabashed social climbing (Dr Faseyi), mob reactions of various groups, and the hypocrisy and mediocrity among middle-class professionals and technocrats such as Prof. Oguazor and Dr Lumoye. There is a special focus on the plight of exploited young females in this postcolonial setting, something that provokes an aggressive reaction from Bandele, the most level-headed of the new crop of interpreters, who is prompted to issue an imprecation: "I hope you all live to bury your daughters" (251).

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[12] Wole Soyinka, *The Road* (London: Oxford UP, 1965): 58.

[13] Soyinka, *The Road*, 56.

This outburst is as much a judgment on the new postcolony as Bandele's earlier warning to his fellow interpreters against embracing Lazarus's religious organization: "Just be careful. When you create your own myth don't carelessly promote another's, and perhaps a more harmful one" (178). This is a warning, however, that Soyinka views as unheeded by, not just the interpreters, but the whole postcolonial world he depicts in the novel.

Except for Sekoni, the engineer-turned-artist, the anguish of powerlessness, of lack of capability to prevent the "accident" at the bend of road, occupies the narrative focus of the novel, for, as Jeyifo notes,

> theirs is the terrible burden of 'knowledge,' of seeing all and having to bear witness and render an account to themselves. […] As they live through, observe and talk about the encompassing rot which has so swiftly overtaken their 'new' nation, they are forced to delve deep into a scrutiny of motives, causes and effects, of theirs' and others' actions, behaviour and attitudes.[14]

In short, they create myths that render the nation immersed in anguish, like a raft adrift in a raging storm. And their impotence scares the interpreters, for they recognize their inability to realize the dreams that can allay the concerns of the underprivileged in society. The interpreters perceive the anguish of suppression, visible in Noah's "sacrifice" on the altar of homosexuality, in the unnamed student's "sacrifice" on the altar of hypocrisy, and in the visages of Dehinwa's mother and aunt that become so monstrous, having been abstracted into shapes resembling those of bats and witches.

In *The Interpreters*, Soyinka exploits his traditional heritage as well as the neo-colonial mismanagement of Nigeria's post-independence politics and social policies to starkly expose the cracks that would later mar the landscape of the nation. Even though the novel was written only a few years after independence from Britain, Soyinka's narrative strategies capture the birthing pains of a violently disruptive and cancerous growth on his nation's body politic.

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[14] Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka*, 177.

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⌘

The Enduring Relevance of Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* in Twenty-First-Century Ghana

AWO MANA ASIEDU

> They conclude that all things African are bad and all things European and American are good. I know that the world will be a better place if all of us respect one another's way of life, agreeing that no one is either superior or inferior; and that all of us are equal but our ways of seeing the world, worshipping God, rearing children or tending our crops may be different.[1]

THESE WORDS, by a thirteen-year-old in the early 1960s, capture the essence of Kobina Sekyi's ideas as expressed in his play *The Blinkards,* the earliest Ghanaian play, written and first produced in 1916. Situated within the colonial era, it satirizes the mannerisms of people who, in the early-twentieth century, had travelled to Britain and returned to the Gold Coast with condescending attitudes towards their own cultures and peoples; they had bought into the lie of white supremacy and African inferiority. The play focuses on the institution of marriage, questioning the tendency to adopt a Western style of contracting a marriage in an effort to be modern or civilized. It also examines attitudes towards speaking English instead of the local language, and notes the preference for European food and clothing as against African food and clothing. Sekyi exposes and interrogates the apparent inferiority of all things African and the supposed superiority of all things Western. I contend that the play raises questions that are still relevant more than five decades after Ghana's independence.

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[1] From a letter by a thirteen-year-old girl to Kofi Awoonor in Nogales, on the Mexican border in the USA, after he had given a talk at her school. See Awoonor, *The African Predicament: Collected Essays* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006): 4.

I was fascinated to discover how this early-nineteenth-century Gold Coast intellectual was so far ahead of his time in his thinking, and why, though not a trained theatre practitioner, he found the medium of theatre a suitable means of sharing his views with his compatriots, who in large part thought of him as strange. James Gibbs, in an enlightening essay based on a painstaking search through old newspapers and archives, re-creates the conditions under which Sekyi produced his play in Cape Coast in 1916. He provides very useful background information and highlights the success of this first production, noting, however, that "the impact of the production was not followed by the establishment of a theatrical tradition or even by any real circulation of the script of the play."[2] In fact, the play was not published until 1974, eighteen years after Sekyi's death.[3] The reason for this lack of an enduring impact of the production may lie in the unpopularity of the issues he raised. Although a chronology of his life, as traced by Gibbs,[4] indicates that a year after the production of the play he returned to England to further his education, and thus may not have had the opportunity to reproduce it, there is sufficient evidence, as provided later by Gibbs, to suggest that there were people who were suspicious of Sekyi and were not altogether pleased with his play. Gibbs quotes from an article in a Gold Coast newspaper, *The Nation,* reporting that "Before the production, certain wild rumours had been circulated by some person or persons to the effect that the play was of an impious nature." Although the writer goes on to debunk this rumour, concluding that "the lessons it taught were wholesome and they brought some valuable home-thrusts to those who overstep the boundary of propriety in engrafting foreign customs on their own,"[5] it is immediately clear that the production of the play was not welcomed by everyone. This is not at all surprising, as the play lampoons the elite of his day, and many influential people may have felt its barbs quite keenly. That some characters and incidents in the play still resonate with Ghanaian audiences nearly a hundred years after this first production points to Sekyi's brilliant observation and understanding of the psychology of the colonized.

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[2] James Gibbs, "Seeking the Founding Father: The Story of Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* 1916)," in *African Theatre: Histories 1850–1950*, ed. Yvette Hutchison (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010): 23.

[3] Kobina Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (London: Heinemann, 1974).

[4] Gibbs, "Seeking the Founding Father," 24.

[5] "Seeking the Founding Father," 31.

Although there have been some reviews of the play since it was first published in 1974, as well as some articles written about Sekyi and his political views,[6] Gibbs's essay remains, to my knowledge, the only attempt to study *The Blinkards* as a play in production. An earlier study of the significance of names in Ghanaian theatre by Abu Abarry[7] gives some prominence to *The Blinkards* among a number of other plays discussed, but Gibbs's investigation was the first to focus on re-creating the circumstances under which the play was first produced and situating his work in the early-twentieth century. My study focuses on the thematic concerns of Sekyi and the ways in which these concerns persist, albeit in different dimensions, in twenty-first-century Ghanaian society. The essay first presents some information on Sekyi, the man, showing how his life experiences greatly influenced the play. I then proceed to look at the main thematic areas, the institution of marriage, the use of language, attitudes to local food and clothing, as well as the general regard for all things white and the disdain for all things black or African. I then draw some conclusions, pointing out Sekyi's relevance in our contemporary times.

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[6] See, for example, Samuel Rohdie, "The Gold Coast Aborigines Abroad," *Journal of African History* 6.3 (1965): 389–411; K.A.B. Jones–Quartey, "Kobina Sekyi: A Fragment of Biography," *Research Review* (Legon) 4.1 (Michaelmas Term 1967): 74–78; Robert Berner, "*The Blinkards*," *Books Abroad* 49.2 (Spring 1975): 380; Kofi Baku, "An Intellectual in Nationalist Politics: The Contribution of Kobina Sekyi to the Evolution of Ghanaian National Consciousness" (D.Phil., University of Sussex, 1987); J. Ayo Langley, "Modernization and its Malcontents: Kobina Sekyi of Ghana and the Re-Statement of African Political Theory (1892–1956)," *Research Review* (Legon) 6.3 (1970): 1–61, also in *Political Theory and Ideology in African Society: Proceedings of a Seminar* (Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, 1970): 18–77; J. Ayo Langley, "Introduction" to Kobina Sekyi, *The Blinkards: A Comedy, and The Anglo-Fanti: A Short Story*, foreword by H.V.H. Sekyi (Accra: Readwide; Oxford & Ibadan: Heinemann Educational, 1997): xiii–xxix; J. Ayo Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900–1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973): 98–103; Stephanie Newell, "'Been-tos' and 'never-beens': Kobina Sekyi's Satires of Fante Society," in Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to Play the Game of Life'* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002): 157–82. For extracts from Sekyi's writings, see *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856–1970: Documents on Modern African Political Thought from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. J. Ayo Langley (London: Rex Collings, 1979): 242–54, 440–46.

[7] Abu S. Abarry, "The Significance of Names in Ghanaian Drama," *Journal of Black Studies* 22.2 (December 1991): 15–67.

Kobina Sekyi (1892–1956): The Ideologue and Playwright

Kobina Seyki, also known as William Esuman–Gwira Sekyi, was born in 1892 to an affluent family in Cape Coast in the Gold Coast, as Ghana was then known. After his early education at missionary schools, he was sent to England to study. According to J. Ayo Langley, he "was brought up as an Anglo-African in a society whose educated members were brought up to believe that all things African were retrograde and were to be despised, and that thorough anglicisation (and Christianisation) was the passport to 'civilisation' and 'progress'."[8] He was an "Anglomaniac," brought up to be ashamed of his African heritage, even prior to his education in England. His long poem "The Sojourner" reveals his anglomania and finds expression in the play in lines given to Okadu, one of the characters:

> I speak English to soften my harsher native tongue,
> It matters not if often I speak the Fanti wrong.
>
> I'm learning to be British, and treat with due contempt
> The worship of the fetish, from which I am exempt. […]
> I'm clad in coat and trousers, with boots upon my feet;
> And *atamfurafo* and Hausas[9] I seldom deign to greet;
>
> For I despise the native that wears the native dress –
> The badge that marks the bushman, who never will progress.
> All native ways are silly, repulsive, unrefined.
> All customs superstitious, that rule the savage mind. […]
>
> I wish I'd go to England, where, I've been often told,
> No filth and nothing nasty you ever may behold.
> And there I'll try my hardest to learn the English life;
> And I will try to marry a real English wife![10]

Within a short time of his arrival in England, however, Sekyi underwent an identity crisis that resulted in his transformation into an Africanist.[11] K.A.B. Jones–Quartey notes that "the more European philosophy Kobina Sekyi read, the more African he became."[12] One thing that points to this was his decision to use the Fanti version of his name, 'Sekyi', rather than the anglicized version, 'Sackey', adopted by his grandfather.[13] The practice of either adopting an English name or anglicizing a Fanti original was very prevalent at the time and receives quite a bit of attention and ridicule in his short story "The Anglo-Fanti" and in his famous lecture "The Meaning of the Expression 'Thinking in English'."[14] The short story, written in 1918, was published alongside *The Blinkards* in one volume, and serves as a good supplement and aid to understanding some of the situations in the play. One is also very keenly aware that much of the story of Kwesi Onyidzin, the protagonist in "The Anglo-Fanti," is partly Sekyi's own story.[15]

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[8] Langley, "Introduction," xv.

[9] The word '*atamfurafo*' refers to people who wear traditional or 'native' clothes, and Hausas are a group of people from Northern Ghana, looked down upon by the coastal southerners.

[10] Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1997), 45.

[11] Langley, "Introduction," xvi.

He earned a BA as well as an MA in Philosophy, and became an ardent critic of European ideas of progress. He argued that "the development of statute law and the rise of the modern state and bureaucracy […] had nothing to do with morality and progress but were merely the manifestations of increasing artificiality and decadence."[16] On his return home, he became an ardent critic of the colonial administration and his fellow Africans who were easy imitators of their colonial masters. He wrote and argued for a return to traditional culture, to the point of being misunderstood as being unprogressive and fanatical. Sekyi, however, Langley argues, was neither of these: he "believed in modernization, but modernization tempered and controlled by the creative and integrative elements of tradition."[17] In other words, he did not believe modernization had to be the same as westernization. Africa could find its own place in the modern world by developing its own ideas and cultures and not by borrowing blindly everything Western. Indeed, he himself had a certain degree of admiration for some things in Western culture. As Samuel Rohdie notes, there was an

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[12] Jones–Quartey, "Kobina Sekyi," quoted in Langley, "Introduction," xvii.

[13] Langley, "Introduction," xiv; Kwaku Larbi Korang, *Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa: Nation and African Modernity* (Rochester NY: U of Rochester P, 2003): 131–32.

[14] Cape Coast, 1935; Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Cape Coast, ACC No. 531/64. See Kofi K. Saah & Kofi Baku, "Language and Nationalism in Colonial Ghana," in *Identity Meets Nationality: Voices from the Humanities*, ed. Helen Lauer, Nana Aba Appiah Amfo & Jemima Asabea Anderson (Legon & Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2011): 87–92.

[15] Kwadwo Osei–Nyame, "Pan-Africanist Ideology and the African Historical Novel of Self-Discovery: The Example of Kobina Sekyi and J.E. Casely Hayford," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 12.2 (December 1999): 140–42.

[16] Langley, "Introduction," xix.

[17] Langley, "Introduction," xxii.

> ambiguity in Sekyi's attitude […] shared by many educated Gold Coast Africans. The Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society to which Sekyi belonged, and whose interests he defended, combined an admiration for the British and their ideals with a love for their own African ideals and institutions, which they tried to protect from European encroachment.[18]

This ambiguity is born out of what Sekyi calls the "double environment" in which the Anglo-Fanti is nurtured: "in his language, in his diet, in his garb, in his play" which is in turn determined by "the intensity of the religious fervour that animates his people and the extent to which they have abjured African ways and adopted European substitutes."[19] He was nonetheless very clear in his mind about the need to hold on to African values and not replace them totally with Western values, particularly when much of what the West had to offer was in no way better than what was in Africa.

His play may be seen, as Langley concludes, as "an attempt to popularize and dramatize his criticism of the social and cultural consequences of colonialism, and his view of the relationship between freedom, culture and morality."[20] That he chose a play is not so surprising when we consider that he was interested in studying English literature and may have done so, had a friend not persuaded him to study philosophy instead. It is also very likely that he must have watched some theatre performances in England during his first visit there. Additionally, both Langley and Baku indicate that he had other literary writings among his papers, which were never published.[21]

The Blinkards, then, is about the social and cultural effects of colonialism on Africans in Sekyi's day. Nearly a hundred years after it was written and produced, how far-reaching have these effects been? How much has changed over time? Were his fears justified? I shall now turn to the play for the import of Sekyi's ideas.

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[18] Rohdie, "The Gold Coast Aborigines Abroad," 390.

[19] Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1997): 179.

[20] Langley, "Introduction," xxviii.

[21] Langley, "Introduction," xxviii; Kofi Baku, "Kobina Sekyi of Ghana: An Annotated Bibliography of His Writings," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24.2 (1991): 380–81.

The Play *The Blinkards* and Its Continuing Relevance

At the centre of the drama is a rich cocoa farmer, Mr Tsiba, who desperately wants his daughter to be a Western lady. He finds Mrs Borfosem, "an imperfect English clone,"[22] the perfect person to train her in the ways of English people. Mrs Borfosem sets to work by first insisting that she discard her native names and take on two English names, Barbara Ermintrude. She is no longer to wear traditional clothes nor speak Fanti, her mother tongue, but speak only English. In fact, her father Mr Tsiba carries around an English dictionary and attempts to speak English, even though he has very little English vocabulary and is an uneducated man. Soon Mr Okadu, "a half-baked Anglo-Fanti youth,"[23] notices Ms Tsiba and wishes to make her acquaintance. In order to win her over, he also goes to Mr Onyimdze, an England-trained lawyer (and Sekyi's spokesman in the play), to train him in English manners. The lawyer Onyimdze, who is critical of Mrs Borfosem and people like her, is unwilling at first, but agrees, just for the fun of it. He himself delights in wearing native clothes and has no disdain for his culture and language in spite of his English education, much to the amazement and chagrin of Mrs Borfosem and her followers.

Okadu succeeds in winning Ms Tsiba, and they get engaged Western-fashion. Against his better judgement, Mr Tsiba accepts this, because, as Mrs Borfosem points out to him, "In England, the young people get engaged first, and break it to their parents afterwards."[24] He is so bent on being English that he jettisons traditional custom, which demands that the prospective groom pay a bride price. Incredibly, he instead agrees to bear the cost of the wedding, as the father of the bride, "as is done in England." None of the traditional rites required for marriage are followed. The import of this absurdity can be appreciated when we consider the customary requirements for marriage in the African context. As Kwame Gyekye notes,

> In Africa – in the setting of communal relationships and the extended family – marriage is not merely an affair between two individuals who have fallen in love and plan to spend the rest of their lives together. It is a matter in which the lineage groups of both the man and the woman are deeply interested.[25]

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[22] Korang, *Writing Ghana*, 133.

[23] *Writing Ghana*, 133.

[24] Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1997), 73.

[25] Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa,

Mr Tsiba's actions are completely irrational and ridiculous, and Sekyi's audiences would have found them such. It is clear that in attempting to be what he is not, he loses himself in a web of ridiculous behaviour. As Korang rightly notes,

> It is this vitiation of an organic connection between self and place, between the imaginary order that confers an identity on the bourgeois aspirant of the middle class and the objective sociocultural order of the Akan-Fanti, therefore, that Sekyi is at pains to point out in his drama.[26]

Mr Tsiba's wife, who is entirely against the Western way of marriage, goes into a rage and attacks Mr Onyimdze and Mr Okadu, but, in a melodramatic fashion, dies from a heart attack. Mr Tsiba still goes ahead with the wedding of his daughter, without observing the necessary period of mourning for his wife. Ms Tsiba's maternal grandmother salvages her granddaughter's honour by taking her away from Okadu and giving her to another who is willing to perform the customary rites. Okadu and the parson in Cape Coast bring charges of bigamy against Ms Tsiba and she is dragged to court. Lawyer Onyimdze, who deeply regrets his part in all of this, successfully defends her, using native law in a colonial court. The parson is beside himself with rage at the fact that a marriage contracted in Church can be set aside in favour of one contracted in a traditional manner. Sekyi makes his point: traditional customs should take precedence over Western customs.

Mrs Borfosem, meanwhile, after her houseboy, drunk on Western liquor, attempts to kiss her, is completely cured of her excessive love for Western ways and goes back to wearing traditional clothes. She confesses at the end of the play that she actually feels more comfortable in her native dress. Her husband, Borfosem, sums up the moral of the play in the final lines:

> If only we were national, we should be more rational and infinitely more respectable. Our ways and our things suit our climate. [...] The people of the old days were wise indeed: if only we would follow the customs they left us a little more, and adopt the ways of other races a little less, we should be at least as healthy as they were.[27]

1996): 78. For a discussion of Yorùbá marriage rites in colonial Lagos, which are very similar to some traditional Ghanaian marriage rites, see also Kristin Mann, "Marriage Choices Among the Educated African Elite in Lagos Colony, 1880–1915," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14.2 (1981): 201–28.

[26] Korang, *Writing Ghana*, 133.

[27] Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1997), 173.

In the premiere production in 1916, Borfosem was played by Sekyi himself; thus, these words, coming from the playwright and serving as the summing-up of the moral of the play, were doubly effective.[28]

The strength of Sekyi's play lies mainly in his memorable characters, each of whom is named symbolically. As Abu Abarry rightly notes,

> any critical understanding of the play must be linked with the meanings of the Akan names assigned to various characters based on their conduct, utterances, and symbolism.[29]

His essay provides the meanings of the Akan names of the characters, so I shall not go into those details here. Suffice it to say that Sekyi's attitude towards these characters and his ridiculing of them is evident in the names he assigns them; 'Tsiba', for example, translates as 'small brain', or 'brainless', while 'Okadu' implies someone who follows fashion blindly, and 'Borfosem' means an imitator of the white man's mannerisms. The main concern of my essay, as mentioned earlier, is to examine how much or how little has changed, and thus the question arises whether there are people and situations now, in the twenty-first century, comparable to those Sekyi ridicules in his play. To what extent are African traditions eroded in favour of Western traditions?

The Enduring Impact of Colonialism

It is true that colonialism did not succeed in a total westernization of African countries. There persist strong presences of African traditions in modern Africa despite pervasive europeanization, resulting in what postcolonial theorists describe as hybrid or syncretic situations. For example, although there are democratically elected governments and constitutions in most African countries, obvious imports from the West, alongside these are dozens of chiefs and sub-chiefs who come to power through traditionally prescribed procedures and who rule in their own communities; these range from the very powerful *Asantehene* to more lowly chiefs ruling over small areas of people. While this situation works to a large extent, there are often tensions between them. For instance, although the Ghanaian constitution clearly indicates that chiefs may not engage in partisan politics, the truth of the matter, of course, is that many of these chiefs do in fact have political leanings and may occasionally express them. Politicians also court the approval of these chiefs in their bid for votes and support. Election campaigns always include delegations of political parties paying 'courtesy calls' on prominent chiefs.

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[28] See Gibbs, "Seeking the Founding Father," 27.

[29] Abarry, "The Significance of Names," 158.

In other spheres of social life also, this hybrid situation is observable. It is in the marriage arena that this is perhaps most clearly to be found. Let me illustrate with a recent event. On 15 July 2010, newspapers in Ghana carried the story that the Black Stars goalkeeper Richard Paul Franck Kingson (note the string of European names, which could easily have occurred in 1916) was to "wed his woman" on 17 July. What the papers failed to mention, however, was that this couple had already been married for some years and even had children. Why, then, this wedding announcement? The fact is, they had got married traditionally and were now ready to have a Western-style ceremony. This wedding of Mr and Mrs Richard Paul Franck Kingson is not a unique occurrence. I have heard of and witnessed such couples being married in the traditional way for twenty to thirty years – going through this ritual of a Western wedding, complete with a long flowing white gown and all manner of accessories. The so-called 'white wedding', a vestige of our colonial heritage, has become an accepted part of Ghanaian society, and exists alongside our traditional marriage ceremony, which is erroneously referred to as the 'engagement' of the couple. It is worth noting that it is regarded as prestigious to have a wedding, and women proudly wear their 'Mrs' tag, which is not possible without a wedding ceremony either in church or in the civil courts.

What is important to note (and which Sekyi, if he were alive today, might perhaps have approved of) is the fact that the traditional ceremony is insisted upon, before the legal or church wedding. One may decide to have only the traditional ceremony, but it is not possible to have the others without it.

Another key colonial legacy that is in a real sense a passport to participating in a westernized society and a 'globalized' world is the English language. Ghana's official language is English, but it is no secret that the majority of Ghanaians are most comfortable speaking their own mother tongues. The plethora of FM radio stations with their countless call-in programmes in local languages, particularly Akan, bears testimony to this fact. Even in the arena of theatre and performance, it has been noted that actors are much more at ease and perform with much more dexterity when the language of the play is their own mother tongue.[30] Be this as it may, there is still an insistence on the use of English in the public arena, as English serves as the lingua franca of the country and beyond. To be heard and to be seen, one must be adroit in the use of English; thus, many Ghanaian children in twenty-first-century Ghana grow up speaking English as their first language. Their parents and teachers, convinced of their need to be adept in its use right from the start, argue that they are bound to learn the local languages as they grow up. This belief is reinforced by the educational system, which emphasizes English to the neglect of local languages. Local language use in education in Ghana has quite a complicated history, with policies fluctuating between local language use at the basic levels and English later to only English from start to finish. Baku and Saah deal with this situation in their essay on "Language and Nationalism in Colonial Ghana." They discuss the importance Sekyi and other educated Ghanaians of his day placed on the use of local languages to combat the effects of colonialism. They also note that although Christian missionaries and their local collaborators "recognized the importance of the use of Ghanaian languages in schools [...] in pre-independence Ghana, the opposite has been the case since independence." This ironic situation, they maintain, is due to an "infatuation with the English language" and a lack of appreciation for "the virtues of our languages as the vehicles for the expression of our national identity."[31]

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[30] See Awo Mana Asiedu, Sarah Dorbgadzi & Ekua Ekumah, "Language and Body in Performance: Working Across Languages in the Ghanaian Production *I Told You So*," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21.1 (2011): 50–59.

Thus, today, although there may not be open disdain for the use of the local language, as was the case in Sekyi's day and is aptly dramatized in his play, there is still a preference for the use of English. English has been privileged above local languages because of its status as the language of education and commerce as well as the official language of the country. That Sekyi makes language a central issue in his play, adapting a bilingual approach where some of his characters spoke only in Fanti (followed by Sekyi's English translations) points to his clear understanding of the danger English posed to local languages. In this instance, he remains highly relevant and vindicated. What is most worrying about the language situation, and what is in many ways very similar to the early-twentieth-century situation satirized by Sekyi, is the affectations adopted in speaking English. One has only to tune in to radio or television stations to hear the affected accents of presenters, eager to sound like African-American or British presenters. Many of these people have not been abroad, and those who may have travelled abroad present even more acute affectations. In this case, the more foreign your accent, the better. Tales have been told of people getting jobs as presenters chiefly because of their foreign accents. It is true that, today, travelling to Western countries is very common, and there are foreign-born-and-bred Ghanaians with genuine foreign accents. In fact, such persons are held in high esteem and are seen almost as better than those who have never travelled abroad. And so, in a very real sense, not much has changed since Sekyi's times in terms of the attitudes of people towards those who have been abroad. This situation is compounded by economic factors, where those who have been abroad are usually better-off financially, or are seen as such.[32] This also accounts for the numerous young people eager to migrate to the West in search of greener pastures.

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[31] Kofi K. Saah & Kofi Baku, "'Do not Rob Us of Ourselves'," 96–97.

The final issue the play highlights is attitudes towards African clothing and food. In Sekyi's day, there were those who were referred to as 'frock ladies' and others as 'ntam frafor', or those who wore 'native' dress. Mrs Borfosem insists on Ms Tsiba's wearing frocks and eating chocolates rather than roasted plantain when they visit Lawyer Onyimdze. At the garden party, the young ladies reprimand Mr Onyimdze because he wears 'native' clothes to a garden party. "You don't behave yourself. Look at your cloth: it is savage," one says, and another adds, "You have English education, yet you wear cloth. Don't you misbehave, then?"[33] Clearly, wearing traditional clothes was seen as being savage and uncivilized, and the England-trained lawyer was not to be excused for his behaviour. In contemporary Ghana, interestingly, lawyers have to be dressed in suits and are sometimes decked out in their professional wigs in pursuance of their jobs. They have a dress code that demands that they look Western while at work. Many of these people, however, in their private lives, at weekends, would most probably wear more traditional apparel. Certainly no one in Ghana today would look down on anyone wearing traditional clothes; in fact, the colourful fabrics used in making traditional wear can also be used to design Western-style dresses and suits for women. Thus, in the arena of clothing, the notion of hybridization is taken to a whole new level.

Woollen clothing as worn in Sekyi's day, despite the tropical heat, is not likely to be worn by the generality of people today. Although young people in particular may be seen in jeans, T-shirts, and other Western-style clothes, more often than in traditional clothes, they are very open to wearing traditional clothes as well on certain occasions, such as weddings and church services, and would therefore not make fun of anyone who might opt for the latter. Traditional wear is as acceptable as formal wear. In recent times, a government directive has resulted in what is called 'Friday wear', where government officials and civil servants wear traditional fabrics and clothes on Fridays. Although some see this as a positive step, others see it as indicating that our own clothes have been relegated to once a week and are perceived as informal wear or 'slumming'. Evidently this is not a simple issue; however, it certainly is not as much of a problem as it was in Sekyi's day.

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[32] Amma Darko's novel *Beyond the Horizon* (Oxford & Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1995) presents this very situation, highlighting the real dangers and disillusionments that come with these attitudes and pursuits.

[33] Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1997), 61.

The area of food is also a highly hybridized one. Many Ghanaians enjoy local Ghanaian dishes and no one would look down on anyone for preferring to eat roasted plantains or fufu or any other local dishes rather than Western cuisine. However, in recent times, with the continuing rise of the middle classes, eating out at fancy restaurants and fast-food places has come to be seen as a sign of well-being and progress. These places serve a variety of dishes from West and East, are truly cosmopolitan in nature, and may even serve local dishes. A study by Olutayo and Akanle presents interesting findings on Nigerian perceptions about these eateries and class consciousness. They conclude: "because fast food is attractive, but expensive, anyone who can afford it thus acquires an enviable status."[34] Their findings in many respects hold true for the Ghanaian context. Thus, although people who can afford to eat in such places may be regarded as better-off, it does not imply that they would not enjoy eating their local food or look down on others who prefer eating local food. In fact, these new diets have been linked with all manner of 'new' diseases, and so may in a large measure be regarded as inferior to our own local dishes, which tend to be much more natural and healthy.

Conclusion

Modernization need not equate with westernization. No culture is superior to another and none should thus be seen as inferior to others. This was the view of Kobina Seyki many years before Ghana became an independent nation in 1957. He warned the political elite that they should not blindly follow Western concepts of modernization and neglect their own traditional systems of government. He was exasperated with his fellow countrymen and women who had so readily taken on Western cultural practices, often misguidedly. According to Langley, he was an advocate of

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[34] A.O. Olutayo & O. Akanle, "Fast Food in Ibadan: An Emerging Consumption Pattern," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 79.2 (May 2009): 223.

> traditional concepts of duty and social obligation, and [pushed to] Africanize the educational system to arrest the individualism and debilitating effects of excessive Westernisation. In short, he was particularly concerned with the basic question: how to Westernize without being Westernised; how to preserve while modernizing.[35]

He sought, through his aptly titled play *The Blinkards,* to draw attention to the folly of trying to be something we are not. This play is still performed in Ghana today, because of its continuing relevance for twenty-first-century Ghanaians, many of whom have yet to learn the lessons of the drama, encapsulated in the words of Kofi Awoonor's early poem – "We have found a new land" – quoted by Ayo Langley at the start of his introduction to the play. Two lines, in particular, are highly pertinent:

> Those who want to be seen in the best company
> Have abjured the magic of being themselves.[36]

Today it is difficult to imagine Africa or Ghana without its westernized institutions, traditions, and practices; our educational system, system of government, language, clothing, and even our food and marriage, as I have indicated, have all been influenced in one way or the other by Western culture as a result of the colonial encounter. It may be true to say, however, that Sekyi's fear of the annihilation of African culture and traditions has not happened. What has happened instead is a hybridization of African culture. Some Ghanaians and other Africans are truly themselves when they are partly Western and partly African; there is hardly anyone, or any institution, that is truly authentic and singularly African or Ghanaian in their dress, marriage contract, eating habits, or language. The language situation, however, remains worrying, as our local languages are in real danger from our over-emphasis on the importance of English.

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[35] Langley, "Modernization and its Malcontents," 9.

[36] Kofi Awoonor. "We have found a new land," in Awoonor, *Night of My Blood* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1971): 28. Langley, "Introduction," xiii, errs by misquoting "abjured" as "adjured."

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The Agony and the Ecstasy

Sierra Leonean Dramatists' Confrontation with the Sierra Leonean Landscape

EUSTACE PALMER

The tremendous transformation in the Sierra Leonean literary and cultural scene in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was largely due to the rise of plays in the vernacular written by a group of young indigenous dramatists who wished to change not only the nature of the local theatre but also that of the theatre audience. Dramatists such as Dele Charley, John Kolosa Kargbo, Clifford Garber, and Akmid Bakarr formed indigenous drama groups that were quite different from the British-oriented ones that had preceded in Freetown, introduced professionalism to the Sierra Leonean stage, and, in plays in Krio such as Charley's *Titi shine shine* (1968), Kargbo's *Poyo Togn Wahala* (1979), and Bakarr's *Sugar Daddy Nar Case* (1983), produced works that packed the Sierra Leonean theatre and with which the ordinary citizen could identify.[1] A major shift thus took place in the nation's cultural scene. However, brilliant though some of these plays were, they could not readily find publishers, mainly because there were hardly any willing to take the risk of publishing plays written in the vernacular. Such publications would have found an extremely limited audience. Some of these dramatists, however, also wrote remarkable plays in English that were received with great acclaim by Sierra Leonean audiences and even beyond, but still found no publisher. Dele Charley's *Blood of a Stranger*, for instance, was the Sierra

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[1] For a fuller account of this dramatic renaissance consisting largely of plays in the vernacular, see my "Vernacular Drama against the Context of the Development of Sierra Leonean Drama," in *Knowledge Is More Than Mere Words: A Critical Introduction to Sierra Leonean Literature*, ed. Eustace Palmer & Abioseh Michael Porter (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2008): 123–36.

Leonean entry to FESTAC, the African Festival of the Arts held in Lagos in 1977, and it was rapturously received in that magnificent Nigerian national theatre building. Scholars wanting to study and teach these plays were therefore severely handicapped. It was thus with great enthusiasm that one saw the recent publication of five of the most popular and most important of these plays in English edited by Iyunolu Osagie.[2] This essay will attempt a detailed study of these five plays by Dele Charley, John Kolosa Kargbo, Julius Spencer, Tonie French, and Mohamed Sheriff.

Let me Die Alone is a powerful tragedy by the late John Kolosa Kargbo, who was arguably the most important and, certainly, one of the most prolific of the younger generation of Sierra Leonean dramatists. Most of his extremely well-crafted plays were written in the vernacular, Krio, and warmly received when staged in Freetown. They were popular precisely because they addressed some of the fundamental ills that seemed to be endemic to Sierra Leonean society. Drama, of course, has a way of bringing home to the people, in a very direct way denied to the novel and even to poetry, the inimical and inequitable nature of the environment in which they live, and Kargbo's plays did just that. *Poyo Togn Wahala*, in particular, brilliantly demonstrated the corruption, incompetence, and indifference of the ruling elite. Because of this, Kargbo incurred the wrath of the government of the day, and he was forced to go into exile in Nigeria, where he continued to expand his education in the field of drama and exploit those aspects of the media that he could. *Let Me Die Alone* is one of the few plays he wrote in English and, like the others staged in Sierra Leone, it was warmly received. Even if one disregarded the achievement of the plays written in the vernacular, this play alone would be sufficient to propel John Kolosa Kargbo to the front rank of African dramatists. Demonstrating that he could flawlessly deploy the resources of the English language to maximum effect and yet, like Achebe and Soyinka, introduce ingredients from the indigenous Mende language and thus create a genuine African environment, Kargbo gathers up in this play most of the concerns that have been at the heart of modern African drama: the conflict between a proud traditional society and a haughty and even contemptuous alien civilization bent on imposing its will; the conflicts and struggles within that traditional society itself as various elements jockey and bargain for power and dominance; the responsibilities of rulership and the qualities needed for the successful exercise of the same; the limits of human authority; the battle of the sexes and conflict between genders in a rapidly changing society; and the importance of traditional dancing and singing as well as traditional beliefs, both to the themes and to the nature of the environment as a whole.

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[2] *Theater in Sierra Leone: Five Popular Plays*, ed. Iyunolu Osagie (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2008).

Let Me Die Alone, based on solid research, expertly deploys historical materials in the presentation of the life and times of the legendary Madam Yoko, a woman who, in her own right, became a queen or chief in the Mende tribe, one of that redoubtable line of powerful women in pre-colonial and colonial times who succeeded against all odds in becoming rulers in a patriarchal society and going on to rule successfully. The play thus begins with an emphasis on feminist issues that are at the forefront of African literature today, and these permeate the entire play. In a brilliant opening scene, we see Madam Yoko's husband, the weak chief Gbanya, trying to force a protesting Madam Yoko to go to bed with him, for he is convinced that that is all a woman is fit for – to dance, to sing, to cook, and to satisfy her husband's sexual needs. He is also convinced of the smallness of the feminine mind and its total incapacity to comprehend weighty and complicated matters of state. The rest of the play is similarly shot through with utterances by other men, such as Lamboi, Musa, and Ndapi, all convinced that women can never occupy positions of authority and are fit only to cook, breed children, and provide comfort for their husbands' beds. If they fail to discharge any of these obligations satisfactorily, they must be severely beaten into subjection.

Madam Yoko intends to confound all these prejudices and preconceptions. She reminds her husband, who senses that his death is near, that he promised she would take over the kingdom upon his death. And she intends to hold him to his word. It would appear that the husband had made the promise in a moment of venality, when he was smitten by Madam Yoko and wanted to enjoy her body, because he now intends to renege on his promise, proclaiming that a kingdom needs a strong man at its head, especially during a period of war.

Indeed, one might say that the main conflict in this play is between Madam Yoko and those who are convinced that a woman cannot rule and who are determined that she will never obtain the rulership. Even while Chief Gbanya is reneging on his promise and treating Madam Yoko as a mere woman, Lamboi and Musa, the villains of the piece, are plotting to poison the chief and wrest power, because they are convinced that the weak Gbanya will hand over the kingdom to Madam Yoko; and they are not prepared to allow that. They thus introduce unparalleled intrigue into this fascinating plot, replete with blackmail, murder, and even human sacrifice, all in the interest of acquiring power.

The situation is enormously complicated by the intervention of the arrogant and contemptuous British Governor, the representative of her Imperial Majesty Queen Victoria, who, in the presence of the leading elders and many of the people, emasculates the weak Chief Gbanya by a public flogging. The contempt of the British for traditional authority could not have been more glaringly underscored. Humiliated by the British, Chief Gbanya is then poisoned by Lamboi and Musa in a bid for power, but the Chief, in his dying moments, comes to his senses and asks Yoko to take charge of the kingdom. It is now that Madam Yoko proves her mettle. She rises to the occasion, demonstrates tremendous courage and sagacity, and succeeds in overcoming the resistance of her enemies and taking over the kingdom. She is even prepared to be initiated into the Poro society, a society normally reserved for men and which the head of state must join, and she eventually becomes a highly successful ruler, greatly expanding the boundaries of her kingdom and fighting wars that her late husband would never have dared to fight. She even proves herself a consummate diplomat who temporarily wins the respect and admiration of the British Governor, whereas her husband had aroused nothing but the utmost condescension.

But it is all done at a price. Madam Yoko is forced to forgo the delights of motherhood in order to demonstrate that she can be and act like a man, and there are times when she is capable of behaving with unusual cruelty and brutality, because surviving in the harsh male-dominated world of political manipulation demands this. She proves more than a match for those who, like Lamboi and Musa, still believe that a woman should not rule and are prepared to use intrigue and false accusations of murder to get her dethroned. But by sheer force of will, strength of character, and acuteness of intellect she is able to beat them at their own game. However, Madam Yoko is ultimately undermined by the treachery of the British Governor, who severely curtails the extent of her kingdom. Rather than face such humiliation, she prefers, like Cleopatra, to commit suicide and die a truly great tragic heroine admired by almost all.

In *Let Me Die Alone*, John Kolosa Kargbo has created a compelling female protagonist. He has also shown himself quite adept in manipulating the language to create various registers, some of which, like the affected Governor's messenger, introduce a touch of humour into an otherwise sombre play. Here is an example:

> GUARD: Who goes there?
>
> MESSENGER: What? Who dares address me in that…?
>
> 2ND GUARD: Struggle and cross life's river of no return.
>
> GUARD: It's the parrot-with-the-big-words, the Governor's messenger. What do you want here?
>
> MESSENGER: Heh! Heh! Heh! He's throttling me. What…. Is this the red carpet reception for the servant of his Lordship the Governor, servant of her Imperial Majesty, the Queen of Great Britain?
>
> GUARD: Look, parrot, do you want to live long enough to see tomorrow's sunrise? What do you want here? The night is unhealthy.
>
> MESSENGER: I demand an explanation for this vicious welcome. I have missive of the utmost national and international importance. And when I risk my life and limb to bring it here, all I get is a savage attack from you apes. If you think you can threaten me, then you are in dire need of psychoanalytic…
>
> GUARD: (*slaps him*) Now don't you go bursting our ears with those big words. If you don't know, tonight is *Poro* night. If you encounter the fearful *Gbeni* as you go around yapping, yapping, and yapping, your nose will rot, leprosy will devour your fingers, cataracts will marry your eyeballs…
>
> MESSENGER: And elephantiasis will cling to my appendages the way mud clings to the pedal extremities of an agriculturist in the swamps? (Scene 3)

This play is a brilliant presentation of a complex leading female character coping with a genuine traditional African society going through the tremors of transition. One can only speculate about the direction Kargbo's genius would have taken had he lived longer.

Blood of a Stranger is undoubtedly the best and most popular of the numerous plays of Dele Charley, who was at the heart of the cultural renaissance that consisted of the flowering of drama which started in Sierra Leone in the 1960s and continues to the present day. Out of a small group of amateur players connected with St John's Church in the east end of Freetown, he went on to build the towering Tabule Experimental Theatre, the leading dramatic group in Freetown, a group that specialized mostly in plays in the vernacular, plays that enjoyed tremendous success and greatly expanded the parameters of theatrical activity in Sierra Leone. A highly competent director, he was also his group's leading playwright, writing about thirty plays in Krio and English along with adaptations in Krio of some of the plays of Shakespeare such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth*, and forging a new dramatic genre, the dance drama. His *Blood of a Stranger* came to life on the Sierra Leonean stage as a powerful and spectacular extravaganza and was hailed both at home and at the African Festival of the Arts in Nigeria in 1977 as African theater at its best. Like *Let Me Die Alone*, *The Patriot*, and many other African plays, the play transcends the domestic and deals with national, indeed international, issues. It is about governance and state power, about the attempt by alien forces to impose control on a proud people with their own customs and governmental structures, and about the fraudulent attempt of the alien power to exploit the resources, human and otherwise, of the colonized people for its own benefit. The play thus assumes almost epic proportions. In a sense, *Blood of a Stranger* is a massive exercise in cultural and national retrieval. It is not just about the clash of cultures, because that would imply a confrontation between two competing systems that do not understand each other. Rather, it is about the arrogance and contempt with which the alien colonizing force regards the local culture and attempts to degrade and destroy it, and the heroic attempts of the indigenous system to assert itself and regain mastery. One of the most significant scenes in the play is that in which Whitehead, the drunk and corrupt Englishman, shows tremendous disrespect to King Santigi of Mandoland, and Kindo, the play's protagonist, forces him to prostrate himself and kiss the ground before the feet of the king. In a similar scene, Parker, the detribalized spokesman of the corrupt Englishman, is stripped naked and flogged by the locals for showing similar disrespect. Both scenes show a reversal of the usual scenario between colonizer and colonized in which it would have been the colonized who would usually have been thrown to the ground, stripped naked, and flogged, and both constitute a symbolic vignette showing the proud determination of the indigenous people to assert their independence and the authenticity of their culture.

Generally, the play is about the fraudulent and corrupt activities of a white man, appropriately called Whitehead, who arrives in Sierra Leone during the colonial period, shows profound disrespect for the people's customs and traditions, corrupts some of them with alcohol and drugs, and attempts to seduce their women and steal their diamonds. But the playwright also suggests that he is only able to do this with the connivance of some of the major indigenous elements who are motivated by greed and lust for power. Although the play is thus situated in the early colonial period, it virtually becomes a paradigm of the modern history of Sierra Leone. Whitehead is the type of the colonial exploiter. He comes to the country pretending that he intends to plant tobacco and thus contribute to the nation's wealth, but what he actually introduces is the drug marijuana, which has a deleterious effect on the people's health, and his real intention is to use that as a smokescreen to steal the people's diamonds while they are dazed from the effect of the drug. Diamonds also become (as they will do in subsequent Sierra Leonean literature) the symbol of all those forces that will lead to the degradation of Sierra Leone society, and the motive for political manipulation.

Kindo, the play's protagonist, represents all those idealists who are prepared to assert the genuine tradition and defend it against all those who would flout it or exploit it for financial or political gain. And there are quite a few of those, not least Whitehead himself. For instance, in order to get the king and the people to welcome Whitehead, who deceives them into thinking that he has come to plant tobacco, the priest Soko and the ambitious Maligu tell the egregious lie that the spirits have proclaimed that the stranger should be welcomed into their society. Later, they tell an even more egregious lie: that the spirits demand human sacrifice, the blood of a virgin and a stranger, because of their designs on Wara, the girlfriend of Kindo. By a remarkable turn of events, however, the stranger's blood that is spilt is that of Parker and the fraudulent Whitehead.

There are those who might find the conclusion of the play strange and rather contrived, but it bestows tremendous stature on the protagonist Kindo, who has all along idealistically stood for what is right, but who must now go into exile because he has killed a man. However, he promises to return and continue the process of purging a society that has been corrupted. On the whole, this is a powerful play, and compelling in performance. Dele Charley's untimely death in the mid 1990s, like that of John Kolosa Kargbo, was a sad loss not only to Sierra Leonean literature but to African literature as a whole.

Julius Spencer, the author of *The Patriot*, is a professional man of the theater with a Ph.D. in drama. This can be clearly seen in the modern theatrical innovations he deftly introduces into the play, such as the clever use of a narrator who emerges from the back of the audience and then merges into the play as one of the characters; the adroit use of lighting; the use of multiple sets with, at times, one scene dissolving into another; and the use of silences. And he has been able to combine these with more traditional devices such as miming, drumming, singing, and dancing – the staples of any African play – and has thus created a most spectacular and compelling dramatic fare.

If Spencer's main aim in The *Patriot* is to arouse the audience's and reader's contempt for the arrogance, brutality, savagery, and capacity for lies and deception of the British imperialist, he has been enormously successful. At the same time, however, the dignity, courage, nobility, and charisma of the protagonist, Bai Bureh, register very firmly on the mind, and he takes his place with other celebrated freedom fighters and opponents of the arrogant and supercilious British, such as the Kenyan Dedan Kimathi, as the British strive to impose their rule on a proud people.

The play opens with the narrator on stage involving the audience in the singing of a song that many contemporary Sierra Leoneans were taught as youngsters and that was meant to degrade, denigrate, and mock Bai Bureh, one of the legendary heroes of Sierra Leone and a veritable freedom fighter.

> Bai Bureh was a warrior
> He fought against the British
> The British made him surrender
> *I ala koto maimu* (meaning: "Please sir, I beg you")
> *Ah koto bekithong*
> *I ala koto maimu* (I.i)

This in itself suggests the way in which the British succeeded in brainwashing some of the colonized into accepting the dubious results of colonialism and demeaning those who resisted the evils of imperialism. It is also one of the ways in which Spencer suggests that contemporary Sierra Leoneans are devoid of the kind of patriotism and national pride that Bai Bureh embodied. Spencer and the narrator have cleverly succeeded in turning the joke on us, the audience, especially if we joined in singing the song.

Immediately afterwards, we see the courage and mysteriousness of Bai Bureh, then called Kpanka of Kase, as he single-handedly outwits his Limba enemies, escapes miraculously, and reappears when almost everyone else had given him up for dead. Thus begins the aura of mystery and legendary heroism that was to surround the figure of that indomitable warrior even before he began his resistance against the British. The only other resistance fighter one can compare him to is Dedan Kimathi, who similarly developed a reputation not only for courage and fearlessness but also for suddenly appearing and disappearing and being in several places at any one time. Like Micere Mugo and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Spencer succeeds in enveloping his protagonist with this sense of mystery and charisma.

Bai Bureh (or Kpanka as he was then) is a complex character who, on being converted to Islam, decides to give up the life of a warrior because his faith has convinced him that killing is wrong. He chooses the arts of peace instead, becoming an industrious and successful farmer. But, being the true patriot he is, he eventually yields to his people's plea that he should become the new Chief of Kase, because everyone is convinced that only he has the qualities that the new times require in a leader and Chief. Moreover, one of the influential leaders of the people has declared that only men of peace should be chosen as Chiefs. Bai Bureh therefore reluctantly agrees to accept the position on condition that as Chief he will not fight against his fellow black man and will embark on no wars of conquest. The author makes us admire his honesty, dignity, and idealism as he is crowned Bai Bureh.

It is a measure of the ineptitude and wrong-headed lust for domination characteristic of the British that this man who had conscientiously and religiously given up the arts of war for the arts of peace is once more drawn into fierce military confrontation. In their drive to establish rulership and in their supercilious belief that they are destined to rule the peoples of Africa, the British use fraud, deception, and lies; they pretend that they merely want the Chiefs of the people to sign treaties of friendship with them, to consult them before going to war with one another, and to ask them to mediate in such disputes because they were merely traders and missionaries and needed an atmosphere of peace and security to carry on their activities. Bai Bureh and some of the other Chiefs are perceptive and intelligent enough to realize that the British are bent on rulership, otherwise there would be no need for the indigenous Chiefs to consult them before going to war with one another. One of the most compelling set pieces of the play is the great debate among the Chiefs as they discuss the British request. The Chiefs all emerge as highly intelligent and compelling characters, and Bai Bureh, in particular, is invested with true nobility as, having argued strenuously against the treaty all along, he reluctantly but graciously agrees to go with the majority view and sign the treaty, on condition that they impress on the white men that they are not giving up their sovereignty.

Almost immediately the scene dissolves into another in which the cynicism, fraud, and deception of the British are glaringly revealed. Spencer shows himself just as adept in the characterization of the British Governor Cardew, the District Commissioner, and the Commander of the frontier force, Major Talbert, as he is of the indigenous Chiefs. He certainly captures their idiosyncratic tones and mannerisms and is also able to highlight the differences between them. They assume that the signing of the treaty by the Chiefs means that the latter now owe allegiance to them, and they declare their intention of establishing a protectorate over all the areas within their sphere of influence and to ask the Chiefs to travel to their headquarters and receive their staffs of office from them, a symbolic gesture that would confirm their overlordship. The Chiefs correctly interpret this as meaning their ceding of sovereignty to the British, and accordingly resist. But those who do so are unceremoniously arrested and locked up, thus severely eroding their dignity as Chiefs of the people.

Furthermore, the British declare that a tax will be levied on every hut in the area, thus confirming their determination to impose overlordship on a proud people. Bai Bureh is thus proved to have been right all along, and the man who had conscientiously decided to renounce the arts of war and embrace the arts of peace now becomes the skilful and courageous leader of the resistance against the British and is invested with even greater dignity, nobility. and an aura of charismatic mystery. He becomes the leader of what, in Sierra Leone history, has come to be known as the hut tax rebellion. The issue was not really the economics of the tax, for most of the people could afford to pay. It was whether this alien power had the right to impose overlordship over a people who had ruled themselves proudly and successfully for hundreds of years, and the rebellion became symptomatic of resistance to British imperialism.

For a while, Bai Bureh and his followers, though possessing inferior weapons, are able to wage successful guerrilla warfare against the arrogant and fraudulent British and reduce them to grovelling impotence. But then the British resort to the worst kind of terrorist tactics, indiscriminately burning towns, villages, and farms. In the end, Bai Bureh is not really defeated; he is not captured even though some of his own people attempt to betray him, responding to the promise of a huge financial reward. He decides quite nobly and selflessly to give himself up, in order to spare his people further suffering. In this he shows he is as much a patriot as when he was engaged in successful guerrilla fighting. The play concludes with the narrator declaring that that was how Sierra Leone lost its freedom, a freedom the country has never really regained.

If *The Patriot* is a tragedy, it is not Bai Bureh's tragedy, because he remains undefeated; nor do we see him possessing any flaws that could be said to have led or contributed to his downfall. Rather, it is the tragedy of the entire society which, though possessing some courageous, intelligent, and charismatic leaders, has others who are driven by greed to collaborate with the enemy or who have no stomach for the fight. And that situation has continued to this very day.

The Pool is the only play by a woman dramatist to be included in the collection. The late Tonie French was undoubtedly the leading female playwright working in Sierra Leone during the dramatic upsurge of the 1980s and 1990s; had her life, like those of Dele Charley and John Kolosa Kargbo, not been cut short by untimely death, she would almost certainly have gone on to greater things and would have rectified those deficiencies apparent to anyone reading the play in the study. On the Sierra Leone stage, however, *The Pool* was highly popular because audiences saw in it situations and characters reminiscent of everyday happenings and to which they could relate. The play is very much about the condition of African womanhood, about male exploitation of women, lack of opportunities for the advancement of women, male irresponsibility and marital infidelity, prostitution and its causes, and the relations between husbands and wives.

The pool, which is a typing pool, becomes, like the market in other situations, a microcosm of deprived and insulted womanhood. The characters include Khaday, the vicious prostitute who is intelligent and gifted but driven by poverty to prostitution in order to get the good things of life. In normal circumstances she would have been able to get a good job or go to university, but she lacked the resources to give a bribe either for a job or for a scholarship. There is also Mabel, a fairly decent young woman who, though not very bright, hopes the secretarial skills she will acquire at the pool will land her a decent job; there is Marion, the daughter of a fairly well-to-do civil servant who is not at university, either because she lacks the intellectual equipment to qualify for entry or because her father does not care much about what happens to her; and there is the forty-year-old Aina, a mother of three whose husband unfortunately died young and who, though not particularly bright, hopes she can qualify as a secretary/typist and get enough resources to make ends meet and take care of her young family.

The play is located in the 1970s, a time when the only career open to most girls was secretarial, after a brief period of training in a typing school. The typing pool in itself therefore highlights the lack of opportunities for women at the time. The play thus incorporates a great deal of social comment. In particular, it comes down hard on middle-aged, apparently respectable men in positions of authority who use such authority to have sexual relations with girls young enough to be their daughters and who at times abandon their wives and resort to the arms of prostitutes, while still maintaining a respectable outward veneer. It is this that creates the major conflict in the play, for Marion does not know that her father, the respectable Mr James Macauley, is having a clandestine affair with her pool-mate Khaday, the mouthy prostitute who seems to revel in her way of life. The climax of the play occurs when Khaday reveals the truth to Marion in the presence of her father, and the disgusted Marion walks out of her father's home, refusing to have anything more to do with him.

Tonie French makes use of some modern theatrical devices such as multiple stage sets, but, though it is thematically interesting, one cannot help feeling that this play is, unfortunately, the least finely crafted in the collection. In an interview with Iyunolu Osagie, French advises all female writers to be keenly observant as they move around and to jot down scenes and situations they witness with a view to using them in their writings.[3] It is clear that the vignettes in this play derive from scenes and situations Tonie French heard of or witnessed, but she has not fully succeeded in welding them together to form a play that is as well-structured as the others in the collection. The main conflict in the play, between Khaday and Marion, derives from a built-in animosity Khaday has toward Marion, who she knows is the daughter of a man she is having an affair with, not from anything that has happened within the play itself. Some of the situations are rather implausible, and there are problems with the plot. For instance, the rather vicious prostitute, Khaday, says that Marion goes about spreading rumours about the forty-year-old Aina's relations with their tutor Mr Buckle, and this is supposed to have some significant bearing on the plot, but we do not see Marion doing anything of the sort. The inclusion of one such scene would have been helpful. One does not get the sense in this play of an exposition and complications leading to a climax and dénouement that would normally constitute a well-crafted play. This said, however, it must be admitted that the play incorporates some realistic scenes from life and is a useful commentary on aspects of contemporary Sierra Leone society.

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[3] Iyunolu Osagie, "The Significance of Tonie French as a Female Artist in Sierra Leone Theater," in *Knowledge Is More Than Mere Words: A Critical Introduction to Sierra Leonean Literature*, ed. Eustace Palmer & Abioseh Michael Porter (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2008): 144.

To a much greater extent than *The Pool*, Mohamed Sheriff's *Not You Too* is an interesting exploration of the condition of African womanhood and the African woman's burden. The play revolves around a very topical and controversial issue – female genital mutilation – but it is also about bullying fathers and brutal husbands; girls being forced into marriage or circumcision against their will when they would much rather continue their education; irresponsible polygamous husbands; and irresponsible, predatory male professors. All the women in the play, including a white volunteer from the USA, have terrible stories to tell about their relationships with men, and the boyfriend of Gina, the girl who is threatened with circumcision, is the only male in the play who can lay claim to some semblance of virtue. The play tends to be overly didactic at times, and the conclusion might appear simplistic and implausible to some, in that the women can only get Gina to avoid being drafted into circumcision and marriage to a man more than twice her age by contriving to make her father and the Chief dead drunk. However, *Not You Too* is still an effective play.

These five plays have certain features in common: colonial arrogance and exploitation; the exploitation of African womanhood; and the corrupt nature of contemporary Sierra Leonean society. Together they give some indication of the genius of Sierra Leonean dramatists and their contribution not only to Sierra Leonean literature but also to African literature as a whole.

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The Rev. Joseph Jackson Fuller

A 'Native' Evangelist and 'Black' Identity in the Cameroons

GARETH GRIFFITHS

The history of the use of black evangelists in Africa has received a good deal of attention in recent years. In the process it has become clear that the story of the successful missionizing of black Africa is the story of its indigenous evangelists. There are few things about the history of missions that scholars agree on, but one of them is that, until native Christians became available to evangelize their fellows, missionaries had few or no converts. The role of the white missionary seems to have been to enable a small number of black catechists to become the main instrument in generating conversions in larger numbers among their own people. Such indigenous evangelists had several advantages. Often they spoke the languages and were familiar with the customs of the peoples they sought to convert. But even when they were not from the same ethnic or linguistic group, they showed a broader understanding of the cultures they encountered, and so engendered a greater sympathy and hearing from their fellow Africans. One of the great figures of West African Christianity, the first black Anglican bishop, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was a Yorùbá speaker who had been raised as a so-called 'recaptive'[1] in Sierra Leone. He accompanied the CMS missionary J.F. Schön on his exploratory voyage up the Niger River in 1841, and although he spoke no Ijaw, Igbo or Hausa, a comparison of his journals with those of his mentor Schön easily confirms that he understood and sympathized with the societies he encountered in ways that his fellow white missionary could not.[2] This may serve as an example of how problematic the term 'indigenous' is in discussing the role of black missionaries and their helpers in Africa, since being indigenous to the continent did not necessarily mean being from the region of operation or specific mission field assigned. Even more so, the term 'indigenous evangelist' would seem to preclude those black missionaries who were born elsewhere – for example, in the USA or in the Caribbean – and who returned to Africa as agents of white mission societies. But in practice the overarching idea of the 'native' employed in colonial discourse often broke down this neat division, and black missionaries from elsewhere were seen to occupy an ambivalent space between their white colleagues and the local indigenous pastors the mission trained and employed. Despite this, they often played a vital role in getting the missions accepted by black communities who identified with them on the basis of their colour and their ethnic origin.

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[1] As those rescued from slave ships by the British navy were, rather ironically, called.

In Ghana, for example, when the missionaries of the Basel Evangelical Society established themselves in the hilly, malaria-free regions behind Accra at Akropong, they failed to persuade the Omanhene (King) that Christianity was a religion suitable for his people.[3] The king supposedly remarked that clearly the religion was suitable for white men but not for black. The response of the Rev. Andreas Riis, the charismatic leader of the Basel Mission in the region, was to introduce black missionaries from the Caribbean as proof that the new religion could be taken up by black men like the Ghanaians of Akropong.[4] In this vignette is captured the way in which a perception of a shared identity based on colour rather than place of birth or language might be employed by missions. Black missionaries, especially from the Caribbean and from the USA, were employed successfully across Africa. When the tensions between colonial authorities and 'natives' erupted, as it did in various places across the colonized world in the late-nineteenth century, these 'returned' missionaries of African descent were often caught in the clash and forced to acknowledge that they were never regarded by the colonial authorities as quite as reliable as their white fellows.[5] But, conversely, they seem to have been able to sympathize with their fellow blacks in ways that white missionaries did far less frequently.

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[2] For a comparison of the way the two men's journals treated the expeditions and recorded the beliefs and customs of the people they met on the river, see Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West* (London: Longman, 2000): 51–53.

[3] The Baselers were also handed control of the Cameroons in the late 1880s, as discussed below.

[4] The Omanhene (King) supposedly said to Riis: "When God created the world, He made the Book [Bible] for the Whiteman and juju [fetish] for the Blackman, but if you could show us some Blackmen who could read the Whiteman's Book [Bible], then we would surely follow you." See the History of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, National Union of Presbyterian Students of Ghana website: http://www.nupsgknust.itgo.com/pages/pcg.htm (accessed 27 December 2012). In an ironic echo of the situation in Cameroon, this essay describes how the Baseler mission in Ghana was closed down and taken over by the Presbyterians after the German defeat in the 1914–18 War.

The case of the Jamaican-born missionary J.J. Fuller, who spent forty years in the English Baptist mission to the Cameroons, shows how this worked in practice. It is of especial interest here because Fuller left an account of his life and work, "Autobiography of the Rev. J.J. Fuller of Cameroons, West Africa" (74 typewritten pages), as well as numerous letters and notes concerning his life. The account was never published, but it has survived in the archives of the Baptist Mission.[6] In the typewritten version, Fuller claims that he kept a journal throughout his period in the Cameroons but that this was destroyed by white ants. The surviving autobiography was written upon his return to England in 1888, after the Baptist Mission was wound up and its mission field handed over to the Basel Evangelical Missionaries as a consequence of the negotiations that saw Britain hand over the Cameroons to the Germans. It covers the early period of Fuller's mission from the previous mission base on the island of Fernando Po to the trading post of Victoria, the settlement on the south-west tip of the Cameroons, which the British settled and where they remained until the territory was transferred to the Germans in 1884. Fuller's surviving papers also contain a series of handwritten "recollections." These notes are subtitled "from the beginning to 1887," but in fact the last dates covered in the material in the file are 1875–76. These recollections would seem to be the main source for the typed autobiography, though there are sections here not reproduced in the typed version, and the page numbering seems to be erratic, making a detailed comparison of the two sources difficult. Most significantly, though, neither of these two surviving sources for Fuller's life covers the last years following the German takeover and the struggle this initiated between Fuller, his Baptist converts, and the newly arrived Basel Missionaries. Yet it is this period, when Fuller is locked in a complex struggle with the Baptist Mission Board and its Secretary Baynes, and also with the Baselers who have taken over his mission, that sees the emergence of a breakaway Native Baptist Church in the erstwhile British mission territory that Fuller had helped establish.

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[5] For an example of this, see Gareth Griffiths, "The Other Mr. Wilberforce: Role Conflict and Colonial Governance in Sierra Leone 1878–1913," *African Identities* 7.4 (November 2009): 435–39.

[6] The Baptist Mission Archives are now lodged at the Regent's Park Baptist College in central Oxford where the original MS and letters discussed here can be viewed. The "Autobiography" exists in an undated, typewritten manuscript. There are also two boxes of letters and other material from and to Joseph Jackson Fuller (A/5/1–15). Material that has some bearing on the issues discussed here can also be found in the Western Sub-Committee Minute Book No.7 and also in a piece he wrote for the Baptist Society journal *The Missionary Herald* 89 (1907), the year before his death, aged 83. It is quoted from below.

Fuller's role in this process is an interesting one which some of the surviving letters in the Baptist Mission Society archives allow us to follow as it developed. To put the process in context, it is worth noting that, as a black Jamaican Baptist, Fuller was a descendant of a people who had an earlier and significant role in creating breakaway, independent black congregations in his native island. In her study of slavery and missions in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Jamaica, Mary Turner notes that among the several Protestant missions on the island, the Baptists had both an official white presence and a separate set of Black Baptist congregations established by emigrant blacks from the USA, who arrived in Jamaica after the American Revolution. The first of these was George Leile, a free black from Georgia who started open-air preaching in 1784, and, when his congregation exceeded eight hundred in 1793, opened a chapel, where he taught not only Christianity but also reading. Turner comments that Black Baptists such as Leile and his successors, Thomas Swigle, Moses Baker, and George Gibb, who also established black congregations, "looked on their church as a black church, a church of Ethiopia, but accounted themselves orthodox Baptists. They corresponded with American and British Baptists and received financial aid from the New Connection Baptists in Bristol."[7] James Walvin, the historian of British slavery, has even suggested that Baptist practice in places such as Fuller's native Jamaica might have been particularly congruent with traditional African practices:

> Later, with the coming of Christianity among the slaves – led by the Baptists –*myalism* incorporated useful aspects of the whites' religion.

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[7] Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society 1787–1834* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1982): 11.

> It absorbed the concept of the Holy Spirit and the practice of baptism by immersion. Baptism took place in rivers and the sea, which in parts of Africa were thought to be the homes of spirits. In the process protection was conferred against evil spirits.[8]

He also suggests that after the Great Awakening of 1750

> revivalism involved a sense of equality [between black and white]. Meetings took place in public; they spilled from chapels and churches into the streets and fields where excitement tipped over into ecstasy. When baptized in local rivers, amid scenes of great enthusiasm, slaves could recognize glimpses of their African pasts.[9]

As we shall see below, one of the great contentions of the Baptist congregations nurtured by Fuller in the Cameroons was over the form of baptism imposed by the Lutherans after the German takeover of the Baptist missions in the Cameroons.[10]

By the time J.J. Fuller was born, in 1825, these independent black congregations in Jamaica were no more, having fallen victim to the increasing paranoia of the white plantation owners that from 1802 onwards led to the decision to allow local magistrates to license or disallow missionaries, effectually undermining the more tolerant provisions before that date, which insisted only that all missionaries take an oath of allegiance and supremacy and subscribe to a scriptural declaration (a form of declaration which allowed dissenters to be licensed without directly agreeing to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church). This process affected white missionaries (notably the Wesleyans), but, as Turner notes,

> The impact on the Black Baptists was more far-reaching. Their Kingston churches were closed. Baker's chapel became a hospital, and from this time forward the Black Baptist church ceased to develop, though some preachers were subsequently allowed by planter patrons to resume work on their estates; Moses Baker and George Gibb held congregations together until they died in the 1820s. Once the magistrates had established the right to insist on "due qualification" before licen-

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[8] James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (London: HarperCollins, 1992): 181.

[9] Walvin, *Black Ivory*, 185.

[10] On 24 February 1888 Fuller told Mission Secretary Baynes that the Baselers refused to use immersion to baptize and preferred "sprinkling" as a form of baptism. This, he says, "has led to much discontent amongst the native converts."

> sing preachers, there was no place in the system for the Black Baptists.[11]

By 1825, this was already a tale from the past, but one might speculate that it remained an issue among the Black Baptists, including his own parents, who had been slaves in the period when the free congregations had flourished and who were freed when emancipation was declared in 1833 and fully enacted in Jamaica five years later in 1838. Fuller's autobiography gives a full account of the place of his parents and grandparents in this history, and although no mention of the Black Baptists is made there or in the handwritten recollections that survive, it may well be that their memory was part of the inheritance of Baptists in the black community in Jamaica. It seems difficult to imagine that it would not have been so. Certainly Fuller's own connection with the Baptist Mission authorities came under stress at the end of his long service in the Cameroons. At this time in the 1880s he was involved in a lengthy correspondence with black catechists who deeply resented the forcible takeover of their Baptist missions by the Lutheran Baselers. The takeover was fully endorsed by the Baptist Mission authorities, though it was clearly not one that Fuller himself felt was to the benefit of the peoples he had served for almost forty years. The decision eventually prompted many of those he had helped convert to set up a breakaway Black Baptist church, under African leadership. Although Fuller does not explicitly endorse this, he clearly understood and sympathized with these leaders, as his letters to them at the time show. His sense of identity with fellow blacks was an ironic echo of the history of his own originating society in Jamaica. For all his desire to be a loyal member of the Baptist fellowship, his colour as a black Jamaican created loyalties and ties that were different in essence from those of his white colleagues.

The many pages of handwritten recollections in the Baptist archives are in many ways frustrating. The pagination might lead one to conjecture that a second volume of recollections may have once existed, but if so, it has not survived. What is certainly true is that the material *not* covered is the most interesting and, from the mission viewpoint, the most controversial, as it emphasizes the internecine struggle between the two missions after the arrival of the Baselers, and the relative lack of interest and support given by the Baptist Mission authorities to the local converts and their desire to remain as Baptists. Fuller's role in these conflicts is central, and we can piece it together from the letters that have survived.

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[11] Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 17.

Briefly, the letters show that the Baptist Mission Board agreed to hand over their lands and converts to the Lutherans of the Basel Evangelical Mission (henceforth here, as in the correspondence, called Baselers). In 1887 Baynes, the Secretary of the Board, asked Fuller to see if the Chiefs would acknowledge that the Society has "rights to the lands they occupy under our purchase from King William." This refers to the agreement with the local Kings (Paramount Chiefs) that the Mission had negotiated when they arrived on the mainland after being forced by the Spanish to abandon their Fernando Po base. Once re-established on the mainland, they began to open up the interior, a subsequent process in which Fuller had been an active if not the leading participant. Fuller received a series of letters from Baynes in 1887 asking him to find any evidence that the Chiefs had settled on this land after the date of the Mission's agreement of purchase with King William. In September, he asks that this enquiry be kept confidential and private in the Cameroons so that he can make the Baptist claim on the Basel Mission more effective. In these letters Baynes seems to be trying to get the Basel Mission to accept that the agreement with King William should be respected and so strengthen the Baptists' claim for compensation. At this time there seems to have been general acceptance of this position by both sides, and by the local Baseler representative, the Rev. Munz. During the 1886–87 phase of negotiations, the Baselers are described as missionaries well-thought-of by the Baptists and "who are known and beloved by our Brethren" (Fuller to Baynes, 23 December 1886). Fuller now finds himself at the heart of the negotiations on the ground. His instructions from the Baptist Mission Board are clear. In a long letter dated 1 November 1886, Baynes informs Fuller that the British Government has now ceded all territory north of Victoria to the Germans, thus cutting off the Baptist mission from the interior and from the settlements that Fuller had established there in the previous decade or so. The letter is clearly designed to reassure Fuller, for it states that the Baptists have now signed an agreement with the Baselers and that Munz is to be helped by Fuller to take full possession of the mission field, including Victoria. The Baptists will move their field of endeavour to the Congo, and missionaries in the Cameroons will either relocate there or be retired voluntarily. The Rev, John Pinnock (another Jamaican-born missionary) and his wife will remove to the Congo mission field, others will return to "America," and Fuller, who had served for forty years in the Cameroons by this time, is offered "retirement in comfort" if he chooses not to leave for the Congo. All Baptist possessions and buildings will be sold to the Baselers at "a very fair price," as they are "quite as earnest, quite as self-denying, quite as Christian as ourselves." The agreement, Secretary Baynes notes, provides that all missionaries and native agents will be paid by the Basel mission from 3 December 1886 and specifically states that "the native preachers and teachers now employed by ourselves at Cameroons and Victoria shall if they so desire it be employed as Agents by the Basel Committee" at the same salaries. Two years later Fuller leaves the Cameroons. The period in between has seen bitter conflict mounting between himself and the Baselers, notably with Munz, with whom Fuller has an increasingly acrimonious personal relationship. In 1885 Fuller is in England, but he returns to the Cameroons in 1886. Most of that year he spends in seeking to preserve the Baptist mission, though to little avail, as we have seen given Baynes's decision to close the mission in December 1886. In February of that year, Fuller still seemed hopeful, writing to Baynes of his negotiations with the German authorities, including the Governor (Baron Julius von Soden), with whom he seems to think that some accommodation can be reached that would preserve the Baptist presence in the Cameroons after the German takeover (Fuller to Baynes, 25 February 1886). He says the Governor has assured him that the mission will be preserved and that the Baptists will still be able to open up the interior to Abo. The Germans, Fuller writes to Baynes, want Protestant missions, not Catholic, and do not require Baptists to teach and preach in German. Even while he is expressing these hopes, Fuller must have been aware that the arrival of the Germans was already causing disaffection among the Cameroonian native converts. The previous year, while in England, he had received a letter from his missionary colleague John Diboll telling of the German plans and the reactions of the natives. King Bell, Diboll says, has given the land at Bell Town, Aqua Town, and Dido Town to the Germans, but people locally are not willing to yield this land. King Bell has fled, and the locals from Aqua Town, Hickory, and Dido have banded together to fight the Germans. An insurrection has broken out and the people have plundered Bell Town. Also, Hickory Town people have burned down "King Bell's houses […] cows and pigs." Diboll comments that "The Germans came soon after and finding all this was going on they burned Joss and Hickory Town killing about ten people on both sides. We are now scattered" (Diboll to Fuller 1885). Diboll has removed to the mission settlement at Bethel, where, when the Germans arrive, they search the Mission House and find some of the local helpers hiding there. One of these, a convert called Robert, is clapped in irons but later set free, as the Germans say they are only searching for Hickory and Joss people. Several letters from local converts also discuss this trouble, notably from George Nkive, one of the most famous of the Baptist native converts; on 9 December 1885, Nkive writes to Fuller asking him to bring him some goods from England and remarking in a rather understated way that Fuller and Mrs. Fuller are "much needed here." Another letter, from W.J. Warstead, probably a native teacher, to judge by the language, pleads that "God must pour his blessings into the heart of English people that they must take our country. We don't like to be under German command."

Despite the sanguine tone of the letter of 25 February, in which Fuller tells Baynes of his hopeful conversation with the German Governor, it is clear that Fuller, like other figures discussed here, is increasingly caught in the middle of local and colonial government conflicts and forced into compromises which will prove unsustainable and will eventually lead to his estrangement from the dominant mission and colonial government positions. Although not an indigenous Christian, as a black missionary he finds himself developing an understanding of the views of the "native "pastors and congregations and becoming increasingly estranged from the racialized attitudes that the situation exacerbates. The local indigenous converts look to him as a figure from whom they can expect the kind of sympathy they have failed to get from either the German missionaries or their erstwhile white Baptist mission leaders.

Fuller's complex reactions in this period show how his attitude towards the white mission authorities evolved as the crisis revealed their priorities. In March of 1886, as the letter he sends Baynes on the first of that month shows, he remains sanguine that he can negotiate with the German authorities. He describes the Governor as someone with whom he "finds himself favourably impressed," and remarks: "I think we shall get on nicely." Fuller is still trying to carry out Baynes's instructions to negotiate a peaceful transition to German rule. At this time he still feels that this can include the Baptists' remaining as an active part of the Cameroons mission field, working alongside the Baselers. On 19 March he writes that the situation remains dire in Hickory, which is a complete ruin, and at Batoke, where clashes have also occurred, but that John Pinnock (the other Jamaican missionary) and he are battling with it "in the best possible manner." He still believes that "the Governor is anxious that we should go to the country" and has said he will protect them and the traders. By April, the issue of who owns the mission lands is clearly proving a sticking point in these negotiations, and, on the issue of what he terms "sovereignty" of these lands, the Governor will make no further promises until he consults with his government. While this negotiation is slowly unravelling, Fuller is increasingly aware of the crucial role to be played by native Christian evangelists in the work of opening up the interior. In a letter to Baynes on 4 May 1886, he recounts how the church at Abo has been established not by an official missionary but by young men returning to the interior from the coastal settlements. He recounts how these young men have gradually "woven Christian elements into traditional Sabbath keeping."[12]

However, a letter later that month (Fuller to Baynes, 21 May) indicates that he is less and less sanguine about the negotiations with the Germans. The German Governor tells him that, since Victoria has been made a British colony, the offer to allow the Baptists to work in the interior has been withdrawn. The honeymoon is over. The work of the mission has fallen foul of the Anglo-German power struggle when the British Vice-Consul at Victoria determines to keep a foothold in the south-west of the Cameroons. In August 1886 Fuller asks the Governor if he can send a "Native" to Abo to teach after repeated entreaties from the people there for support. The Governor answers that he has no objection to a missionary being dispatched and he can even hoist an English flag to show that this is an English mission, so long as he also hoists a German flag. The Governor blames the British Vice-Consul's intransigence for the mess and wonders if is an act of "natural stupidity" rather than any "deliberate plan." Whatever the case, this effectively dashes any hope Fuller might have had that the official Baptist mission could remain there.

From this point onwards, his involvement becomes increasingly that of an advocate for and defender of the views of the native pastors and teachers. When, in December 1886, Fuller realizes that the Baptist Mission will be transferred to the Baselers, he comments that "the pain of leaving a life's work I can hardly describe" but adds that he will do as the Committee wishes.[13] In the period that follows, Fuller finds himself in the thick of increasingly acrimonious negotiations about the handover of Baptist property and congregations. He and Munz, the main negotiator for the Basel Mission, are clearly ill-suited temperamentally, and the dispute takes on a bitter and personal tone that the platitudes of mission discourse (dear brother in Christ, etc.) fail to veil. The dispute centres on whether or not King William had the right to sell land that was held by the "aboriginal" people of the region before he took it over. It then escalates into his dissatisfaction with the compensation paid for the Baptist Mission properties. Finally, it centres on the inadequacy of the pastoral care of the Baselers and the demands they make on the converts to conform to Lutheran rather than Baptist "rule" in theological and practical matters.

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[12] The spread of Christianity or at least of Christian practices and influences along with literacy and Bible knowledge by unofficial means is a feature of many African societies. In South-East Africa, men returning from working in the mines of South Africa brought both literacy and elements of Christian worship when they returned to their natal societies, often before official missionaries arrived. This sometimes led to conflicts later between official church practices and these unofficial groups that were forerunners of independent black churches. See Patrick Harries, *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries and Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007): 189.

[13] Fuller to Baynes, 7 December 1886. It is worth noting that he is also leaving in the Cameroons the graves of his father, two wives, and two children. The cost of missionary commitment was high in West Africa in this period.

Throughout 1887, he is locked in a series of disputes with Munz about the inadequacy of the compensation offered for the Baptist goods, complaining to Baynes about "how hard it is to get them to pay much for anything" (Fuller to Baynes, 27 April 1887). He also says Munz has a false idea of how the boundaries of lands can be designated in the African context when "no one has ever measured land bought from savages for they know nothing about measurements."[14] Confessing that in this matter he "spoke very harsh to him" and "lost my temper," he finds better agreement with Munz's more flexible colleague Leutz. Although Munz may well have been intractable and inflexible, it seems clear, too, that these disputes about property and money are fuelled by Fuller's deeper resentment of the way the British Government in 1886 and the Baptist Society's Board in 1887 have, as he sees it, abandoned the native converts in Victoria and the interior for whose conversion he had spent his whole adult life. In July of 1887 he is technically employed and paid by the Basel Evangelical Mission, as are all the employees of the Baptist Mission. He is increasingly angry at what he represents as the neglect by the Baselers of the mission's stations in the interior, complaining in a letter to Baynes on 5 July 1887 that he has been to visit several mission stations but has not got to Malimba, because, as he puts it with very barbed irony, "our friends [i.e., the Baselers] don't care about going away from home. I can only hope that without my introduction they will find a welcome wherever they go." In the same letter he also suggests that the Baselers have not been active even in Victoria, where, he complains, none of them have yet settled, "neither have they taken one service since they came." The period 1886–87 saw the continuation of the insurrections attendant upon the German policy of opening up the interior to trade and breaking the monopoly of the coastal traders. As he went up to Abo in July 1887 he met German boats coming down after "they had burned down one of the large towns" (Fuller to Baynes, 27 July 1887). At Mangamba he baptizes six people, making a total of twelve baptized there, as he notes with pride. He adds that he is "truly sorry for what has happened on our friends account they being Germans for it will take sometime for them to gain the people." He adds:

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[14] This is a most unusual term for Fuller to use regarding the native Cameroonians, and one he does not employ elsewhere in letters I have seen, always referring to the "natives" in a friendly and positive way. One must assume that the context of the letter and its recipient is part of the explanation, but it remains aberrant in Fuller's usual discourse.

> The German powers have also been up the Wuri branch of the river and burnt down Ka's town one of the largest on that side, so that we have been having a regular turmoil of gunpowder and shots. It will be sometime before our people are reconciled to their new rulers.[15]

Fuller clearly feels that the native converts are victims of this new harshness, but it seems also that they have been caught up in the internecine struggle between the two missions. In January of 1888, Fuller sends Munz a sour note complaining that Baptist land on Mondale Island has been leased by the Baselers to the British Vice-Consulate for profit, leaving the local congregation bereft of meeting-places. He copies this complaint to Baynes with considerable detail claiming, rather disingenuously perhaps, that he has tried to avoid clashes with the Baselers "but they seem inclined to lay on my shoulders and make me feel as uncomfortable as possible." In this long complaint to Baynes he strikes a new and more significant note. In this unhappy situation, he says, it is the native pastors that are carrying the burden of the work. "If we had not a native pastor [...] I fear there would be a great drawing back from the work." The Baselers, he says, have effectively closed the school, because they have started charging "a small fee" the people cannot or will not pay. "They say that they have a rule and by that they have to carry on their work. I am sorry for what I have seen and I feel thankful we have left none of our men with them."

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[15] Fuller seems to be suggesting here that German rule is proving harsher than British rule would have been. But given the situation in Sierra Leone within two years of this date, when the major insurrection of 1889 broke out and was handled with very similar brutality by the British, what we might see here is a shift towards a more aggressive and violent policy in opening up interiors of African territories attendant upon the shifts initiated after the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 and practised by all the European colonial powers. For a discussion of the Sierra Leone events and how this influenced the life of another black missionary, see Griffiths, "The Other Mr. Wilberforce," 435–39.

Beyond these disputes about land and money there is emerging a theological issue that he mentions in the letter of 24 February 1888. The Baselers refuse to use immersion to baptize and prefer "sprinkling" as a form of baptism. This, he says, has led to much discontent among the native converts. The Baselers, he suggests, want the church "under their entire control," but to this the people will not consent. They are determined that

> even if the infants should and in the future be brought up in the [Baseler] mode for the present they will not give up their liberty as a church nor their mode of baptism. I have kept out of it thus far and am doing my best to keep out of any thing like confusion, but they have been to me and laid three things before me that they intend when they need to ask for,
> 1st – the freedom of the church to carry on their work.
> 2nd – the control of their expenditure and their pastor.
> 3rd – the continuance of their mode of baptism by immersion.
> If these are granted they have no objection whatever to the Mission or any rules they wish to introduce.

Fuller must have realized how ingenuous this claim was. Neither the Baselers nor his own church could accept this as anything other than a demand for separation by the elders. It is clearly a demand for a separate church run by the natives themselves, and it is to this that the struggle will eventually lead. This is the most significant result of the clash between the two colonial powers and their missions. At the conclusion of the report to Baynes of these demands Fuller notes that he has told them not to act rashly, but he cannot refrain from noting rather gleefully that the native pastors and their supporters have got the roof back on the church, "which our German friends did not expect." In part this is because he has "helped" them buy some sheets of iron for the roof, as he had earlier admitted in his letter to Baynes on 10 January 1888.

What was Fuller's role in all this? Was he, as he continues to claim to Baynes, an advocate of compromise trying to effect the separation declared by his Board? Or was he increasingly finding himself the conduit of, and even the spokesperson for, the voices of the native pastors and their disaffected congregation? Was he, as a black Jamaican who had spent forty years among the black African converts, increasingly disenchanted not only with the Baselers but also with the willingness of his own mission's authorities to abandon what he must increasingly have seen as 'his' people in more ways than one? The tone of his parting comments is bitter regarding the accusations, made by Munz and others, that he had deceived them over financial matters during the protracted and acrimonious sales of property. And there is a shrouded sense that his own mission has failed to listen to and support him as well as the native converts he has made when they needed that support. On 12 March 1888 he sends a bitter letter to an unnamed Baseler (probably Munz), telling him that he will be leaving on the next steamer from the south for England:

> I entered the mission at the age of 19 years and am now leaving at the age of 63 with only two breaks in the time when I visited England and Jamaica […] [in those 45 years I was never accused] of deception, untruthfulness and fraud until you and your colleagues came.

He finishes by saying that he came to Africa when "the whole of the Bight was wrapped in darkness" and that he leaves now, since he has been "subject to all kinds of disrespect and insults."

Although Fuller's attitude to the Baselers was clearly exacerbated by his personal relations with Munz, there is little doubt that he accurately reflected the sense of betrayal felt by the native pastors and their congregations towards the new mission and towards what they saw (with some justification) as the way they had been handed over by the Baptist Mission authorities without any feeling for their own commitments, beliefs, and needs. After his return to Britain, he became the main channel for the views of those native pastors ignored by the Mission Board. Retired now in Britain, he continues to receive letters, including one in July 1888 from Seppu Mukuri, a convert who taught at Dido Town and who tells him that the converts have been "left to perish" and that "we should not be Basler [sic] members after being members of the Baptist Church." Mukuri notes that he is "the late Thos. Lewis's boy, which he brought to England in the year 1866" and that he was baptized in Wales. He also notes that "we" [that is, those Baptists who are refusing Baseler Lutheran authority] "have open [sic] two Stations called Dikolo and Dido Stations."

Another native pastor, Joshua Tundi, in a letter dated 6 June 1888, gives Fuller more news of the emerging self-organized church that is developing since the Baptists left the mission to the Baselers. The letter tells of the great success in conversion that the self-organized church is experiencing. It is getting converts from many areas, sixteen in one day on 2 June, he claims. He also claims the church is having success attracting the Chiefs, including the sons of Chief Charley of Dido Town. He writes to Fuller in moving tones:

> My father you remember how the Dido Town people used to say that the word of God would spread among slaves but not for Free-men but now they are coming and in haste. My father it is true that is said "Except a tree rots it does not produce mushrooms."

Clearly these native Christians refuse to be treated as mere cannon fodder in the colonial territorial and interdenominational trading that the Cameroons are experiencing. They are beginning to develop their own self-rule and with it their sense of unity with their own people. In this process, Fuller, as a fellow black, is clearly seen as someone far more likely to be sympathetic to their desire for freedom and self-determination.

In another of the several letters written after Fuller is established in Bexley, Surrey, following his return to England, Joseph Tundi (or Tonde as he sometimes spells his name, as here) appeals to him directly as an "eye witness" to attest to what the Baptist Mission Authority will not: that the Baselers are forcing this separation on them by their dictatorial and uncompromising behaviour. In evidence, he notes that the Baselers have handed over to the native pastors the communion cups, symbolically accepting that they must act as a separate church if they will not accede to the Baseler demands. He also notes that they have dismissed Kate Williams (a prominent local convert) as a teacher in their school for refusing to join their mission. At this time, he writes, the breakaway Baptists are still sharing services at the chapel, but Tonde is angry with the Baptist Central Committee's lack of support. They are, he says "shaking off the dust of Kameroons from their feet by saying the chapel belongs to the Germans." He adds that "we should like to know the meaning of the term 100 pounds" (probably the sum 'agreed' for the chapel in the negotiations before Fuller's departure?), and asks, "Is it to pay for the trouble which our fathers took to set up the place of worship?" Above all, Tonde wants to ask Fuller to speak to the mission authorities on these matters on behalf of native pastors such as himself: "Some thing [sic] which we cannot induce your committee to see clearly – but we believe you can – as an eye witness."

In this last period, when he is settled back in England, Fuller is clearly emerging more and more strongly as a figure that the "native" Baptists believe they can trust in ways they cannot trust the white Baptist authorities. His own responses show, too, that he is becoming more and more disenchanted with the way in which the Baptist Mission authorities are representing their erstwhile pastors and congregations. In a long letter to Baynes, written on Baptist Mission Society letterhead from Holborn in London, he repeats many of his accusations about the neglect of the congregations by the Baselers, and there is an implied sense that this is due to their tendency to misrepresent and denigrate the genuine feeling and desire for betterment of the people of the Cameroons. Discussing the effect of the new Baseler policy of charging parents school fees, he notes that "the greater part of the children that they met in school came simply from love to be taught not from the wish of their parents. They should have been glad to encourage them instead of turning them out" (Baynes to Fuller, Holborn 1888). Is it perhaps too much of a stretch to see, in comments like this, Fuller recognizing echoes of his own experience as a black Jamaican educated in Baptist schools and expressing a personal anger when his "native" correspondent in the Cameroons describes the school as now without resources (slates and pens). Significantly, he ends by attacking the way he claims the Baselers represent the people of the Cameroons: "they are trying to make believe the people know nothing. […] I say it is unjust and unworthy of men calling themselves missionaries to write thus."

Although it is the Baselers who are targeted in these attacks, and although it is clear that Fuller's view of their mission is a very partial and embittered one, it is also clear that he is increasingly disenchanted with his own Baptist authorities.[16] Both groups seem willing to treat the people of the Cameroons as items in a set of transactions rather than as people with their own views, emotions, and commitments to their Baptist faith and their preferred forms of worship. The attitudes of white missionaries to their 'native' evangelists remained and became increasingly negative and tinged with racism. In April 1890, in a report to the Western Sub-Committee of the Baptist Mission Board, Rev. W. Holman Bentley, based in the Congo, to which the mission had removed, declines a gift of seventeen pounds for "the support of a native evangelist," on the grounds of the great undesirability of paying natives for any evangelistic service in which they may be engaged, suggesting instead that the money should be devoted to the employment of a native to assist him in his translation work. It is difficult not to compare the attitude of this white missionary with that of Fuller. Clearly Holman Bentley feels that native evangelists are not of great use and implies that they may be in it for the money. For this white missionary, their usefulness is restricted to ancillary aid. For the black Jamaican missionary Fuller, there is throughout his work a full recognition that native evangelists are both honest and useful, and that, as history bears out, they were far more successful in their work than their white mission colleagues.

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[16] Whatever the faults of the Basel Evangelical Mission in the Cameroons, the mission as a whole has a long and distinguished history in West Africa and elsewhere, though perhaps the effects of the increasingly nationalized struggles in Africa in the late-nineteenth century between the competing colonial powers was having a negative effect on mission attitudes and relations, as this case shows. But, as Fuller's comments to Baynes also reveals, the Baptists were also affected by this same set of attitudes. This is shown in a now rather disturbing set of comments by Baynes defending the policies of Leopold in the Congo, where the Baptists strengthened their mission after leaving the Cameroons. The archive papers (see Western Sub-Committee Minute Book No.7) have a long and complex story to tell on this that cannot be fully explored here. Baynes met with King Leopold and submitted a report to the committee in September 1889 in which he spoke of his belief that the King intended only "the general good of the entire Congo Kingdom and peoples" (217). In his defence, it is hard to single out Baynes or the Baptists for blame in being fooled by Leopold, given the successful deception of so many others by the King and his agents at the time. In Decem-

The struggle in the Cameroons in the 1880s tells the story of one of the earliest African independent churches, a fact recognized at the end of his life in Fuller's 1907 article celebrating their work entitled "In the Cameroons: Zeal and Progress among the Native Baptists."[17] This tells of how, as soon as he is called home, the local Baptists

> expressed their wish to *remain as Baptists* and to carry on their own work. I tried to point out all their responsibilities. But they willingly accepted them. I do not think that the German missionaries took them seriously. The Germans met them and told them they had to come

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ber 1898, the Baptist Mission decided to employ Roger Casement as a temporary missionary (redoubling the irony, given Casement's later role in exposing the horrors of Leopold's Congo). Within a few years of the revelations of the abuses in the Congo rubber trade, the account of the Baptists is very different. See "Face to Face with Rubber," *The Missionary Herald* 89 (1907): 301–303, an exposure of the horrors that had since been revealed in that worst of colonial regimes.

[17] *The Missionary Herald* 89 (1907): 200 (emphasis in original). I have listed this in the bibliography as written by Fuller, although it has an opening paragraph by an anonymous editor and the rest of the piece is quoted from "a letter" by J.J. Fuller. However, this one-page report is effectively Fuller's view on the Cameroon and its Native Church.

> over. They refused. The answer was "We are Baptists, and do not intend to change." They were then told that all who would not "come over" were to leave the church. That day the congregation in a body of some 1000 left the place and began to worship in the open air. They soon set to work and with united efforts built themselves brick chapels in Ackwa [Aqua] Town, Bell Town, Dido Town, and other places, with extension into the interior. They have had one or two conventions when all have come together, but still they remain independent, and to the best of their ability support their own cause. They call it the "Native Baptist Mission Church." I feel grateful to the good men who then showed their countrymen the need of self-support – especially when I remember the surroundings from which they came.

It is hard not to feel that in this last message Fuller is encoding his own sense of being, in a deep sense, one of them, a fellow countryman, and that in this celebration of black Christian independence in the Cameroons he is hearing an echo of his own natal surroundings and recalling the institutions from which the faith of his own people had grown, the free Black Baptist communities of Jamaica.

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A Modest Plant, Easily Crushed

Radio Drama in Blin, Eritrea

JANE PLASTOW

THE RESEARCH FOR THIS ARTICLE was carried out in September 2008 with the support of radio broadcasters involved in the then two local-language radio service providers in Eritrea, Radio Bana (Light), run under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, and Dimtsi Hafash (The Voice of the Masses),[1] the service which had been set up as a guerrilla station during the liberation war of 1962–91 but which has now become the voice of government.[2] At the time of the research, Dimtsi Hafash was broadcasting in all nine of Eritrea's constituent languages and in English. Radio Bana was working in five Eritrean languages and English. In February 2009, government agents moved in on Radio Bana, temporarily arrested all fifty staff associated with the station, and subsequently imprisoned a number of journalists who are still in jail, being held without trial.[3] The work I discuss is therefore not continuing.

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[1] My thanks to Hamde Kiflemariam of Radio Bana and Eyob Tesfahans of Dimtsi Hafash, my main facilitators in gathering information for this article. Views deriving from the information gained are my own and not the responsibility of any informant.

[2] Eritrea fought a thirty-year war of liberation against Ethiopia, 1962–91, which it eventually won under the leadership of the Eritrea People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This movement has subsequently transformed itself into a ruling party, The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) under the dictatorial leadership of President Issias Afeworki. No political opposition is tolerated.

[3] For information on repression of the Eritrean press, see *Reporters without Borders*, http://en.rsf.org/ (accessed 16 January 2013). See also Eoin Koepfinger, "Eritrea: Over a Decade of Media Persecution," *Sampsonia Way* (17 February 2012), 1, http://www.sampsoniaway.org/blog/2012/02/17/eritrea-over-a-decade-of-media-persecution/ (ac-

In a small country, the Blin people are a very small group. Estimates vary, but it is thought that around 60,000 to 100,000 people self-identify as Blin and use Blin as their mother tongue, and that they make up just over 2% of the national population. The language is an ancient one of a group known as Central Cushitic or Agaw, and associated with some of the very oldest groupings of peoples in northern Ethiopia. The Blin are the only speakers of an Agaw language in Eritrea. They are a people divided by religion, some Muslim and some Christian – both Orthodox and Catholic. They are also divided geographically, with villages scattered either side of the capital of Asmara, though they centre on the second city of Keren, in Anseba region. A key promise of the bitter liberation struggle against Ethiopian imperialism, which had included the imposition of the Ethiopian language of Amharic as the language of government and education, was that all Eritrean cultures would be honoured after independence. Eritreans had hated the imposition of Amharic in much the same way as black people resented state attempts to impose Afrikaans as the language of education and bureaucracy under South African apartheid. So, after 1991, the Eritrean state set about establishing education and media outlets in all nine of the nation's languages, with the addition of English as the international language and the medium of instruction in senior education.

In the case of Blin, this meant first establishing an orthography. For most of its speakers, Blin was a purely oral language, but it had been rendered, often by Christian priests, into a variety of written forms. Now the state Blin panel had to decide whether to use Latin, Arabic or script derived from Ge'ez[4] to produce a complete range of schoolbooks. Many Blin people wanted the Ge'ez form because this liturgical language of the Eritrean Orthodox Church is seen as inherently spiritual. Moreover, if Blin people could write, it was likely to be in the dominant language of the Eritrean highlands, Tigrinya, which stems from Ge'ez in much the same way as the Romance languages of French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian all derive from Latin. Arabic was favoured by Muslim Blin for parallel reasons. However, the final decision was made in favour of the Latin form, largely because it was thought

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cessed 16 January 2013).

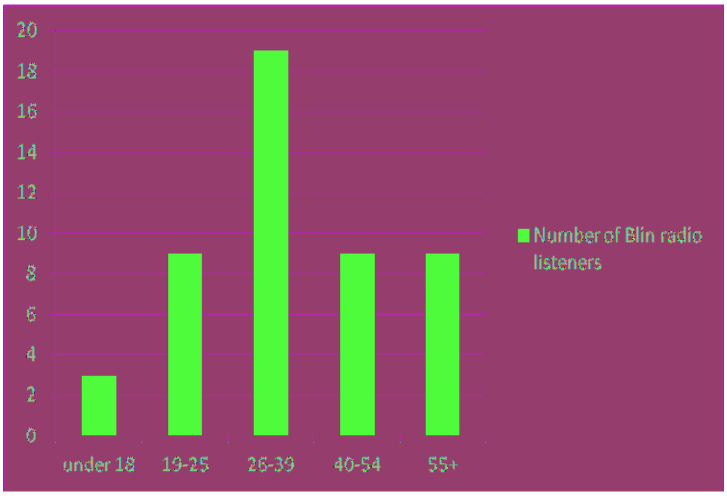
[4] Ge'ez is the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is a Semitic language and the root of widespread vernaculars in the region such as Amharic, Tigrinya, and Tigre, but ceased to be spoken outside of church use around the 4th century CE.

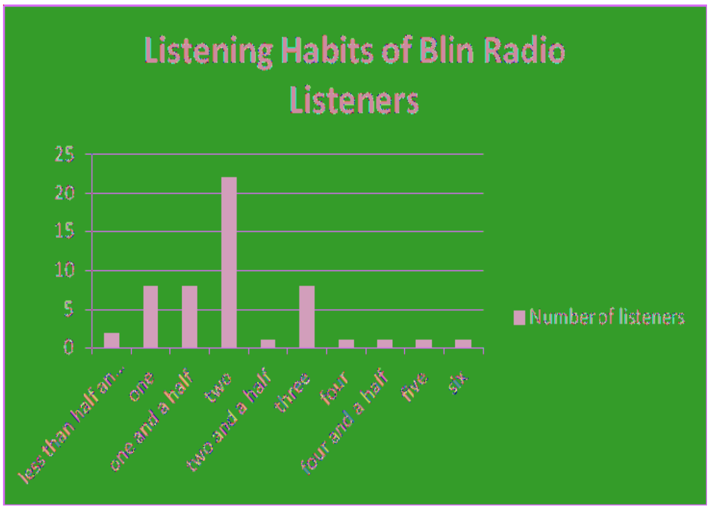
that this would make an eventual transition to English – the language of senior high schools and higher education – easier for Blin young people.

Education in Blin in the thirty primary schools serving the community became available in 2002, fulfilling the government promise that all Eritrean citizens would be able to attend primary education in their mother tongue. Approximately fifty percent of Blin children are thought to be attending school at present, and so the first cohort of Blin people literate in their own language is now moving through the senior secondary stage of schooling.

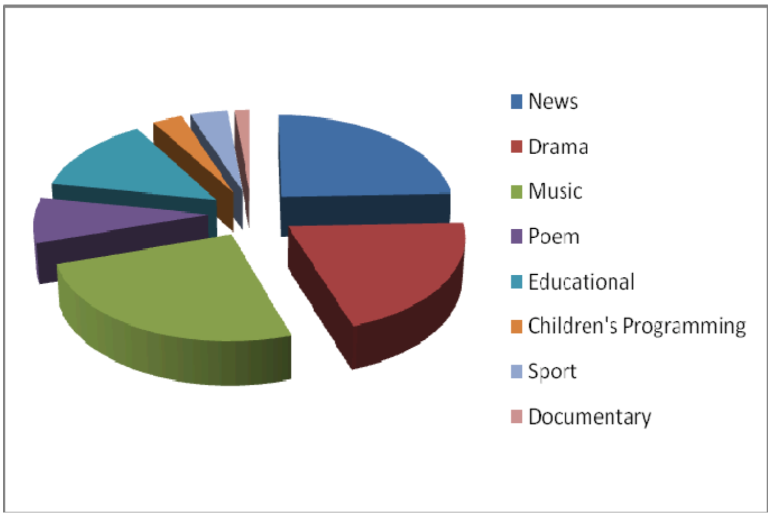
A second plank of the promise to maintain cultural diversity was the establishment of radio in all Eritrean languages. Radio Bana was mandated to run programmes dealing with health, social education, and music. It broadcast in Blin one radio programme which ran for half an hour per day, at 11 am on most days but 7.30 pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, with all programming approved by the Ministry of Education. Dimtsi Hafash came under the Ministry of Information. It put out one programme in Blin per week. This was dominated by news but could also include material on health, agriculture, music, and other Blin-related cultural activity. The regular health programme, which a number of listeners praised in the questionnaire developed to supply data for this article, focused on issues such as hygiene, maternal health, and children's nutrition. In 2008, a specifically education-based slot was created covering topics such as social education, Blin language and culture, identity, ethics, and patriotism. The station also carried interviews with both Blin-speaking professionals and members of the community, and it regularly played very popular Blin music. Finally, from time to time the station put on short radio plays, always with social messages. These came either in the form of a serial, typically playing over three to four months with a total of three hours worth of material, or as brief 15–20-minute playlets.

In a survey conducted by questionnaire of fifty Blin radio listeners in August 2008 in three locations – the capital Asmara, the major town of Keren, and the predominantly Blin village of Feledario, and with respondents ranging in age from seventeen to seventy, there was universal approval of the Blin-language radio service. Where people did not have their own radio set (thirteen out of fifty), they commonly listened to one owned by a neighbour. Most Blin are necessarily multi-lingual, as they interact with other language communities on a day-to-day basis, and most respondents said they listened to radio in a variety of languages, typically in the other highland languages of Tigre and Tigrinya, though English and Arabic were also mentioned. The average listening hours of radio estimated per week were around four, with two of these hours typically being in Blin. Hamde Kiflemariam, the Blin panel radio producer since 2004, estimated that his programmes reached around fifty percent of the Blin-speaking population, people who, outside the major towns, often rely solely on the radio for contact with the media.





The questionnaire asked people both what kind of programmes they most liked listening to and what they particularly appreciated about Blin radio. Statistically, music and news were by far the most popular subjects for radio listening. After this came drama, followed by educational programmes, poetry, sport, and children's radio. In response to the questions as to whether they thought Blin-language radio important and why, every respondent thought the service important, while similar reasons were given in a variety of formulations for why Blin-language radio was valued.



An important factor was ease of understanding. "Learning in your own language makes everything easy," I was told. Improving language skills was also valued. "I learn my language and ensure it is equal to the best languages"; "We can improve our mother tongue." Along with language goes the question of culture and identity, which many respondents saw as a central aspect of Blin-language radio. "It helps us know a lot of our culture and language"; "It is important and our right to have it to ensure our identity." Similar responses were abundant. Linked to this was a strong consciousness among older respondents of a role for radio in passing on Blin culture to the young. Some Eritrean villages are entirely Blin-speaking, but many more people live dispersed among other language groups, and without the state commitment to nurturing Eritrea's different cultures, there would have been a danger that minority identities would wither, as has happened in so many parts of the world. Thus, I was told: "We can transfer our culture and habits to the next generation," and "It is important for older people and society to pass their language, culture, and other good habits to the new generation."

After culture came information. The popularity of music, drama, and poetry indicates that radio is widely used for entertainment purposes, but the Eritrean state uses the media extensively for social messaging, and respondents were very keen to emphasize how important to them was the knowledge and education brought to them via radio. Local-language radio brings the world to people even in remote villages, and this is much appreciated. "It helps us to know what is going on in the world"; "We get precise information about what is going on in the world"; "We have to have a local radio so as to listen to news in our language." On a more immediate level, people see radio as a tool of education and development – "Local radio is very essential to teach and mobilize the people for development"; "We learn many things we have never heard before"; and: "The society learns a lot from the community radio about health."

The only consistent criticism of Blin radio was that it was seen as too distant from its audience. Time and time again I was told that there needed to be more community participation in programming, with improved opportunities for audiences to make comments, give suggestions, and for ordinary people's voices to be heard. This is interesting not only because it demonstrates a sense of alienation from the radio producers in Asmara, but also because the demand for a voice for the people implies that they saw Blin radio as belonging to them – a space in which they should have the right to be heard. Radio producers also agreed with this perspective. All those I spoke to who worked on Blin radio bemoaned the fact that they were operating out of Asmara while aware that most of their audience were in other parts of the country. There were a number of opportunities for audience members to contribute to Blin radio. Competitions were held where viewers were asked to send in poems and plays, and interviews were held with a range of Blin speakers. The main problem for the producers was that lack of funds meant they could seldom travel out to the Blin heartlands even though most are less than a hundred miles from the capital. Moreover, though no one raised this issue with me, state control over all media is extreme. Free discussion would therefore not be tolerated, and all output had to be vetted by the government.

I became aware that drama was part of the output of the local-language radio network when a theatre colleague, Mesmer Andu, whose mother tongue is Blin, told me that he had won a competition to have a play he wrote performed on Blin radio. It was this chance piece of information that led to the research informing this article. I knew that theatre and, more recently, film had a strong history in Tigrinya, the dominant language of the capital, and had also been developed in Tigre. I had been involved with theatre training in Blin in the mid-1990s and more recently with experiments with theatre in a Blin primary school, but I knew drama was still a novelty for most Blin and for other minority-language groups in Eritrea. When I thought about it, radio seemed an excellent place to begin to develop minority-language theatre. It reaches many people. The resources needed to put on a radio play once a station is up and running are minimal compared to the expense and organization required to mount a stage play, and radio drama can be short, thus providing an apprenticeship for those wishing to begin to learn to write, direct or act.

I do not speak Blin, so my analysis for this report has had to be carried out through translation. I focus on two scripts, both already broadcast, which the writers and the radio station kindly agreed to share with me and which I had translated. Some plays put out were written by members of the Blin panel, while in 2007 and 2008 the focus was moving towards competitions to which anyone could submit a play. In 2008, three of these competitions had been held. The first attracted three entries, the second six, and the most recent had had eleven submissions. In each case a social topic had been prescribed for the plays: girl's education, AIDS and its stigmatization, and tuberculosis. Such competition structures for arts events are widespread around Africa, as is the prescribing of topics seen as socially useful. This accords with both the widespread African view that art should serve a didactic purpose and the desire of many governments to maintain control over artistic output.

The two plays this article focuses on are *Children for Tomorrow* by Amina G and *Kina at the Crossroads* by Eyob Tesfayohannes. Both are very short pieces, the former running to only three pages and the latter to five.

The overtly didactic nature of radio drama was made especially clear to me when the script I was given for *Children for Tomorrow* was preceded by a paragraph labelled "Objectives." These were as follows:

> Develop awareness in mothers that they should not give anything other than breast milk to the child before it is six months old.
>
> Mothers should give time for playing with their infants and children so that children will develop:
>
> > Vocabulary and communication abilities
> > Confidence to ask and answer
> > Love for parents and society

This is clearly a play supporting the health agenda of the government, for it is focused on giving information through entertainment. Such radio drama has a long history. The UK's longest-running radio serial, *The Archers*, which has been broadcasting for over sixty years, began as an agricultural advice vehicle. The BBC World Service Trust has supported radio programmes purveying public-health messages, social education, and 'soft' politics in local languages over many years in countries ranging from Afghanistan to Rwanda,[5] and across Africa radio is currently being pressed into service to support a range of social campaigns, with health, more recently especially HIV/AIDS, often topping the list.

Children for Tomorrow has a cast of four. The mother, who begins the play dramatically with sound effects of giving birth, is also a social worker who has taken on board progressive ideas about child-rearing. She is being assisted in her delivery by a traditional midwife, Sinnar, and it is between these two that the main debate over custom and practice takes place. The other two women in the piece, Lette, the midwife's assistant, and Dahba, a neighbour, are also traditionalists in need of re-education. The play comes in three short scenes with music between indicating a gap of time – just a few minutes in the first instance, but four months between the second and third scenes.

The first lines set the scene. We hear the pain of childbirth, and then Sinnar says, "It's all right. Don't worry. Keep pushing. Virgin Mary will help you. The one who endures can carry the load." The reference to the Virgin Mary would immediately establish credibility for an audience, whether Catholic or Orthodox, in terms of cultural referencing, since Mary is devoutly invoked as a protector by Christian women across Eritrea. Following this up with a Blin saying provides ambiance but also gives us an immediate clue as to Sinnar's traditionalist views.

In the very next line, the baby is safely born, and then we come to the meat of the scene. Sinnar wants to give the newborn child a medicine of her own preparation, while Lette believes that a drink of cold water will ensure that the baby does not get stomach ache. Sinnar also wants to give both mother and baby a steam bath, scoffing when the mother (unnamed throughout) asks for warm water to wash. "First get rest [...] Youth nowadays. You say you need soap and water. What is needed now for you and your baby is a steaming with wet wood."

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[5] See *Drama for Development: Cultural Translation and Social Change*, ed. Andrew Skuse, Marie Gillespie & Gerry Power (Thousand Oaks CA & London: Sage, 2011).

In the first scene the mother has been largely too preoccupied with giving birth to take on her would-be assistants, but in scene two she is coming back to herself and demands her child so that she can breast-feed. Once more Sinnar seeks to insist that the baby needs her medicine, but the mother is having none of it and ends the debate with a central bit of teaching for Sinnar and the radio listeners:

> Breast milk is enough [. . .] Up to six months the child should feed only on his mother's milk. Breast feeding on time and vaccinating on time, including body hygiene, is enough for six months to allow a child to grow properly.

Up until this point the tone has been bustling and even amusing. Sinnar is an archetypal well-meaning village know-it-all and traditionalist of a type that would be near universally recognized, and the playwright daringly suggests a range of birthing noises from the mother that would be potentially quite graphic. However, once the lesson has to be delivered it does come in a fairly indigestible lump, where we are informed not only about breast-feeding, but also about vaccination and hygiene, all in one line.

In the final scene, we hear noises of talking, and then the neighbour, Dahba, appears. She first wonders who is speaking, then worries that something is wrong when she realizes that all the talking is just being done by the mother to her four-month-old baby. Once again Dahba plays the voice of tradition. She says that those who talk too much to their children never get their work done and that the child will be spoilt. Rather, she argues, "A child should be fed properly, then disciplined and sent out of the house to play far away." Once more the mother becomes teacher, and in a series of speeches she explains that children need to feel able to discuss things with their parents, that children need to be listened to and encouraged to ask questions so that they can learn and do well in society. Unlike Sinnar, Dahba proves a more apt pupil. With each argument the mother brings forward she is gradually persuaded, until she concludes the play convinced that people are neglecting their children wrongly, not for lack of love but "because of lack of knowledge."

In three pages it would be very hard to convey any message subtly. Amina manages to bring into her play dramatic tension, comedy, character, and an evocation of traditional Blin society. The mother/social worker has a hard part to play, in that she is mainly the embodiment of a set of ideas, and the playwright wishes to convey quite a lot of information in a very short space of dialogue. However, the introductory birthing sequence and the fun that can be had from the chatting to the child at the beginning of scene three do give some space for humanizing this character. Moreover, it is notable that none of the traditionalist characters is made to look stupid. Rather, the focus in *Children for Tomorrow* is on education, with a belief that people can change for the benefit of the whole of society.

The second play I am considering, Eyob Tesfayohannes's *Kina at the Crossroads*, was the prize-winner of the competition asking for plays about the importance of education for girls. As before, we are given an objective, which is "to bring an understanding to the society that a girl should not be married before she finishes school and while she is still under-age." A little context is necessary here. Prior to independence, many girls were married off extremely early and with no voice in the matter. Indeed, a substantial number of the young women who joined the liberation struggle as fighters did so to avoid unwelcome marriages. The law now says that no girl may be married before the age of eighteen, but in rural communities the law is still broken. In terms of education, only 9% of Eritreans went to school before 1991, and the vast majority of these were boys from urban areas. The Eritrean government has put considerable effort into developing not only local-language schools but many more of them, and it is estimated that some fifty percent of Eritrean children now go to school. However, the drop-out rate among older girls is high and the state has run a number of campaigns to get more girls into education.

Kina at the Crossroads is set in a nuclear family with a mother and father, Keymet and Dekin, an older brother who has been on national service and returns in the second scene of the play, and Kina, the sixteen-year-old girl at the heart of the play. The play is set in an unspecified rural village and the family are farmers. The opening scene shows the parents getting up, when Dekin mentions that an unspecified suitor has approached him about marrying Kina. This traditional patriarch is shocked when his wife questions his decision – not in relation to the prospective husband, whose suitability is never discussed, but because she is still under-age and should finish her education.

The short second and third scenes show the arrival on leave of Woldu, the family's soldier son. He is a model young man, happy to see his family, and wishing to greet his neighbours. Indeed, much emphasis is put on the loving nature of the family and their joy in being together, and there is little individual character-development. The following exchange is typical of the playwright's anxiety to show the benevolence of all concerned:

> KINA: My father, we were eating separately when Woldu was away. But today he is with us, we will enjoy it together.
>
> DEKIN: I agree my dear daughter. I will also enjoy the dinner with you, my beloved son and daughter, and with my wife, Keynet.

The core of the play is scene four. When his father mentions marriage in relation to Kina, Woldu immediately interjects, saying she is too young and should finish school. Dekin gives the traditional reason for his decision – no one wants girls if they are not married by the age of seventeen. The support of her brother and mother finally allows Kina to speak.

> KINA: I was not able to say no to my father concerning this case. I would like to finish my education. I like learning. I always come first in class. But I can't say no to my father. I must obey my parents and you as my elder brother. If you all agree and let me continue learning, I will be very happy.

However, the play is not allowed to move to confrontation. The aim is to persuade, not to promote conflict or ridicule old beliefs. Accordingly, Woldu says they must all agree on what is to be done, and explains that while their father wishes Kina well, the problem is that, because he is illiterate, he cannot understand the advantages of education. Then Woldu tells the all-important story. He asks them if they have enjoyed the letters he sent them, and how they thought the letters were written, since he never went to school. Both parents insist that they were delighted with the letters, which Kina read for them, and explain that, since Kina said the handwriting was always the same, they thought he must have a friend who wrote for him. Woldu plays his trump card. He explains that on national service everyone is taught to read and write by the government, and he now understands the importance of education. Dekin now, for the first time, consults his wife and then graciously concedes, saying that he had not understood his mistake about the importance of school. His concession is greeted with the usual ululations of joy, and the family come together in mutual love.

In terms of the message the play wishes to convey, it is ideologically impeccable, but, in its anxious desire to win everyone over through persuasion rather than argument, individuality and drama is sacrificed. Only Woldu, in his story of becoming literate, and Dekin in his initial irascible assertiveness, attain any individuality. The women in this male-authored play remain virtuous ciphers, models of progressive views tempered by suitably meek attitudes towards their menfolk.

Since so few Blin speakers have had any opportunity for creative writing, and since topics for plays on radio are so prescribed and texts so necessarily short, it is hardly surprising that subtlety and character-development are a little thin. In the questionnaires, a slight majority, twenty-eight out of fifty, said they listened to Blin drama and enjoyed it, and a number were able to list specific plays they had enjoyed, and even sometimes the names of playwrights. No one offered critical comment, beyond saying that the plays were interesting and educational, and this probably says more about the relative lack of literary and dramatic education in the community than it does about the quality of the plays. A number of people said they did not feel qualified to make critical comment on radio offerings. Educational differences and respect for authority mean that it is difficult for many ordinary people to openly offer any critical analysis of state media.

Radio producers are keen to expand the range of what they can offer, and would like to continue to develop drama. However, they are keenly aware of a range of problems in relation to radio drama. Budgets for local-language radio in one of the poorest countries of the world are very tight. None of the playwrights has any training, and Hamde Kiflemariam says there are particular problems with acting for radio. The actors are just ordinary people who volunteer to play their parts. They generally rehearse over a couple of days in someone's home and then come in to the ramshackle studio to be recorded. All the professionals I spoke to were eager to gain access to training, and saw a particular need to coach actors in how to approach radio drama.

Blin radio ran on a shoestring, with severely limited resources in terms of funding, personnel, and training. Yet it was hugely popular with the Blin population, and was very much seen as *their* radio station. Blin radio drama was in its infancy, but was valued as educational entertainment by both the state and audiences. It was unclear how much further such a minority form could develop without training and at least some resources, but the evidence was that Blin radio drama was slowly attracting more people who wanted to try their hand at creative writing and that there was an audience eager for radio plays.

Regrettably, Blin, like other minority-language radio, ceased to develop when Radio Bana was closed down. I was unable in Eritrea to obtain a reason for the closure, but Reporters without Borders says that a group of journalists from the station were involved in a programme on participatory government in January 2009 and that it thinks this is why the station was closed and eleven journalists imprisoned without trial. Sadly, this is not an aberrant action on the part of the Eritrean government. The media in Eritrea have been under the absolutely control of the state since it closed all independent media outlets in 2001 and began imprisoning journalists who were seen as in any way critical of government. In 2008, no Blin-language journalists were arrested, but in 2011 Mohammed Osman of the Blin Dimtsi Hafash service was detained without trial, contributing to a situation that currently sees Eritrea ranked lowest in the world for press freedom. I ceased writing about live theatre in Eritrea some years ago because it was no longer anything but a vehicle for state propaganda. The tender shoot of local-language radio drama now seems to have been cut off in the same way.

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Through Determination to Happiness?

Eastern African Slavery in Life and Literature

Pia Thielmann

During a research visit to Malawi in 2008, I showed a newly purchased book, Jonathan Sajiwandani's *Road to Emancipation: From Slavery to Happiness* (2005), to a friend, a literary person by passion and a linguist by profession.[1] The author, according to the book's back cover, was born in 1935 on Likoma Island, and lived there until his adulthood. My friend told me that the author's surname didn't sound like a real Likoma family name. Without the last part of the name, 'sajiwa' means 'he/she/they don't know' in Chinyanja, which is spoken on Likoma and along the shores of Lake Malawi. With the question word 'ndani' added, the name means "Who doesn't know?"[2]

The family name, possibly adopted, appears to be programmatic and contains a double meaning. If read as a rhetorical question – 'Who doesn't know!' with an imagined exclamation mark – the implication is that everyone is aware of the history of the Muslim Arab slave raids on predominantly eastern African communities. If taken as a serious question – 'Who doesn't know?' with a question mark – then part of the missing information is provided by the author in his book: "a fictitious account of the [five-year] ordeal of an abducted young man on the shores of Lake Malawi, in what is known today as the Niassa Province of Mozambique."[3] The fictitious character is kidnapped at the age of fifteen by Muslim slavers working for Arabs. Since the international, historical, academic, and literary foci largely remain on the European and American Atlantic slave trade,[4] a book by an African about Africa that features the Arab slave trade thus constitutes a welcome addition to the few exceptions, such as Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Paradise* (1994), which discusses trade and slavery and writes back to Joseph Conrad's controversial *Heart of Darkness* (1902) with its journey along the Congo river into the continent's interior.[5] My friend's pleasant surprise about seeing this book was also based on historical facts. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and a BBC News online article, the damage done to eastern Africa by the Arabs and by others on their behalf affected more victims, started earlier, and lasted longer.[6] These sources estimate that between eleven and eighteen million black Africans were enslaved by Arab/Muslim slave traders and taken across the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Sahara desert between 650 AD and the early-nineteenth century, compared to other estimates that nine to fourteen million Africans were brought to the Americas in the Atlantic slave trade from the fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In no way do I want to subscribe to a concept of competition as to who suffered most, the victims of the Atlantic or of the Indian Ocean slave trade, or those that were affected by both trades, such as in Mali. What I want to point out is that African fiction on this part of history is still extremely rare.

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[1] Jonathan Sajiwandani, *Road to Emancipation: From Slavery to Happiness* (London: Janus, 2005).

[2] This information is based on conversations with Pascal Kishindo in December 2008 and on emails between him and myself on 8, 9, 13, and 14 November 2012. I thank him for graciously letting me use this information.

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[3] Quoted from the preface of *Road to Emancipation*, np.

[4] There are, of course, the numerous accounts of David Livingstone's attempts to help end this trade, usually embedded in studies of his missionary and "explorer" activities, his diaries, and on general trade records. Another academic book is Edward A. Alpers's *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1975). Some recent examples of academic concerns with East African Muslim/Arab slavery are contained in Paul E. Lovejoy's *Slavery on The Frontiers of Islam* (Princeton NJ: Markus Wiener, 2004), and *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (1983; New York: Cambridge UP, 2012), *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus & Marcus Rediker (Berkeley: U of California P, 2007), and Tidiane N'Diaye's *Le génocide voilé: enquête historique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008). *Many Middle Passages* contains two particularly interesting articles: "The Other Middle Passage" by Edward A. Alpers (20–38) and "The East African Middle Passage" by Iain McCalman (39–51). Alpers's article features some accounts by slave children collected and published in 1887 by a member of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA). McCalman's article concerns itself with David Livingstone's Zambezi and Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi) travels, and the busy slave transport route across Lake Malawi to Portuguese Mozambique (the 'Middle Passage' of the title), which Livingstone had tried to stop.

[5] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994). Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, was serialized in 1899 in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Edinburgh) and published as the second of three parts of a book in 1902.

[6] *Encyclopaedia Britannica's Guide to Black History* http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-24156 (accessed 25 April 2010), and Anon., "Quick guide: The slave trade," *BBC News* (15 March 2007), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6445941.stm (accessed 25 April 2010).

Sajiwandani's novel is the only book-length fiction from Malawi on the Muslim Arab slave trade as it concerns Malawi and its neighbours. In 2000 Kachere and CLAIM (Christian Literature Association in Malawi), two Malawian publishing houses with Christian roots, joined to publish *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives,* edited by David S. Bone. But even in the first essay by Bone himself, "An Outline History of Islam in Malawi," the slave trade is mentioned explicitly only twice; once in regard to Salim bin Abdullah, "a trader in slaves and ivory" who established the lakeshore town of Nkhotakota as "the first centre of Islam" in Malawi,[7] and a second time in reference to the actions of Christian missionaries and David Livingstone to counter such trade.[8] Otherwise, the term "trade" is used frequently but "neutrally." There are very few references to slaves in the entire book.

In addition to Sajiwandani's novel and its unspecified source – as I learnt from Peter Fraenkel – there exists an autobiography by a former slave, Padre Petro Kilekwa, entitled *Slave Boy to Priest*, published in 1937 by the Universities' Mission to Central Africa in London.[9] Fraenkel, who "was running Malawi Radio at the time," met Petro Kilekwa, whose name, as he told Fraenkel, was originally Chilekwa, the 'K' having come in through KiSwahili, and interviewed him.[10] Fraenkel, of German-Jewish descent from Breslau, now Wrocław in Poland, fled from Nazi Germany to Africa and became a Broadcasting Officer in the Central African Broadcasting Service, "where he helped to pioneer broadcasting almost entirely in African languages," and later, because of his "dislike of racist politics," moved to Britain to work for Reuters and the BBC World Service.[11] He writes:

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[7] David S. Bone, "An Outline History of Islam in Malawi," in *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspective*, ed. David S. Bone (Zomba & Blantyre: Kachere and CLAIM, 2000): 14.

[8] David S. Bone, "An Outline History of Islam in Malawi," 15–16.

[9] Email from Peter Fraenkel to Eckhard Breitinger, 21 May 2010. Petro Kilekwa, *Slave Boy to Priest* (London: Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1937), tr. from Chinyanja by K.H. Smith Nixon. In Alpers's "The Other Middle Passage," Kilekwa is mentioned in the context of thirteen freed children's accounts (published by the UMCA) of their lives as slaves. Alpers also mentions Kilekwa's 1937 autobiography and quotes from it.

> Among my ancient tapes I found one I recorded on the shores of Lake Malawi (Nyasa) in 1956: An old African priest, Padre Petro Kilekwa – then in his 80s – described very vividly and in good English how as a small boy of 5 or so he was captured in a tribal raid in what is now Zambia, sold, marched to the coast of Tanganyika, put into a dhow by Arab slavers and transported to Muscat [capital city of Oman]. A British anti-slavery patrol intercepted the dhow, he was freed, kept on board a British warship for a year or two […], then put into a boarding school on Zanzibar, became a teacher and later was ordained as a priest.[12]

Fraenkel's transcript of the interview recorded at Monkey Bay, Malawi (then Nyasaland) on 14 October 1956 and Kilekwa's published autobiography, which he consulted in May 2010 in the British Library in London, appear to contain different accounts of some situations.[13] According to Fraenkel, the book indicates that, when Kilekwa's parents attempted to buy the boy back from the slavers, they "offered three lengths of calico to ransom him but the slavers demanded eight which they could not raise,"[14] whereas in Fraenkel's 1956 interview, Kilekwa recalls:

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[10] Email from Peter Fraenkel to Pia Thielmann, 2 June 2010.

[11] Dust-jacket of Peter Frankel, *No Fixed Abode: A Jewish Odyssey to Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

[12] Email from Peter Fraenkel to Eckhard Breitinger, 21 May 2010. According to Fraenkel, Kilekwa died in 1967 in his mid-nineties (email from Fraenkel to Thielmann, 28 May 2010). Another source claims that "he died on 29 November 1966 aged 96, the last ex-slave in Malawi." Donald Arden, "Slavery in Malawi," *Nkhani Zaulere: The Malawi Chatterbox* (February 2007), http://www.malawimacs.org/downloads/Nkhani_Feb_07.doc (accessed 2 June 2010).

[13] Peter Fraenkel, "Interview: Padre Petro Kilekwa with Peter Fraenkel, Central African Broadcasting Service, recorded at Monkey Bay, Nyasaland (Malawi), 14.10.1956, slightly abridged." I thank Peter Fraenkel for graciously having made his transcript available to me for my use.

[14] Email from Peter Fraenkel to Pia Thielmann, 30 May 2010).

> Many people of our village, when they came back to the village, saw the Angoni selling slaves to them, to the Swahili people, and my mother saw me and I saw her too. And she said "That is my child" but the Swahili people said "Yes? It is your child? What then? What do you want to do?" She said "I want to ransom him." Then they said "No, you can't get him. Not at all. We have bought him. We must take him to the coast." My father said "I will ransom him. I will give as much as you want: Cloth, or a cow…anything." But they said "No, you can't. We've got him already. Nothing more."[15]

As Fraenkel suggests, this discrepancy between the two accounts may be based on the nature of oral tradition and human memory. Further, it appears that the first version may be the more accurate one, considering that the book was written twenty years closer to the actual event, and considering that slaves had a monetary – or, in this case, calico – value attached to them. Why would the traders refuse to receive more?[16] What is also apparent from Kilekwa's account is that the local Ngonis – like their fellow Africans in western Africa during the Atlantic slave trade – took an active part in the trade, as did the Yao, both being peoples of Malawi. Both were also victims. Kilekwa's wife, for example, was "a Yao woman who had […] been rescued from slavery."[17] According to online history sources, the Ngoni (or Angoni) people had arrived from the Natal region of modern-day South Africa, having fled from the head of the Zulu Empire, Shaka Zulu (c.1787–1828). The Yao came to Malawi (Nyasa) from northern Mozambique to escape famine and conflicts with the Makua. The Makua had become enemies of the Yao because of the latter's wealth from trading ivory and slaves to Arabs from Zanzibar. In Malawi, the Yao soon began attacking both the Chewa and the Ngoni people to capture prisoners and sell them as slaves. In 1870, the Yao ruling class chose to follow Islam like their Arab trading partners rather than maintain traditional 'animism'.[18]

Sajiwandani's novel, which is not readily available or known in his home country – a regrettable but common situation shared by many African countries – but which is available through the internet and potentially shipped all over the world, has been chosen for this essay for two reasons: to introduce another of the rare accounts of slavery in Malawi, and because it is possible that Sajiwandani may have known about or read Kilekwa's autobiography. As Kilekwa was abducted "in what is now Zambia" by Ngonis, first sold to Swahilis, then to Yaos, and finally to Arabs who took him to Muscat, Oman, Sajiwandani's narrative and Kilekwa's autobiography cannot be the same.[19] However, it is still possible that he also received some inspiration from Kilekwa's account for his novel. In any case, he did shed more light on the underexposed eastern African slave trade in life and literature.

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[15] Fraenkel's transcript of his interview with Kilekwa.

[16] Fraenkel, email to Thielmann, 2 June 2010.

[17] Fraenkel, email to Thielmann, 28 May 2010.

[18] Anon., "History of Malawi," http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Malawi (accessed 3 June 2010, 2 November 2012); Anon., "Shaka," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaka (accessed 3 June 2010, 2 November 2012).

Jonathan Julius Sajiwandani holds a Ph.D. in gerontology and returned to Likoma Island after spending thirty-eight years teaching at universities in the UK as a senior lecturer.[20] He is the author of the book *Learning By Doing*: *Teaching and Human Ecology* (2000) and of medical articles, among them a co-authored study of sexually transmitted diseases in Zambia that includes a discussion of AIDS, published as early as 1987.[21] He wrote this article while at the School of Medicine of the University of Zambia in Lusaka. After the author's name are listed eight titles (Ph.D., M.Sc., B.A., S.R.N., N.D.N., C.M.S., R.N.T., F.R.S.H.), indicating that he may think of himself as a role model. As a privileged and successful person from one of Africa's poorest countries, he may have felt an obligation to 'give back' to his country, a possibility supported by a 2007 article about his still-active self-help project on Likoma Island. According to this article, Sajiwandani "was shocked by the information he read in the Likoma District social/economic profile,"

> and was moved to join others to form the Lake Malawi Project[s] (LMP) to encourage local communities to work in village groups in tackling problems such as HIV/AIDS, food insecurity, gender dis-

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[19] Fraenkel's transcript of his interview with Kilekwa. Fraenkel's email to Breitinger, 21 May 2010.

[20] Anon., "Ambassador Eastham Hands over Self-Help Projects in Likoma," http://Lilongwe.usembassy.gov/ltestembassynews11111.html (accessed 30 September 2009). Anon., "Open Question: Does the Former President Clinton Help to Fund Community Development Projects in Poor Countries Such as Malawi?" http://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=sajiwandani&d=4867684766389710&mkt=de-DE&setlang=de-DE&w=eLfhvbUDB22lkWxE8ycogHlityjK8Bnj (accessed 5 November 2012).

[21] Jonathan J. Sajiwandani, *Learning By Doing: Teaching and Human Ecology* (London: Janus, 2000); Jonathan J. Sajiwandani & K.S. Baboo, "Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Zambia," *Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health* 107.5 (October 1987): 183–86.

> crimination, illiteracy, transportation and lack of soil conservation methods.[22]

Sajiwandani is the Chair of LMP and is revered as one "local" who has "done good."[23] Francis Phiri writes enthusiastically about this island with its approximately 9,000 inhabitants and its famous Anglican Cathedral of St. Peter, consecrated in November 1911:[24]

> To the right there is a bungalow of Dr. Jonathan Sajiwandani standing on the rocks on shores of Mbamba beach. The sight adds to colour with several modern boats around, and you will be told the owner is one of the best examples on the island, for leaving the comfort of big cities like London to come home and settle to a simple life. Best example being that after staying some forty years lecturing medicine at UK universities […], Dr. Sajiwandani decided to abandon everything and stay in his village soil while enjoying the lake breeze. "It is wonderful to be back and not stay in town but this village of ours. I enjoy the best of my stay here and even after staying in UK I feel I am having the best of the stay home," says the man who inspires many locals from the island staying in town to get back and establish their existence.[25]

The novel itself, untypically for the genre, features a subtitle, "From Slavery to Happiness," that promises a happy ending. On the surface this refers to the story of Pete Sangapite, who was abducted at the age of fifteen and adopted by his abductor and Muslim slave master, Tere Sanavale, who, under the influence of Pete and the Christian John Wilmot, "an anthropologist with Portuguese and English blood […] born 1878 in Liverpool, England"[26] and with a Malawian wife, Lona, Chief Chombe Tafika's daughter, will join the anti-slavery forces. The novel thus appears to demonstrate the conviction that reconciliation between conflicting cultures, religions, attitudes, and economic practices is possible if people from the opposing interest-groups get to know and understand each other. The climax comes in the marriage between Pete and Ine, the Wilmots's "mixed-race" daughter. This is followed by the growing interest of Pete's cousin, Dawale, in Ine's "mixed-race" sister, Danga, a relationship thereby ensuring future contacts between people of different backgrounds. According to the author's philosophy, this will lead to political peace and personal happiness.

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[22] Anon., "Ambassador Eastham Hands over Self-Help Projects in Likoma."

[23] Flora Sajiwandani, Jonathan Sajiwandani's wife, is the Chairperson of the Agriculture Subcommittee of the LMPM Executive Board. (Lake Malawi Projects (Malawi)). Zeria Banda, "Vegetable Gardening Improving Livelihoods in Northern Malawi," 8 August 2008, http://web.worldbank.org/WEBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21869053~menuPK:258649~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258644,00.html (accessed 8 November 2012).

[24] Anon., "Likoma Island," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Likoma_Island (accessed 9 November 2012); Anon., "Likoma, Malawi," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Likoma,_Malawi (accessed 9 November 2012). According to this entry, Likoma Island has 9,000 inhabitants, according to Phiri, 6,000.

[25] Francis Tayanjah Phiri, "Locals Add the Magic Touch to Beautiful Likoma" (7 February 2010), http://www.bnltimes.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2029 (accessed 3 June 2010).

The novel contains twenty-six chapters, a description of the trade routes through Malawi to the Indian Ocean, and a preface confirming that the story is fictional except for the names of persons and places of historical relevance. The book starts with a conversation about a former slave trader, Chief Nanenso Tate, Dawale's father, who converted to Christianity. The conversation takes place between Pete's abductors. Thus, the reader knows from the very first sentence that it is possible to switch sides, and that this may happen to other characters, too, by the end of the story. Also, since this is a love story between not just one but two young couples, the reader can rest assured – beyond the promise of the subtitle – that there really will be a happy ending. To reach this ending, however, Pete has to be morally superior to his Muslim captors. Having a Christian orientation, he can handle this challenge. The author lets him save his captors and people related to them from disaster or certain death several times. The first time, shortly after his capture, Pete fights off a lion by pushing a burning log into its mouth:

> It suddenly backed off and rolled on the ground groaning in agony. Yake was now awake and fired his gun to finish it off.
>
> "In the name of Allah!" exclaimed Yake. "How did you manage to do that, boy?" he asked, his body shaking, astonished at Pete's bravery.
>
> "I don't know, sir," he replied, trembling all over, feeling as though it had been a dream.
>
> "Well, you have saved my life from the king of the beasts, young man, and I owe everything to you for this brave act," Sanavale declared in amazement with a parlance of respect for the boy.

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[26] Sajiwandani, *Road to Emancipation*, 94. Further page references are in the main text.

> "Pete, you're a very brave boy. You are a real man before your time, eh!" commented Wina approvingly.
>
> Pete acknowledged the compliment as he looked at Yake. "But it's you, sir, who killed it." (25)

This rite of passage catapults the boy into adulthood. Additionally, it gains him the respect of his captors. It also gives Pete the opportunity to show his talent for diplomacy when he flatters Yake.

On this road to emancipation, which is also a personal odyssey, Pete not only has to fight figurative Cyclops in the form of beasts (such as a crocodile that attacks a goat-herd forty-five pages after the incident with the lion), but also has to resist the Sirens' song. When he tells the story of his life to his future wife, Ine, and her younger sister, Danga, portrayed as a Siren of sorts herself, he reveals to them that he "met these three very beautiful girls. They invited me to play the mbumba game with them and they gave me some beautiful pebbles as a gift of goodwill" (90). These pebbles, which are used as marbles but, unknown to him, are actually rough diamonds, serve as another means of testing his honesty and moral strength. In contrast, the traders' dishonesty and greed endanger the entire group's life.

The rewards for his goodness have drawbacks, even though they are not immediately obvious to him: Sanavale is so impressed by the young man that he wants to adopt him upon reaching his home, Ndondo. He tells his plans to his senior wife, Chaine Sanavale, who is also quite taken with Pete and by the idea of getting a son, in addition to her two daughters. Although he tells his wife that he will adopt the youth with his permission – and his wife insists on Pete's consent to the adoption, otherwise he should be free to go home – he is deceiving his wife and is planning to deceive Pete:

> Her husband explained everything in detail as to how they abducted Pete and that he was to adopt him as his own son and hoped that he would agree since he had built up a rapport with him and, moreover, he was now far away from his own homeland.
>
> To make certain that he agreed, Sanavale had secretly planned to give Pete some magical herbs that would make him forget about his home and think of Ndondo as his real home, but he kept this plan to himself. (90)

Sanavale, portrayed ambivalently as a stereotypical, cunning, untrustworthy Muslim (slaver), yet a person who dearly loves his wives, children, and now Pete, does not have to give the herbs to Pete, as the latter falls down some steps, faints, and wakes up not knowing where he is. Sanavale takes advantage of this situation:

> "Who are you and where am I?" he asked, startled.
>
> "Oh, son, I'm your father, Sanavale. I'm glad you're with us again. You have not been well since we arrived back from Nyenyenzi. You remember Nyenyenzi?"
>
> "Yes, I do remember, but not before that."
>
> "Good, no, I mean, don't worry so much about the past as long as you remember the pleasant things from Nyenyenzi. Your mother, Mrs Sanavale senior, will come in and see you," he said. (91)

Pete's education as the son of a Muslim family begins by being dressed accordingly. Sanavale says:

> "I have [...] bought you these two white caftans and two pairs of sandals for you to wear. The caftans will be handy when you wish to wash those clothes you're wearing," he said lovingly.
>
> "Thank you very much, dad. I wonder why I have never worn these before," pointing to his new clothes, "but I like them and I'll look like you; well, almost like you."
>
> "I'm sure you will," he acknowledged joyfully. (93)

Pete, having been successfully deprived of the means to return home by the Sanavales, no matter the intention, assumes himself to be a Muslim: "But I'm a Muslim like you, dad?" "No, you are not," he chuckled. "But why?" said Pete, puzzled. "Uh? Oh... yes. You'll know better when you grow up" (103). Sanavale, therefore, does not go *all the way* in taking away Pete's identity, which he would have done, had he told Pete that he is a Muslim. In fact, he even encourages Pete to work for the Christian family, his friends the Wilmots.

Beyond relating events to Greek mythology, the Western-educated Sajiwandani also compares Pete's numerous challenges and suffering to those of Job in the Old Testament. Pete resists all temptations, becomes the ideal son-in-law to John and Lona Wilmot and an ideal husband to his wife Ine; when saved, he is re-united with his original family, Lidiya and Bole Sangapite, his sister Tawene, five years his junior, and his cousin Dawale Tate, who had escaped the slave raiders. "Better yet," Pete, who "was baptised as a Christian when he was a baby in Mataka, [but] [...] couldn't remember that his father told him all about Christianity" (97), now becomes an *active* Christian, with his parents' consent, "since it was their intention too for him to attend the religion of his own choice since his full identity had been established" (158).

Pete is physically, psychologically, and spiritually at home now, at peace with himself. Despite the book's obvious Christian perspective, the link to Job, who is also an Islamic prophet, indicates a certain religious open-mindedness on the part of its author: The "notorious Yao African slaver" (2), the Muslim Sanavale, confesses to Pete that he and his wife are not his real parents, apologizes, promises to help Pete return to his Sangapite family, and even promises to apologize to his parents about the pain he has caused them (112–13). Unknown to Pete, it is his positive influence on Sanavale that makes him reconsider his involvement in the slave trade: "Since the abduction of Pete, his attitude had changed and he would stop trading in slavery and continue only with the ivory trade" (94).

In a transcribed conversation with a person identified as "Lewis," Alfred Msadala, a poet, journalist, and president of Malawi PEN, evaluates Sajiwandani's life, reading him and his novel as displaying "determination" and, by extension, resistance to power:

> Through determination, he qualified as a medical doctor and ended up as a university lecturer in the United Kingdom. It is not my intention to chronicle his life but there is a link with the story he authored. As the title reads, as Malawians, do we have a culture of listening? And is the freedom that is given to us by God put to full use – meaningful and profitable use?
>
> The protagonist in the book, Pete Sangaipe [sic], is enslaved and sets out on a forced journey to East Africa. A tale set in the slave trade era, [it] is about how Pete puts to use his freedom whilst in bond.[27]

To underline the importance of resistance, Msadala refers to a scene in the novel in which the slaver Sanavale promises the newly captured boy that he will be set free after showing the traders a safe way through the forest: "Pete somehow believed him because his voice was gentle. In any case, he had to concede because of fear of what the gang might do to him if he did not co-operate. But he was brave enough to talk" (17). Msadala continues:

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[27] Alfred Msadala, "Literary Talk: By the Town Hall Side," *Sunday Times* (Malawi; 11 May 2008): 7. The person addressed as "Lewis" is Lewis Msasa, the spokesperson for Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education (TEVET) (two emails from Msadala to Thielmann, 30 October 2012). The use of the term 'East Africa' in the quotation is not very precise, since the whole area covered in the novel is located in what may be called East Africa, or eastern Africa, or southern East Africa. Sometimes, Malawi in particular is also subsumed under Central Africa.

> Firstly, there is a word "somehow." Pete, though in captivity, could think and make judgement. He was just in his early teens but was able to see things and listen. Although his captor was gentle in talking, Pete had already read through him. He was cautious since he was surrounded by roughnecks. Lewis, you know who [this] could be in modern times. And for a reader to see how intelligent he is, we are told that he was brave enough to talk.[28]

Here, Msadala might be referring to Hastings Banda, the country's dictator from 1964 to 1994, under whose regime it was extremely dangerous to speak out, or to Bakili Muluzi, president from 1994 to 2004, who was charged with corruption, or even to Muluzi's successor, Bingu wa Mutharika, who started his presidency in 2004 with a campaign against corruption, thus raising high hopes, but then, until his sudden death in 2012, followed a course of honouring the dictator Banda by, for example, installing an expensive mausoleum for him and renaming some public buildings after the former dictator.[29]

Msadala calls on writers to follow Sajiwandani's example and speak out, as, in his view, Sajiwandani does, to prevent or correct evil powers. Msadala also addresses each individual's responsibility for freedom and urges Malawians to think for themselves, as no one else can think on behalf of another person. He calls on teachers to teach pupils beyond the basic curriculum, since they have a responsibility to contribute to Malawi's freedom and not become unreflecting "yessir!"-sayers.[30] Msadala reminds his audience that life is too short to spend it meaninglessly.

Since I have suggested that Jonathan Sajiwandani's 2005 novel *may* also have been inspired by Petro Kilekwa's 1937 autobiography, let me point out explicitly some similarities but also several differences. In both cases, it is a boy who has been abducted, one between the age of five and seven, the other at the age of fifteen.[31] In both cases, the abductors are Africans working for Arabs and in both cases, the boys are treated fairly well – if one can claim such a thing regarding slavery. Pete gains the respect of his abductors through his courage and is kept as a quasi-son. Petro talks in the interview with Fraenkel about long marches on foot, scarce food and water, different masters, different ships, and the fear of what will happen next. When he is "saved" by a slave patrol boat around 1885, he is not brought back home but his journey continues with service for the new *de facto* masters, even if this service consisted "only" of having to fan the master with palm fronds or function as a children's caretaker. When they offer to send him to school in 1887 after he has been taught the basics on a ship, he is sceptical that they may be deceiving him. However, he is not given a choice, is sent to school, becomes a good pupil, and in 1895 is sent to Tanganyika (Tanzania) to be a teacher for one and a half years in a mission, before going to Zanzibar to get married and teach there. He and his wife then go to Nyasaland (Malawi) in 1899, meeting the bishop on Likoma Island, who tells him to go to "Yao country, Mitonya (?) in Portuguese territory," to do missionary work. He spends two and a half years there before teaching at Nkhotakota for twenty-two years. He is ordained as a deacon and in 1917 as a priest. After he has spent many more years as a priest at Fort MacGuire and Mkope, in 1947 the bishop in charge suggests that he retire. "So I retired from the mission work and he [the bishop] offered me some money to build this house and I am staying here," in the place where Fraenkel interviewed him and where Kilekwa's wife lies buried under a mound.[32] Asked whether he never tried to go back home before becoming a missionary, Kilekwa responds:

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[28] Alfred Msadala, "Literary Talk: By the Town Hall Side."

[29] Since 7 April 2012, directly after Mutharika's death, Malawi has had its first female president, Joyce Hilda Banda (*1950–), an educator and grassroots women's-rights activist.

[30] Msadala, "Literary Talk: By the Town Hall Side."

[31] Peter Fraenkel, "Interview: Padre Petro Kilekwa with Peter Fraenkel."

> It didn't enter my mind at all. How could I get there? The way was very far away. I could not know the way. And who would look after me? Nobody. And I was very young, not married. To go from the coast to Bisa country was a very long way. And I knew – if I go there nobody will recognise me, neither me to recognise them. So it was very hard. I said, "Oh, never mind, Country is country. Wherever you be, it is your country. It is your place, you can live and God can look after you."[33]

Apparently, Kilekwa re-invents himself and applies the feeling of worldly and spiritual "home" as a survival strategy by suppressing the mere thought of returning to the place he was stolen from. Having been stolen as a small boy, he finds his attachment to his original home as a place not as strong as that of the older fictional character Pete. But he also has no chance to go back, as most likely there is nobody to wait and care for him. He adjusts, and feels contentment, even thankfulness, about the chances he has been offered.

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[32] Fraenkel, "Interview: Padre Petro Kilekwa with Peter Fraenkel."

[33] "Interview: Padre Petro Kilekwa with Peter Fraenkel."

Neither Petro Kilekwa nor the fictional Pete Sangapite expresses hatred toward his captors; instead, each expresses caution. Pete even comes to love his captor Sangapite and his family. Both of them survive as slaves, and both have the opportunity to live meaningful lives as free adults. Padre Petro Kilekwa, too young to have remembered his parents' name or the name of his village, never sees his family again after the incident when his mother wants to buy him back from the "Swahili people" to whom the Ngonis had sold him. He does not know whether they died in later slave raids or not. He feels deprived. He feels he *is* a slave. In contrast, the fictional character, Pete, at first "was unaware that he was one. [...] He thought that they were just bad people who wanted to use him and later would let him free" (43). And he misses his home and family, worrying about his mother's health. Being a curious and impressionable youth with a budding interest in females that would not be stopped by his homesickness, Pete, before his amnesia, even considers becoming a Muslim in order to be able to marry more than one wife, as he has met several beautiful young females. However,

> the thought about his abductors, Sanavale and Yake, discouraged him. He thought that slavery was to do with the Muslim religion and he detested it. In spite of the dislike for the Muslim religion, however, he wanted to know more about it and he wanted to ask Sanavale and Yake many questions about it, but decided against it until later. (59)

Having been curious about Islam, he finds that living in a Muslim family comes natural to him. Not knowing the truth about his background, and thus never missing his family, he even comes to love Sanavale and his wife, Chaine Sanavale, as well as their daughters, as his presumed first and natural family. Through Sanavale, who encourages Pete to work for the Wilmots, he gets to know his future wife, Ine. And through the influence of the Christian John Wilmot, Sanavale comes to confess his betrayal of Pete to him and pledges to help him return to his real parents. The five years away from home turn out to have been a chance for Pete to broaden his horizon, become interested in new things, and meet people otherwise beyond his reach. He makes the best of his experiences – and succeeds.

His future happiness is presented as derived from the Christianity he has embraced once again, and, most importantly, his personal decision to exercise free choice. This leaning toward Western individualism, in which it is up to each person to forge his or her own happiness, is underlined by his and Dawale's marriage decisions. Pete does not marry his "earmarked future wife [...], Dawale's sister, Bende, who lived in Chilola with her parents" and

Dawale does not marry his "earmarked future wife […], his cousin Tawene, Pete's sister" (4). Instead, both young men, designated to be chiefs, marry a woman not selected by their parents but chosen by themselves. They even marry 'mixed-race' women, almost *azungu* (whites), thus further strengthening their Western bonds and displaying their potential for becoming 'progressive' chiefs.

The fictional Pete Sangapite is represented as a hero, as a "life and soul saver," during his captivity and in freedom. Accordingly, he is admired and loved by his captors, his temporarily lost family of origin, and people in his entire social environment. The historical Petro Kilekwa, who as a free adult became a teacher and priest, could also have been admired and loved by those in his entire social environment for having survived slavery and for having become a "soul saver." However, fiction and reality do not match here, despite the usually high social acceptance of priests in parishes, communities, and society in general. As Peter Fraenkel remembers,

> When I mentioned him to Nyasaland contacts back in the 1950s they were all rather contemptuous. 'That old slave?!' they said. […] They appeared to regard it as a personal failure that he had allowed himself to be captured.[34]

Condemning a young child for having "allowed" himself to be captured is painful to imagine. Behind this contempt, there might have been a feeling of guilt or helplessness that one could not even save children from their fate. There could have been envy that Kilekwa had made it against all odds. His mere presence as a witness and survivor of slavery might also simply have been an uneasy reminder of historical outcomes that need to be faced rather than thrust aside. The contempt could also have been based on Kilekwa's rather obsequious and grateful attitude toward the English, as expressed in the 1956 interview with Fraenkel:

> In 1930 I have written a record which is called "A Tribute to the King" [*A Tribute to the Sailor King*]. In that letter I wrote to thank English people for what they have done to us Africans by freeing slaves. This letter reached King George himself. He was very pleased and sent very many thanks to me. So Archdeacon Close (?) told me, "The King has been pleased very much and [*your tribute*] has been published in some English magazine. Many people have read about you." In that letter I had said that our King George was very good because he was in HMS

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[34] Email from Peter Fraenkel to Pia Thielmann, 20 November 2012.

> Bacchante – the same flag ship in which I was – and he did the work of trying to rescue people and to guard the coast of East Africa.[35]

It is not known how many people, if any, in Nyasaland in the 1930s were aware of that letter to King George. Yet, at the time of the interview, three years after Britain had merged the territories of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and imposed the hated "Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland" on the region, submissiveness, and admiration for the colonial power – an "'Uncle Tom' attitude" – must not have sat very well with those who knew about it.[36]

Why can a fictional character who loves and respects his captor be fully respected and loved by his family and community and serve as a role model to readers? Why can a real person – stolen as a child, in close contact with his fellow slaves as well as with his 'savers' or their representatives – provoke the opposite reaction? I suggest that in both cases the effects of the historical context on the person are largely left unexplored and unconsidered.

While a welcome addition to the scarce fiction on eastern African slavery, and a work most likely written as a motivational narrative in praise of strength of character, resilience, courage, and a belief in God, Sajiwandani's *Road to Emancipation* nevertheless fails to address many of the destructive historical, sociological, economic, and psychological effects of slavery, some of which continue to afflict individuals and societies in East and Central Africa today. An ahistorical approach toward one's destiny seems rather inappropriate in regard to slavery. As Iain McCalman points out,

> Many of the political struggles that shattered pre- and postindependent Malawi in the twentieth century were based on the implacable ethnic and tribal divisions that were forged during the slave trade. And the psychic and social costs of the loss of so many of the country's young men and women during the century of slavery remain incalculable.[…] In Malawi terrible echoes of slave experiences were replicated long after the official end of the slave trade in other sorts of middle passages driven by bonded labor and forced migrations.[37]

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[35] Fraenkel, "Interview: Padre Petro Kilekwa with Peter Fraenkel" (italics and question mark in Fraenkel's original transcript).

[36] Email from Peter Fraenkel to Pia Thielmann, 24 November 2012).

[37] Iain McCalman, "The East African Middle Passage," 50. One may assume that, in commenting on "the century of slavery," McCalman is not referring to one particular

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century but, rather, to the entire period of eastern African slavery as it affected and still affects Malawi.

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“Shine your light, Zimbabwe”

GEOFFREY V. DAVIS

> Culture is the ideal means for re-engaging with Zimbabwe
> —Paul Brickhill, Founder of the Book Café and Winner of the Prince Claus Award

In May 2012, Timothy Mason of the Commonwealth Association of Museums, Chipo Chung, a Zimbabwean arts consultant and member of the Britain-Zimbabwe Society, and myself as a member of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies were given the opportunity to visit Zimbabwe. Tim and I represent our respective associations on the ‘culture cluster’ within the Commonwealth Organisations Committee on Zimbabwe. Although Zimbabwe has not been a member of the Commonwealth since President Mugabe withdrew it in 2003, it is hoped that at some date in the not-too-distant future the country may choose to rejoin. With this in mind, the brief of the committee is to identify where help is needed to assist Zimbabwe’s reintegration into the international community and its development programme; to investigate gaps in technical, professional, and training capacity which could usefully be filled through Commonwealth initiatives and expertise; to develop effective contacts within the country who can assist in identifying needs; and, finally, to broker effective responses to identified needs in the wider Commonwealth. In this context, our own specific purpose in going to the country was to undertake a needs audit of the cultural sector. We aimed to make contact with cultural practitioners and organizations that most require assistance in sustaining or re-establishing themselves and in this way to help build a relationship between the needs of the cultural sector in Zimbabwe and the assistance that can be provided from Commonwealth countries.

At the time of our visit, Zimbabwe was still in the process of emerging from a period of severe economic depression. To that end, it had introduced 'dollarization', which had contributed to considerable improvement in the economy. It was also benefitting from the profits of the recently established diamond industry. The country was, however, still facing numerous serious problems, among them polarization within the coalition government which will perhaps only be resolved through another election; the long-term effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the problems of ongoing political repression and human-rights abuse; continuing international isolation which particularly affects its relations with regional SADC countries; and the economic and political ramifications of large-scale migration, mainly to South Africa, but also to the UK and elsewhere. All of these factors affect the arts-and-culture sector just as negatively as they do Zimbabwean society as a whole.

We timed our visit to coincide with the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA), which brings together many members of Zimbabwe's cultural community. The largest arts festival in the country, HIFA has, in the estimation of the Mayor of Harare, Muchadeyi Masunda, "put the city and the country on the map." The main venue is located in Harare Gardens just behind the National Gallery and comprises open-air performance spaces, a festival club, a craft fair, and food stalls. Rather like its Edinburgh counterpart, the festival also spreads out across the city, seemingly occupying every available space in theatres, halls, and churches. The 2012 festival, under the motto 'A Show of Spirit', was the thirteenth since its inception in 1999. The opening evening, attended by thousands of enthusiastic festival-goers, offered a veritable feast of performances by choirs from local schools, jazz sessions, *mbira* recitals, gumboot dancing, and poetry. Unlike the previous year's politically controversial opening musical, *Treasure*, which had satirically evoked the removal from power of Mugabe, had made barbed references to the corruption associated with the newly exploited diamond fields, and had incurred the wrath of the police, this year's opening played safe by offering renderings of songs of unity ("No Shona, no Ndebele"). The opening night inaugurated a whirlwind of music, dance, and theatre which lasted throughout the week until the festivities were brought to an exhilarating close with an equally rousing evening in the form of a concert by one of the country's musical greats, Oliver Mtukudzi.

Our visit provided us with an exciting and unique opportunity for dialogue with a great variety of theatre practitioners and visual artists, photographers and filmmakers, arts curators and musicians, writers and publishers, as well as academics and cultural policy-makers. Among those we met were the directors of the National Museums and the National Gallery, representatives of the British Council and the Alliance Française, participants in a young people's arts club in the high-density area of Chitungwiza, and a large assembly of craft-makers gathered for the Annual General Meeting of the Zimbabwe Applied Arts and Crafts Association held at HIFA. All of them showed a remarkable willingness to meet us. To quote the Director of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, Dr Godfrey Mahachi: "After a decade of isolation, it's nice to get an email telling you that you don't walk alone."

It was a heartening, if humbling, experience to witness the work of some of those initiatives that have enabled the arts to survive through difficult times. One of the most successful such ventures is the Book Café. Founded as Grassroots Books in 1981, it has evolved into a major cultural centre. Hosting a programme which comprises seventy percent music, it operates a very artist-friendly policy, since it supplies equipment and passes on the whole of its box-office takings to the performing artists. It has furthered the careers of most musicians who have emerged in recent years. Under constant surveillance, it has survived a bombing attempt and several threats to close it down. Crucial to its survival has been consistent local support. In 2012, the Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai attended the ceremony at which Paul Brickhill, the founder, was given the Prince Claus Award in recognition of his work.

Another venerable Harare institution is Gallery Delta, which has pioneered contemporary Zimbabwean art forms for the past thirty-seven years. As one outspoken informant, who was committed to the gallery's work, put it: "art in Europe is vacuous by comparison." Located in an old colonial house, the gallery has a sculpture garden out front and a theatre space where Robert McLaren once put on Ibsen at the back. Over the years they have built up what the joint owner Derek Huggins terms a "family of artists" which numbers about twenty-five. Since the local market is very depressed, unless it be for traditional landscapes, and the African elite show no interest in contemporary art, the Gallery has had to rely on sales to NGOs and embassies as well as on the support of the Dutch agency HIVOS.

The major literary publisher in the country, Weaver Press, has brought out some eighty Zimbabwean writers to date. Without the commitment of Weaver and other, smaller presses to new writing, there would probably not be any such thing as Zimbabwean literature. In a country where few people are able to buy books, libraries scarcely have funds to acquire new titles, and most book sales take the form of school texts, it has obviously been a struggle to build up a literature list and secure the funding to publish challenging texts.

Dance continues to thrive in the many different forms that reflect the cultural practices of such a diverse population. The Dance Trust of Zimbabwe, originally founded as the National Ballet in 1978 and functioning for the last twenty years as the Dance Trust, now comprises four sections, the Tumbuka Dance Company, a Dance Foundation Course, the National Ballet, and the Outreach Project, which works in the urban area of Harare and also provides dance lessons for the physically and mentally handicapped. An organization like the Dance Theatre, which suffers from a chronic lack of funding, a scarcity of teachers, and a need for basic resources, finds it very difficult to access local sponsorship; it has to fall back on appealing for donations from its audiences. In spite of many difficulties, including the collapse of the Dance Centre's roof, it nevertheless managed to mount an impressively diverse show for the festival which played before a full house of some eight hundred dance aficionados – at 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning!

To appreciate the plight of culture and the arts, it is worth looking briefly at the situation in literature and publishing as well as at such public institutions as libraries and museums.

Zimbabwe has long been known for the quality of its writers – among them Charles Mungoshi, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chenjerai Hove, Shimmer Chinodya, and Yvonne Vera – whose work has achieved success at home and abroad. Because of the political dissension of recent years, a number of writers – Hove is one – have gone into exile or have chosen to live abroad. Somewhat unexpectedly perhaps, the censorship board currently shows little interest in literature, and books do not have to be submitted prior to publication.

At the present time, it is virtually impossible for writers inside the country to live off their work unless they write texts for schools or compile reports for NGOs. Many people try their hand at writing short stories, while few succeed with novels. Many young people who aspire to be writers evidently lack the necessary basic skills. Owing to the comparative unavailability of books from abroad, many younger Zimbabwean writers tend to be somewhat isolated from international trends and have little awareness of literary developments overseas. A further reason for this, as the chair of the newly revived Zimbabwe International Book Fair, Prof. Museamura Zimunya, indicated, is that "there has never been institutional funding to assist serious writers with fellowships" to travel abroad.

The book trade in general is not in a healthy condition. While Weaver Press remains committed to publishing literary and sociological texts, other publishers survive by specializing in schoolbooks. Play texts are rarely published. The poor economic situation means that few people buy books, which are perceived as too expensive, and in any case few people read for pleasure. As one informant told us, people will read if they are given books, but they will seldom purchase them. The books that people do buy are mainly set texts for schools, and then they are shared. There is no tradition of pre-school reading, and few schools are able to maintain libraries. The result is that young people are not being educated to read, literary texts are difficult to sell, and print-runs are declining.

The situation in publishing is rendered more difficult for the smaller publishers by changes in the book trade such as the emergence of multinationals. Weaver Press has successfully brought out some titles in such a small market as Zimbabwe through joint ventures with publishers in the UK. It was only able to develop its fiction list with the aid of the Dutch agency HIVOS, but, not surprisingly, the publishers sometimes feel that they are "surviving more as an NGO than as a publisher."

Some of the younger writers, such as the promising Blessing Musariri, place their hopes in publishing overseas, which is difficult to negotiate but has the added advantage of facilitating access to a wider market than can be achieved at home.

The relative paucity of significant local publishing and declining standards contributed to the demise of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, which had regularly attracted much overseas interest and had once functioned as a hub of the African publishing trade. Now that the attempt is being made to revive its fortunes, buoyed by substantial Norwegian support, Prof. Zimunya is convinced that as long as there is still a digital divide in the country, "the book [will] remain what it has always been."

Libraries, the publisher Irene Staunton told us, have never been a priority in Zimbabwe; they "have been underfunded since day one." Through difficult times, however, "badly paid librarians have managed to keep the libraries open." Publishers are now trying to obtain funds to get books into libraries. The University of Zimbabwe library, like such institutions elsewhere in the country, is not well endowed. Collections have not been kept up to date; consequently, academics have to have recourse to libraries in South Africa. The Harare City Library, once known as the Queen Victoria Memorial Library, is in a similar plight. Much used by students as a work space, it has few new books on its shelves, and altogether the place has the air of a secondhand bookshop. Its holdings of African and Zimbabwean writing are extremely poor. There is no money to buy new books and the library is therefore dependent on donations. The building is visibly in a state of disrepair: the roof leaks, the ceiling is peeling, and modern library technology is not available. The British ambassador, Deborah Bronnert, recently hosted a fund-raising dinner which raised $20,000 towards improvements. To quote her appeal: "this is an opportunity to really make a difference to the future of Zimbabwe; to invest in the human capital of Zimbabwe to encourage students and adults to enjoy using a properly equipped library for their studies and leisure and to restore the library to its former glory."[1]

Zimbabwe's rich cultural heritage is displayed in the country's museums, which are in the care of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). Among these are the Museum of Human Sciences in Harare, the Mutare Museum, the Zimbabwe Military Museum at Gweru, and the as yet hardly developed National Mining Museum at Kwekwe. The NMMZ has recently been developing community museums such as the BaTonga near Lake Kariba and it is also responsible for the country's major cultural heritage sites, prime among them the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and the Khami Ruins, where it maintains small on-site museums.

It is not difficult to imagine the impact which factors such as economic downturn and international isolation have had on museum activities. As the Director of the National Museums and Monuments, Dr Godfrey Mahachi, confirmed, there has been a dramatic decline in museum attendance owing, for instance, to the fact that outreach programmes are no longer viable, since, where parents cannot pay school fees, schools cannot afford to bus pupils in to the museums; tourist numbers have also become quite insignificant. When we went round the Harare Museum of Human Science, for instance, we were the only visitors there.

A major problem the museums have to confront is their inability to renew their displays in line with modern museum practice overseas. This is particularly unfortunate, since the country has such an important archaeological and ethnological heritage. As Dr Mahachi sadly conceded, "You can't expect someone to come back to see an exhibition that has been in place since the 1960s." The museums do indeed face seemingly intractable problems. Poor pay means that younger members of staff leave in search of better jobs elsewhere – for instance, in the universities. Museum collections are not being properly conserved, as evidenced by the Natural History Museum of Bulawayo's recent discovery that its collections of animal skins had become infested with insects. For lack of the appropriate equipment, it has become difficult to monitor changes in the physical state of the historical ruins in their care, even including the walls of Great Zimbabwe. There has also been a problem of theft from museum collections due to security shortcomings. As elsewhere in Zimbabwe's cultural community, museums and monuments appeared to be isolated, cut off from the international networks, journals, conferences, and training courses that sustain colleagues elsewhere.

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[1] Since our visit the writer Petina Gappah has succeeded in raising the sum of $1,000,000 from the Swedish organisation SIDA to aid the library.

In the words of Farai Mpfunya, director of the Culture Fund, there is in Zimbabwe a quite basic need for "more funding for projects to transform society." Funding of culture and the arts constitutes a fundamental problem, in that the country is by no means unique, but the situation has been very much worsened by the recent economic collapse. As the Reverend Paul Damasane, Director of the Department of Arts and Culture at the Ministry of Education, put it to us, "It's not artists who are poor in Zimbabwe. Everyone is poor." Where so many sectors are calling on funding for social reconstruction, the arts are, in the words of Elvas Mari, the director of the National Arts Council, "at the tail end of economic development." The inadequate funding made available to the arts is perhaps also symptomatic of a general lack of appreciation of the opportunities the creative sector might provide to the economy.

Currently the total government funding provided to the development of the arts through the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture is approximately US$1.6 million. This funding goes to two parastatals – the National Gallery and the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe (NAC). The Gallery's US$1 million is split between five branches across the country, while the Arts Council's total funding is only US$600,000 per annum.

The National Arts Council (NAC) was founded in 1985. As laid out on the organization's website, its aims are to "promote and develop the arts," to "improve the livelihood of artists," to "encourage national and international exchange programmes," and to "empower Zimbabwean creative industries." Economic decline and political isolation have rendered these targets virtually unattainable. Thus the NAC stopped being a provider of grants during the Structural Adjustment programme of the mid-1990s. As Elvas Mari concedes, "We are no longer the people with a bag full of money." The plight of the

Arts Development Fund established by the Arts Council is abundantly clear from their website.

Since 2008, the ADF has been largely dormant. No notable disbursements were made to various deserving artists and arts associations. This was attributed to the national economic meltdown and the subsequent lack of capital for the funds. The National Arts Council of Zimbabwe welcomes the corporate sector, foundations, trusts, and other funds who may desire to inject capital into the ADF.

The function of the Arts Council is thus now largely bureaucratic; it operates a programme of registration of arts organizations and oversees the arts in ten provinces nationally. It also administers a number of independent projects, such as the National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA), hosts a Culture Week, runs the Jikinya Dance Festival, and provides funeral benefits to impoverished artists.

Since, in the realistic words of Prof. Herbert Chimhundu of Great Zimbabwe University, “You’ll never get a government that funds everything fully,” much arts activity in the country has become dependent on the support of donor agencies. An unexpectedly impressive range of them are active in Zimbabwe. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) channels its grant through the Culture Fund and also bought its Zimbabwean counterpart a building; Africalia (Belgium) has supported film-making, dance, and theatre; and the Dutch organization HIVOS has been prominent in supporting publishing, dance, and theatre. Both the British Council and the Alliance Française have lent important support to arts projects, the former largely funding participation by four Zimbabwean artists at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, the latter promoting music performers and hosting innumerable cultural events. Other embassies such as the Norwegian, the Danish, and the Swiss also fund arts initiatives. While we were in Harare, an Australian Government art exhibition, “Message Stick, Exploring the reality of being an indigenous person living in urban Australia,” was on show at the National Gallery. At the same time, the Spanish Embassy announced the imminent closure of its cultural department. Although not a significant component in the spectrum of arts funding, this was yet another blow to Zimbabwe’s frail cultural economy.

Understandably perhaps, some of these donor-funded arts initiatives are also designed to further the donor country’s own culture, as when the Swedish Embassy funded performances of Strindberg and the Norwegians supported Ibsen projects.

Such donor-dependency is not universally welcomed. The Mayor of Harare, for instance, stated forthrightly, "What we don't want are situations where overseas donors support individually driven projects." Others, like Nehemiah Chivandikwa, chair of the Theatre Department at the University of Zimbabwe, recognized that "without NGO support theatre would be dead," while Manuel Bagorro, director of HIFA, believes that in times of difficulty "donors kept the wheels on the bus."

With regard to the funding of arts and culture, the theatre promoter Daves Guzha believes, there is now a basic need to 'conscientize' the business sector. Indeed, the corporate sector appears to be largely absent from arts funding, with the exception of high-profile events like HIFA. There is general agreement that in the present economic climate securing sponsorship is difficult. The only successes in this area appear to have been cell-phone companies and breweries. According to Farai Mpfunya, South African Breweries have been the largest investor in HIFA. He is confident that as the economy improves it will prove easier to create a culture of philanthropy, especially if tax benefits could be instituted.

One factor which continues to determine the situation of culture in Zimbabwe seems to be poor communication between arts practitioners and the government. Two aspects come into play here: one is political polarization; the other is differing attitudes towards the nature and purpose of the arts.

"How do you ensure a cultural policy in a climate of political polarization?" asked a participant at the cultural symposium. His question pointed to a central issue for the arts sector. Where the political parties in the ruling coalition are themselves currently so polarized, the relationship between artists and the establishment is necessarily uneasy. Artists are aware, as our informants pointed out, that "repressive ideology permeates everywhere," that they are operating "in a very shadowy world with no rules," and that "some organizations in the arts are infiltrated." They know that "the authorities see the arts as a challenge," as the Director of HIFA, Manuel Bagorro, put it, and regard theatre, for example, as suspect, especially when performed in the rural areas. There is a general perception that in such a complex political and social environment one should not antagonize the government, which in any case "does not regard arts and culture as a priority," as Peter Churu, founder of Global Arts Trust, described the situation. This view was corroborated by Prof. Zimunya, who thought that "for all parties in Zimbabwe the intellectual and cultural sector is the last of all concerns."

Polarization is a two-way process, however. Criticism of government is widespread; comments such as 'the priority of government is the welfare of government' are not infrequent. Not surprisingly, then, distrust of government-associated bodies has led to ineffective communication. Elvas Mari, who as director of the National Arts Council heads a government organization, was aware that his desire to "work with everybody" is being blocked by the perception that "the NAC is government." Peter Churu put a theatre promoter's view to us. While prepared to believe that the aims of government and artists are "perhaps the same," he said "the biggest challenge is that government finds it difficult to dialogue with us," adding optimistically, "If all sat down at a table, we could iron this out."

A second aspect causing friction in the dialogue between cultural practitioners and official bodies is the differing perception each holds of what constitutes the country's culture. This has led to reluctance on the part of government agencies to support initiatives such as HIFA which are perceived as 'Western'. And, indeed, there did seem to be a distinction between what was perceived as 'indigenous' culture and what was 'foreign', as well as between 'traditional' and 'modern'. "The politicians think that Zimbabwe's culture is in the past," suggested Farai Mpfunya of the Culture Fund. The writer Tsitsi Dangarembga made essentially the same point: "Some people talk about culture and mean tradition." Shona sculpture has long been thought of as the archetypal Zimbabwean art form, as has traditional dance. While interest in Zimbabwean contemporary art grows abroad, it is much more difficult to interest people in contemporary painting inside the country, as Derek Huggins of Gallery Delta knows only too well; equally problematic is the promotion of the kind of contemporary art forms favoured by young people, as Farai Mpfunya of the Culture Fund seeks to do.

A basic problem all cultural practitioners have to struggle with is that responsibility for arts and culture in Zimbabwe is divided among no fewer than eleven different ministries, including Home Affairs, Information, Small and Medium Enterprise, Tourism, Women's Affairs, Youth and Indigenization, and the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture itself. There appears to be little strategic coordination among them, although, as we heard at the Department of Arts and Culture, new policies are being envisaged to coordinate their activities.

Culture does not figure at all significantly in the draft of the new Constitution, which at the time of writing is still being debated. The two clauses which make reference to culture at all confine themselves to generalities. They read as follows:

> 2.5 Cultural objectives
> (1) All State and governmental institutions and agencies at every level must promote and preserve cultural values and practices, which enhance the dignity, well being and equality of Zimbabweans.
> (2) All State and governmental institution agencies at every level, and all citizens, must endeavour to preserve and protect Zimbabwe's heritage.

and

> 4.13 Language and Culture
> Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising this right can do so in any way that is inconsistent with this chapter.

As the Reverend Damasane informed us, the Department of Arts and Culture, which he heads, is currently working on a new, comprehensive cultural policy document.

The timing of our visit to Zimbabwe fortunately enabled us to familiarize ourselves with a broad spectrum of informed opinion and to listen to some lively debate about cultural policy in the country. Thus, we were able to observe the deliberations of a three-day symposium on "Giving Voice to the Artist: The Impact of Current Cultural Policy Discourse on Zimbabwean Arts" which was organized by Nhimbe Trust and was attended by some sixty arts practitioners, prominent writers, and officials. The aim of the gathering, as the coordinator, Josh Nyapimbi, explained, was to work towards a collective position on the creative sector and to debate the policy issues which are pertinent to that.

Among the speakers was the playwright Stephen Chifunyise, who addressed the question of cultural diversity and exchange in SADC countries and the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity. He deplored the absence of regional collaboration in the field of culture, describing cooperation in the region as "dismal." In Zimbabwe there was only minimal awareness of the existence of the Convention, which the country has ratified, and little attempt to implement its proposals. He called for greater awareness of the importance of cultural goods and for measures to create the conditions which would allow culture to flourish. What was needed, he suggested, was "a comprehensive and viable cultural policy."

Paul Brickhill took up the theme of Zimbabwe's isolation amid the countries of Southern Africa, describing this as "a source of real sadness," since it undermined the processes of cultural hybridity that characterize the region. Speaking from the perspective of a musician, he emphasized the need to go beyond the domestic market to create a regional marketplace which could do justice to the region's great musical diversity.

The symposium was not attended by any representative of the Department of Arts and Culture or of the National Arts Council, but the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Regional Integration and International Cooperation, Tadeous Chifamba, did, rather remarkably, take up the gauntlet, and challenged participants at the symposium to become active themselves and "hold governments accountable for the implementation of agreements." He also advised cultural practitioners to seek out permanent secretaries of the responsible ministries rather than the politicians if they wanted to make progress in dialogue with government. Among the artists present there seemed to be consensus when the writer Virginia Phiri, among others, argued that in the present social and political climate there was a growing need for artists themselves, in whatever discipline, to take a stronger advocacy role.

As explained above, the central purpose of our visit to Zimbabwe was to carry out a needs audit in the cultural sector. Let me therefore, in this concluding section, briefly highlight some of the major points pertaining to capacity building and training from our survey.

Many of the needs communicated to us were for the kind of quite basic materials and equipment essential to any artistic enterprise. Thus, the Dance Theatre representatives need dance books, CDs, and a practice mat; the Gallery Delta needs paints and brushes for their young artists; the eminent photographer Calvin Dondo told us that cameras were needed for photography courses. Young musicians wanted access to instruments such as guitars and drum kits with which to begin training. All organizations, whether libraries, museums, or the arts-and-crafts association, are in need of computers and of the basic IT training and support which goes with them. Some organizations identified the need for work spaces such as artists' studios. The main projects needing capital support were the Dance Trust of Zimbabwe and the Gwanza initiative for photographers.

"The lack of training is a measure of what Zimbabwe, which used to have a high educational level, has lost," one informant observed. And, indeed, this was an issue which was constantly reiterated. As Tsitsi Dangarembga confirmed, "People know they don't have skills, and are desperate." To judge from our informants across the cultural sector, this lack of adequate training is a deficiency perhaps most keenly felt in the area of arts administration and corporate governance. In the view of Charles Houdart of the Alliance Française, the biggest problem in the arts is "the lack of structure and management." This problem is compounded by the fact that there is no opportunity to study arts management anywhere in the country; the only option is to go abroad. Leaders of major cultural institutions such as Dr Mahachi of the National Museums and Doreen Sibanda, the director of the National Gallery, stressed the need for training in arts administration. To this end, exchange programmes need to be established, or re-established, which will enable Zimbabwean to re-engage with artists and cultural practitioners in other countries, especially in the Commonwealth.

There is much that needs to be done. Training facilities in the arts, particularly in arts administration, management, and fund-raising, but also in many aspects of basic artistic practice, need to be provided. Librarians have need of training at major institutions overseas; mentoring projects in areas such as film and museum conservation need to be established; choreographers need the opportunity to work with their counterparts abroad; courses in acting, directing, and set design need to be initiated for the theatre sector; and a generous charitable response needs to be made to such basic requirements as books for libraries and computers. Support needs to be given to the campaign to help the Harare City Library. And, in realizing any of this, Zimbabweans in the diaspora need to be involved to mobilize their networks, pass on their skills, and give practical support. In the telling phrase of Manuel Bagorro, the outgoing director of HIFA, "People are not served by doing nothing."

In Zimbabwe today, as one informant asserted, "politics continues to have a pervasive stranglehold." The unsatisfactory implementation of the Global Political Agreement, the still unresolved political future of the country, and ongoing isolation constitute obstacles to international cooperation on all levels of society. Culture and the arts suffer from this situation, since they cannot realize their full potential without profiting from and engaging with developments elsewhere.

Yet there is a sense that things are at last beginning to improve: "Things were terrible but are better now," one informant told us, and he is not alone in his opinion. Several cultural practitioners expressed the optimistic belief to us that the polarized situation is 'for now' but is set to change.

We shared the reaction of Charles Houdart, who, when he arrived to take up his posting to the Alliance Française, was "surprised to see that so much was happening." The commitment of donors to working in the country particularly impressed us. As Prof. Zimunya, for instance, gratefully recognized, "The Norwegians never forgot us."

Moves are being undertaken to formulate a viable cultural policy; artists are beginning to organize themselves as advocates for their work and their social standing; some government bureaucrats seem increasingly open to engagement with them. There is a conviction that culture and the arts have an important role to play in the process of change that Zimbabwe will be going through. As Paul Brickhill, the self-confessed "incurable optimist" of the Book Café put it, "We're going to solve some problems and a big part will come through culture."

Our visit to Zimbabwe was part of a project designed to investigate the needs of practitioners across the arts. Having submitted our report to the Commonwealth Organisations Committee on Zimbabwe, we now have to seek ways of translating our findings into action. In this endeavour, we would welcome the ideas and support of the members of the organizations we represent – the Commonwealth Association of Museums, the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, and the Britain–Zimbabwe Society – as well as of all those who care about the future of Zimbabwe. When we took the opportunity to interview the Director of the National Museums and Monuments, Dr Godfrey Mahachi, he welcomed us with the words, "It sounds like a door is beginning to open." Let us hope it does.

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From Mqhayi to Sole

Four Poems on the Sinking of the Troopship *Mendi*

CHRIS DUNTON

This essay examines four South African poems on a single historical incident: the sinking of the troopship *Mendi* on 21 February 1917.[1] In this, one of the most notable and in some respects controversial naval disasters of the First World War, 616 members of the (black) South African Native Labour Contingent and about a dozen white officers lost their lives.[2] Robert Edgar has written of Africa's "provision of critical manpower and supplies to the war machines of the colonial powers and the impact the war had on the colonized world's social, economic and political situation."[3] That this impact was processed and articulated in a number of different ways is evident in the textual ideology of the four poems discussed below.

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[1] For their help in locating materials and providing translations I wish to thank my friends and colleagues Labane Chokobane, Colin Glover, Frances Harding, L.B.B.J. Machobane, Ketlalemang Maemane, Maleshoane Rapeane, and János Riesz; also the staff of the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and Zofia Sulej of the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

[2] Controversy surrounds the cause of the accident that led to the sinking of the *Mendi* – that is, the ship's collision with the *SS Darro* – and inadequacies in the investigation that followed. For a detailed account of the disaster, see Norman Clothier, *Black Valour: The South African Labour Contingent, 1916–1918, and the Sinking of the* Mendi (Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal P, 1987): 1–100; for a brief, recent account from within the South African military, see Moharo Dan Mofokeng, "SS Mendi: an Enduring Example," *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg; 27 February 2005), Dispatches section: 4. For an account of the disaster that is richly illustrated, see John Gribble, "The SS Mendi: A Forgotten Story of Prejudice and Loss," *British Archaeology* (March–April 2008): 17–21.

[3] Robert Edgar, "Lesotho and the First World War: Recruiting, Resistance and the South African Native Labour Contingent," *Mohlomi* 3–5 (1979–81): 94–108.

The poems examined here were composed over a span of some sixty years, the earliest, by the poet, essayist, and novelist Samuel E. Krune Mqhayi (1875–1945), dating from 1931 at the latest, and the most recent, by Kelwyn Sole, published in the early 1990s.[4] Two of the poems were composed as written texts: the Mqhayi, in isiXhosa, and the Sole, in English. A third, "The Sinking of the Troopship Mendi," was originally composed in isiZulu and appears in English translation in *Oral Poetry from Africa*, an anthology edited by Jack Mapanje and Landeg White. The origins of the fourth are, as I shall discuss below, uncertain, but it – or a fragment of it – appears as a printed text, in English, in a novel authored by A.S. Mopeli–Paulus and Peter Lanham.

In undertaking a comparative examination of four texts composed over a period of six decades, my intention is to identify the range of poetic devices and rhetorical strategies they employ, to demonstrate the range of propositions their authors draw from the *Mendi* disaster, and hence to formulate a tentative commentary (tentative, because of my reliance on translations) on the ideological terrain within the frame of which the historical event has been addressed.

A term that is useful here – one that is drawn from Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* – is "ideology of the text." Eagleton notes that "the literary text is not the 'expression' of ideology [any more than it is] the 'expression' of social class. The text, rather, is a certain *production* of ideology."[5] He later clarifies the relations in question with a diagram that illustrates how the text constitutes an act of signification that speaks from and to ideology, and how ideology constitutes an act of signification that speaks from history.

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The poem "UKutΣhona Kuku-Mendi" ("The Sinking of the Mendi") appears in a revised edition of Mqhayi's collection *Ityala Lama-wele*. While this volume bears no date of publication, its preface is dated 1931; thus, the *Mendi* poem was composed at some time prior to this date. Several English translations – or versions of an original translation – have appeared in print, one of which appears in the *Penguin Book of South African Verse* and is reprinted in Norman Clothier's *Black Valour*.[6] This version is one considerably "worked up" from the original, perhaps to satisfy conventional English notions of the 'poetic'. I have accordingly worked from a literal translation kindly made for me by my colleague Maleshoane Rapeane.

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[4] This poem, "The Beaching of the 'Mendi'," is reprinted in *The Heart in Exile: South African Poetry in English, 1990–1995*, ed. Leon de Kock & Ian Tromp (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996): 269–70.

[5] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (1976; London: Verso, 1978): 64, 80.

Samuel E. Krune Mqhayi was often referred to during his lifetime as the Xhosa poet laureate; indeed, the prefatory note to his poem identifies him as "the nation's bard."[7] He was present on the wharf when the *Mendi* embarked on its final voyage, giving courage to the troops.[8] "The Sinking of the Mendi" is a substantial poem of forty-eight lines, divided into six sections.

In line with the tenets of the Christian faith that underpin it (for example, the notion that the crucifixion is immanent in the nativity), the poem opens with an affirmation of the inevitability of the disaster: "We who knew […] were not surprised / Clearly seeing that it had to be like that."[9] What is especially notable here is the degree of assurance in Mqhayi's affirmation.[10] From here it is a logical rhetorical step for the poet to address the question of motivation: for what reason did the *Mendi* troops enrol in the South African Native Labour Contingent? Here Mqhayi's argument is structured through a series of negative statements. The men did not enlist for profit ("We did not buy your favour with pieces of meat") nor out of "loyalty to your king, / Nor for loyalty to Britain."

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[6] *The Penguin Book of South African Verse*, ed. Jack Cope (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968): 278–80, repr. in Clothier, *Black Valour*, xv–xvi.

[7] S.E.K Mqhayi, *Ityala Lama-wele* ([Lovedale]: Lovedale Press, [1931]). In Mqhayi's *Abantu Besizwe: Historical and Biographical Writings*, ed. & tr. Jeff Opland (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2009): 27. Opland has gone so far as to claim that "In time [Mqhayi] will come to be rightfully acknowledged as the greatest literary figure [South Africa] has ever produced."

[8] David Nomtshongwa, "Remembering our Heroes on the SS Mendi," *South African Soldier* 11.5 (May 2004): 12.

[9] All quotations are from Maleshoane Rapaene's unpublished translation.

[10] The translation reprinted by Clothier adopts an intertextual approach, interpolating echoes of T.S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi," a poem published in 1927 and therefore approximately contemporaneous with that by Mqhayi. In the Eliot poem there are references to the crucifixion being immanent in the nativity, the idea of destiny – of an unbreakable link between past and present – being central as well to Mqhayi's poem. Eliot refers to an incognizant populace "dicing for pieces of silver" and to the Magi's recognition "this Birth was / Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death." See T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963): 109–10.

The question arises of whether Mqhayi's poem, in whole or in part, can be read ironically; praise-poetry can, after all, criticize as well as eulogize its subject. This in turn raises the question of the extent to which Mqhayi regarded British colonial rule in southern Africa as being legitimate. Writing on another poem of Mqhayi's, Dennis Brutus argues:

> we see in his famous satirical poem addressed to the Prince of Wales that marvelous double level of meaning which functions as official salutation and at the same time as the most profound expression of disgust and contempt for those who can read the signs.[11]

It is questionable whether the term 'satirical' is appropriate here, but certainly Mqhayi was capable of criticizing British colonial policy. Albert Gérard refers to the Prince of Wales poem as "a little masterpiece of irony,"[12] while A.C. Jordan, in his obituary of Mqhayi, sees the poem acknowledging that the colonial power's policies had become increasingly retrogressive as the twentieth century proceeded.[13] More generally, Jordan notes "how sincerely Mqhayi had accepted British guardianship [by the early years of the century]."[14] If later his loyalty was more guarded, Jordan can detect no hint of this expressed in the *Mendi* poem:

> though bemoaning the loss of the flower of Africa, he reminds his people that some worthy sacrifice had to be made if they truly loved Britain. […] If the ties with Britain are not to break, as they threaten to do, this sacrifice must be.[15]

One should note that in the autobiographical sketch published by Westermann, Mqhayi gives no hint of any satirical intention in his composition of the Prince of Wales poem.

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[11] Dennis Brutus, "Literature and Commitment in South Africa," in *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*, ed. Lee Sustar & Aisha Karim (Chicago: Haymarket, 2006): 201.

[12] Albert Gérard, *Four African Literatures* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: U of California P, 1971): 61.

[13] A.C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: U of California P, 1974): 114.

[14] Jordan, *Towards an African Literature,* 112.

[15] *Towards an African Literature,* 113.

> When the Prince of Wales and Duke of Kent visited South Africa, I was commissioned to sing their praises. I also did this during visits by the Governor General and other dignitaries. As well as being in close contact with my people, I often have contact with Europeans and with all the religious communities who worship the living God.[16]

After the reference to "loyalty to Britain," there follows in the poem a short section in elegiac mode ("when you left the families that were your responsibility, / When we shook your hands […] our eyes became wet"). Then Mqhayi introduces and develops at some length his cardinal proposition. This has to do with the notion that the death of the *Mendi* troops was organically related to the histories and ideals of their peoples, forming a national trajectory from this.

As Mqhayi elaborates the notion of sacrifice, the dead troops are identified, through a process of typology, first as "Abel, the earth's offering," then as "Jesus Christ, the heaven's hero." From this recognition, their widows and orphaned children are to draw solace. In a move that affirms both community and the notion of destiny, Mqhayi then eulogizes the troops as a body of men "whose blood speaks to the King of Kings." The poem closes with the pious observation "I wish I could stand with them on the Day of Resurrection. […] let it be!"

Mqhayi returned to the subject of the *Mendi* disaster at least once more, in 1935, in the context of an extended memorial biography of Reverend Isaac William Wauchope.[17] Here he reiterates the idea of sacrifice, the cries of pain from the drowning troops rendering their sacrifice valid: "Didn't our Lord utter a confused cry on Golgotha? Today that rock juts over the whole world."[18] Prior to this, however, he does something quite different, through a rhetorical strategy that exhorts his readers to place themselves in the shoes of the dying troops, to experience their suffering vicariously – a strategy that is employed also in the third poem to be examined in this essay: "observe the frantic threshing of people trying to save themselves! […] please observe your boys sucked down into a watery expanse without beginning or end! See them clutch at each other, ignorant of their actions!"[19]

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[16] Dietrich Westermann, *Onze autobiographies d'africains*, ed. Yves Marguerat & János Riesz (1938. Lomé: Haho, 2001): 241. My translation from the French.

[17] Wauchope was a chaplain on the *Mendi*. Mqhayi quotes an address he gave the men as the ship sank. For an alternative account, in which the chaplain's address makes use of the 'sons of Africa' motif, see Mofokeng, "SS Mendi: An Enduring Example," 4.

[18] Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 477.

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The second of the poems under discussion appears in the novel *Blanket Boy's Moon*, authored by A.S. Mopeli–Paulus and Peter Lanham and published in 1953.[20] Biographical and bibliographical information on Mopeli–Paulus and his works makes repeated reference to the authorship of a *Mendi* poem. Ngcangca cites a poem titled "The Sinking of the Mendi" as an example of Mopeli–Paulus's work in English (he also published in Sesotho).[21] The existence of such a poem is attested to also in the blurb to the first edition of *Blanket Boy's Moon*, by Baruch Hirson,[22] and by Haliburton, in his *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho*, who states that Mopeli–Paulus's "best-known work is a long poem on the sinking of the *Mendi*."[23] A comment in the successor volume to Haliburton is, intriguingly, more detailed: "While employed at a Johannesburg law firm, he wrote one of his best-known works, a long poem entitled *Mendi*."[24] This may be a case of one reference generating others without independent evidence, as efforts to source such a text have so far proven fruitless; if it does exist, and if it did appear in print, it was certainly not widely disseminated. The historical papers section of the William Cullen

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[19] Mqhayi, *Abantu Besizwe*, 479. These lines encourage the audience to engage in an act of imaginative engagement, asking that they strive to participate vicariously in the terror and suffering undergone by their (close) relatives.

[20] A.S. Mopeli–Paulus and Peter Lanham, *Blanket Boy's Moon* (London: Collins, 1953). There are several problematic issues regarding the authorship of works by Mopeli–Paulus: for accounts of the genesis of *Blanket Boy's Moon*, see Chris Dunton, "Mopeli–Paulus and *Blanket Boy's Moon*," *Research in African Literatures* 21.4 (Winter 1990): 105–20, and Hannah Jones, "A Co-authored 'Curio' from the 'Dark Continent': A.S. Mopeli–Paulus and Peter Lanham's *Blanket Boy's Moon*," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21.4 (December 1995): 601–12.

[21] D.J.M. Ngcangca, *Mabalankwe ka Bangodi* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1989): 121.

[22] Baruch Hirson, "Charles Hooper's Brief Authority," *Southern African Review of Books* (Spring 1988): 18–20.

[23] Gordon Haliburton, *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow, 1977): 125.

[24] Scott Rosenberg, Richard F. Weisfelder, Michelle Frisbie–Fulton & Gordon MacKay Haliburton, *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho* (Lanham MD: Scarecrow, 2004): 278.

Library at the University of the Witwatersrand holds a number of unpublished works by Mopeli–Paulus, including folders of poetry in English and in Sesotho; none of these poems includes any reference to the *Mendi*, nor do any of the poems in Mopeli–Paulus's published collection *Ho tsamaea ke ho bona*. Whatever the case, it is necessary to read the twenty lines that appear in *Blanket Boy's Moon* as a 'quoted' text embedded in a larger text, its composition attributed to a fictional character in the latter (in other words, in the logic of the fictional text, the poem constitutes part of the dialogue of the character who delivers the poem [Monare], and its spontaneous composition and recital constitute an element in his characterization).

The occasion on which Monare delivers his poem is (in a novel published in 1953) the then annual *Mendi* Commemoration Day, a mass event in South Africa largely ignored by the white minority.[25] Reference to the *Mendi* Commemoration has some relevance to the Mqhayi and Sidyiyo poems discussed above and below. Whatever its origins (was it a commissioned piece?) and whatever use was subsequently made of it, the Mqhayi poem has been recited on at least one recent *Mendi* commemoration.[26] The Sidyiyo poem would lend itself ideally to recital at a mass commemoration and, indeed, has formal features similar to the Mopeli–Paulus poem, the recital of which is explicitly located in such a context.

A migrant worker from the then British High Commission Territory of Basutoland (now Lesotho), Monare, the major character in *Blanket Boy's Moon*, finds himself at a Mendi Day Commemoration in Johannesburg. As various speakers contribute to the occasion, Monare is inspired to follow suit. Mopeli–Paulus and Lanham comment: "This is a custom of the Basotho people; they are given to the praising of great men and historic events; they wait until moved by the spirit, and then rise from the ground and speak."[27]

The poem given by Monare is in three distinct sections. The first eight lines constitute a dramatic monologue, glossed in the ninth line as being the words spoken by the *Mendi*'s Wagon Captain to the troops as the ship began to sink. These lines, then, represent direct address, but at a remove, offering a significant contrast to the Sidyiyo poem discussed below, the whole of which is cast as direct address but in that instance with the audience as addressee (I shall argue below that this lends the Sidyiyo poem an especially visceral, directly emotive impact). In the second section, the poet gives an account of the sinking of the ship, and in the closing couplet first the ship and then the troops it carried are addressed, through apostrophe.

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[25] Clothier, *Black Valour*, 175, writes: "A typical *Mendi* day could include a march past, speeches, a war dance, music from visiting bands, besides the religious ceremony. For more than fifty years these occasions took place, but as the men of the Contingent faded away, so too did the ceremonies, though there has been a revival on a small scale in Soweto in recent years."

[26] See Nomtshongwa, "Remembering our Heroes on the SS Mendi," 12, and the *Newsletter of the South African Military History Society* 343 (March 2004).

[27] Mopeli–Paulus & Lanham, *Blanket Boy's Moon*, 57.

Various reports have been handed down on the conduct of the troops as the ship sank. The words of the Wagon Captain here echo those of the actual ship's clergyman, the Reverend Isaac Dyobha[28] in two respects. First, there is the frank acknowledgment "We […] now are to die" followed by the reminder (or exhortation, if one supplies a pause after the first word) "Men die like men!" Second, there is the emphasis on Africanity. While Mofokeng quotes the chaplain as addressing the men as follows: "I, a Zulu, say here and now that you are all my brothers […] Swazis, Mpondos, Basothos and the others. […] We are the sons of Africa," Mopeli–Paulus's Wagon Captain reminds the men "We [are] the sons of the Black Mother" and goes on to refer to the sea as "The grave of the Africans, / Black men of Africa."[29] This is a fairly insistent emphasis within just a few lines of verse: a similar emphasis will be given a more radical edge in the Sidyiyo poem.

The second section of the poem begins by offering a straightforward account of the sinking of the ship: as in the Sidyiyo poem, the word "down" is doubled to enhance the sense of annihilation. "Down 'Mendi' descended" Then, in the last three lines of the section, a new element emerges. A reference to England prompts a reminder of the distance the men have travelled, of the gulf that lies between these black Africans and the colonial master they serve: "the waves of her Passing / Cried on the Rocks / of the English shore!" At the end of the poem, this sense of antithesis is consolidated as the rhetorical question posed in the first line of the closing couplet effects a poignant stand-off with the poem's opening line: "'Mendi!' – where are you gone?" the poet asks, before uttering the prayer/eulogy "Cattle! Rain! Peace to the sons of Thesele."[30] In the poem as a whole, the emphasis is on Africanity –

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[28] See Mofokeng, "SS Mendi: an Enduring Example," 4.

[29] Mopeli–Paulus & Lanham, *Blanket Boy's Moon*, 57.

[30] Mopeli–Paulus & Lanham, *Blanket Boy's Moon*, 57–58. "Thesele" is a metonymic praise-name for Moshoeshoe I, founder of the Basotho nation. The phrase

and specifically on Sesotho identity – but with this being held in tension with a question that implies (very tentatively) an obstacle to the unimpeded living-out of that identity: namely, colonial rule.

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The third poem to be examined, "The Sinking of the troopship Mende' " [sic] was originally composed in isiZulu; the English translation quoted from here first appeared in print no later than 1948. Taken by Mapanje and White to be an oral composition, the poem certainly makes use of poetic devices (for example, parallelism and direct address to an audience) that are commonly found in the oral repertoire. I have, however, been able to unearth only limited documentation on its origins and dissemination: according to Hugh Tracey, it was composed by Sidyiyo (presumably the Eastern Cape composer Nathan Sipho Sidyiyo) and recorded by the Reitz Bantu Choir.[31]

There are thematic and verbal resonances between this poem and that of Mopeli–Paulus; the Sidyiyo poem is bolder, however, in its approach to colonial rule and the position of the subaltern. Printed in its translated, written form in a single block of twelve lines, the poem can be thought of as comprising six couplets, which form a subtle progression verbally and thematically. The opening couplet simply states the fact of the sinking of the *Mendi* and the identity of its troops – "The ship Mende went down at sea / and sank there with the sons of Africa" – though one notes the emotive impact of the phrase "sons of Africa." In the third couplet, the content of the first is consolidated as the poet reiterates "Down went the Mende / down into the sea." In between these two couplets, however, a strategy emerges that is employed by neither Mqhayi (in his poem, as distinct from his Wauchope memorial), Mopeli–Paulus, nor Sole: i.e. direct address to the audience and an appeal to the vicarious imagination, as – employing semantic parallelism to sharpen the impact – the poet demands: "Can you picture the sea? / Can you picture the ship with people in it?"

After a reference to the orphans left after the disaster (and, composed no later than 1948, this poem could have been heard by the sons and daughters of men on the *Mendi*), the poem then links back to the lines quoted above with the exhortation, "Soften your hearts, you people," a plea to the audience to be

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"Cattle! Rain! Peace" relates closely to the national motto "Peace! Rain! Prosperity!" ("Khotso! Pula! Nala!").

[31] Hugh Tracey, *Lalela Zulu: 100 Zulu Lyrics* (Johannesburg: African Music Society, [1948]): 114. All references to the poem are from this source.

receptive, sympathetic – though, given what follows, a plea to "Sharpen your fighting spirit" would have been equally apposite. Then – as direct address to the audience, still – come the poem's most challenging lines: "What do you say, Africans? / Stay not asleep below!" Mapanje and White comment – rightly, I think – as follows: "The song […] refers not only to the sinking of the Mende but to the sinking of the Zulu people. The last lines appeal to those 'below' to rise against their oppressors."[32]

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First published in the early 1990s, Kelwyn Sole's (written) poem "The Beaching of the 'Mendi' " is both linguistically and conceptually more complex than the three poems discussed above and speaks to an imaginary that is different from theirs in several respects. With regard to the poem's linguistic complexity, this would seem to me to have nothing to do with any general distinction that might be made between orature and literature: witness oral texts such as isiZulu and Sesotho praise-poems, *izibongo* and *lithoko*, with their compression of tropes and dizzyingly rapid shifts from one metaphor to another or from trope to another kind of material. Rather, Sole's particular brand of linguistic virtuosity is directly related to the expressive requirements of his imaginary. Unlike the poems by Mqhayi, Mopeli–Paulus, and Sidyiyo, which address past history and whose rhetorical field is thus forensic, the Sole poem addresses the present (at the time of composition) and employs elements of the fantastic to secure a provocative political point, its rhetorical field being epideictic.

Structured in two numbered parts and sixteen short strophes (some of them one-liners), Sole's poem is set on a South African beach at some unspecified point in the early to mid-1990s; the third strophe refers to "the new reformed South Africa."[33] The tonal and thematic values of this phrase are left uncertain, as Sole both validates and undermines the legitimacy of the claim that reform has been accomplished following the unbanning of the struggle movements and the events that were to follow. In this now multi-racial setting, small children, black and white, hold on to each others' hands – hope for the future.[34] Yet this observation is sandwiched between others that are far more ugly, far less hopeful. The poem begins with a reference to "dogs / dropping turds on the beach / rich food of their white owners." While children of all races play together, "their parents smile / at each other, frostily / or look the other way." Sole then goes on to depict young men – by implication, white – testosterone-charged, ogling young women who are "turning near-naked torsos / spitted on the sun."

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[32] Jack Mapanje & Landeg White, *Oral Poetry from Africa* (Harlow: Longman, 1983): 193.

[33] *The Heart in Exile: South African Poetry 1990–1995*, ed. Leon de Kock & Ian Tromp (London: Penguin, 1996): 269.

[34] The apparent optimism of these lines may be qualified, depending on what one

Now, however, comes a disjunction that opens the way to the second part of the poem: "suddenly all notice / a shape indistinct / among the waves." For a moment the crowd are unable to determine what this shape might be; when they do so, they "jump up / scream, slip, and run / in panic run." What the crowd has seen are the casualties of the wreck of the *Mendi*, the hulk having magically washed its way back to the South Atlantic, beaching now and disgorging the remnants of its human cargo. Further, this cargo is resurrected, alive again: "a hand claws / slowly up the sand / spidering its fingers / a flesh-flayed foot drags / leg and hip / ribs a marimba for the wind."

At first here, with the emphasis on the horror of the scene, we are not too far from Hollywood and the world of the undead. The poem's closing strophe, however, opens up a further and vital dimension, as Sole concludes: "the bones complain / shudder and rattle / at last home free." Here is the heart of the poem, deferred until this point: the notion of redress and of a legacy reclaimed. Here, too, there is a striking parallel – thematic and linguistic – with the climax of Stephen Gray's poem "Hottentot Venus," when Gray imagines Sara Baartman looking both back at her past, at the oppression she and her people have endured, and at the revolutionary demands of the present, and has her proclaiming "I rattle my handful of bones and the dead arise."[35] In the Sole poem, though, room for doubt is left as to what extent the new South Africa is to be "reformed" and to what extent the *Mendi* returnees will be able to claim they are free.

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makes of Sole's use of the word "carapaces" in his reference to the children's hands ("little crabs of brown and pink / with growing carapaces"). Is the suggestion, perhaps, that with adulthood these children's outer shells, their attitudes, will harden, that they will withdraw into their own shells, self-identifying as exclusively white and black, disinclined to continue free association with the other?

[35] Stephen Gray, *Hottentot Venus and Other Poems* (Cape Town: David Philip; London: Rex Collings, 1979): 2.

Composed over a period of some sixty years, from the colonial period to the cusp of the post-apartheid era, the four poems discussed here demonstrate a wide range of takes on a single, and emblematic, historical event. On the most straightforward level, the position taken by each poet can be attributed to the healing passage of time. In the years immediately following the disaster, its impact remained visceral. As Robert Edgar has commented,

> the shock of the Mendi disaster played on the minds of people for some time afterwards. When Jason Jingoes returned home from his [wartime] service in France, he was greeted with astonishment by his family. 'It was a superstition that no black person could ever cross the sea and return again.'[36]

Jingoes goes on to refer specifically to the *Mendi* disaster and to the disgraceful behaviour of one of the surviving white officers (an exception, in this regard), who later objected to the erosion of the colour bar while the men were on service in France: "'If, one day, I arrive in South Africa to find it like this place, I'd rather die than live there!'."[37] As decade followed decade from 1917 onwards, the need to seek or offer consolation lessens, and opportunities for critical distancing grow. That critical distancing is most apparent in the shock techniques employed by Sole (techniques not dissimilar to Brecht's 'distancing' or 'making-strange' effects) in a poem written long after the disaster, at a point at which hopes for liberation in South Africa appeared to be about to be fulfilled, and yet during a period in which there were multiple uncertainties as to how comprehensive that liberation might turn out to be.

In a sense, the poem by Mopeli–Paulus and the isiZulu poem offer the most unmediated approach to the fate of the *Mendi* troops. This approach is facilitated by the fact that both poems employ direct address, through quotation of the (imagined?) words of the Wagon Captain in the case of the Mopeli–Paulus, from poet to audience in the case of the isiZulu poem. It is significant, I think, that Mqhayi uses direct address (or, rather, apostrophe, to the dead men) only sparingly, beginning by referring to the *Mendi* casualties in the third person and swiftly reverting to this after the central section of the poem. In the Sole there is no such voice; the revived bodies of the troops are referred to in the third person exclusively.

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[36] Stimela Jason Jingoes, *A Chief is a Chief by the People* (London: Oxford UP, 1975): 91, quoted in Robert Edgar, "Lesotho and the First World War: Recruiting, Resistance and the South African Native Labour Contingent," *Mohlomi* 3–5 (1979–81): 106.

[37] Jingoes, *A Chief is a Chief by the People*, 92.

The four poems take a range of stands in relation to the colonial and apartheid regimes, the Sole and the Sidyiyo being the most radical – depending on one's reading of the final lines of the latter. Most striking, perhaps, is the gulf that lies between the Mqhayi and the Sole. In a sense, of the four poems these are the most 'driven' in terms of the construction of a proposition: they are the two poems that one can most consider as having a thesis to deliver. But there is a world of difference between Mqhayi's assertion that the *Mendi* troops are, now in heaven, "new-risen men" and Sole's image of the dead returned to claim their birthright.

Referring back to the diagram by Eagleton cited earlier, the sequence of four poems can be read as an example of the way texts can be read as products of ideology, itself a product of history.[38] Given the tensions between and, in some cases, within these texts, one is reminded that ideological formations are themselves permeated by internal dynamics and are nurtured through contestation.

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[38] "We can identify amongst groups of people in specific places, at specific times, shared assumptions, beliefs and preferences [and refer to these] as ideological formations." See Chris Dunton, *Reading the Times: Ideology of the Text in the Early Independent Basotho Press* (Mmabatho: Press and Information Office, University of the North-West, 1998): 1.

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Fieldwork as Translation

Linnaeus' Apostle Anders Sparrman and the Hottentot Perspective

Raoul J. Granqvist

The theoretical proviso for this essay is an understanding and reading of eighteenth-century travel as an asymmetrical, basically univocal conversation or translation of entities, be they land masses, coastlines, insects, roots, or human beings. 'Translation' is used as a term for appropriation and conquest. It took place against a broad social and cultural backdrop of colonial bartering that I will discuss from within the interdisciplinary domains of ethnography, anthropology, linguistics, and humanism/Enlightenment. Its local/temporal site was fieldwork. Carl Linnaeus' (1707–78) project of sending his twenty-odd disciples out across the world during the second half of the century was motivated, principally, by stern, passionate altruism but politically inflected by nationalism and ethnocentrism.

The job of his travelling naturalists was to collect specimens, return their findings and material to Sweden, write their own books, and eventually achieve fame, economically and culturally, that benefited home and the world (in that order). This was their scholarly agenda. In prefacing his late-in-life *Instructio Peregrinatoris*, "Instruction for Naturalists on Voyages of Exploration,"[1] Linnaeus instructed his apostles to find out what the inhabitants called the plants they discovered, what use they made of them, where the plants grew, and to ask questions related not only to the plant, animal, and mineral kingdoms, but to Nature as an entity. Such questions could include the circumstances of the informants' way of living, from birth to death, from diet to clothing. All the inquiries, it was taken for granted, were to be in consonance with the orthodox taxonomic principles of the day. In other words, this cohort of eighteenth-century travellers were supposed to communicate with the locals not only to find out what hid behind the next corner. “Foreign people’s customs, ways of life and institutions” must not be neglected, Linnaeus added; “nothing [must escape] his [the naturalist’s] sharp eyesight and rapt attention,” only disputes about religion and politics were off-bounds. In these interactive contacts it was crucial to be *integer vitae scelerisque purus* (“upright of life and free from wickedness”), as Linnaeus told the young student Pehr Löfling on his way to Spain in 1751.[2] For their inquiries to become truly rewarding and fruitful, the naturalist travellers should “*adjust their behaviour to all kinds of people*” and make efforts to unearth “*attractive ways of socializing*” (203–204, my emphases) – guidelines that Anders Sparrman, unlike other apostles of Linnaeus, followed admirably.

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[1] Carl Linnaeus, "Instructions for Naturalists on Voyages of Exploration," *The Linnaeus Apostles: Global Science & Adventure: Introduction*, vol. 1, ed. Lars Hansen et al. (1759; London: IK Foundation, 2010): 201–11.

Exploring Nature and learning from it was no passive or frivolous act: “No day without at least some work” (211), Linnaeus preached. When abroad, the naturalist travellers should approach the new and strange things they encountered with the same passion that invigorated the travel writers to produce “diligently and accurately written travel books” (202–203). But diligence and accuracy were not enough; they had to be infused with a personal touch. As the naturalists’ fieldwork task was to “imitate” or “observe everything” and encounter “the countless novelties [that will] come into sight, [with] their astonishing variety arousing attention,” they should, Linnaeus suggested, adopt to the full the technique of travelling aesthetes. Notes should be written down before going to sleep rather than relying on memory. The *in situ* memorandum lives longer if it is subjected to the same “artistic rules” that dictate the style of travel writers. Some of them do it so well, he went on, that “it is no mere coincidence that each individual [reader] finds in them something to his own taste” (203).

Linnaeus employed the most popular literary genre of his time, travel literature, as a discursive exemplum to prompt the apostles to see, hear, and document better. This encouragement to emulate literary authors might seem a paradoxical suggestion coming from the master of scientific holism and systematic thinking. However, Linnaeus himself loved to juggle with Swedish, a language not yet tamed into formalistic structures. Without language play, how would readers *see* the specificity that travellers wanted to express, Linnaeus asked. Among his apostles, Sparrman was his equal, if not his superior, in writing with a humane consciousness that transcended the imperial condition of his time. He seemed to have listened to his forty-years-older master with excitement and attention. That he and Georg Forster are forerunners of the modern travelogue in its profane mingling of fact and fiction, the normative and the dissident, the personal and the character-as-type, needs to be more widely acknowledged.

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[2] Linnaeus, “Instructions for Per Löfling,” *The Linnaeus Apostles*, 313–14. Further page references are in the main text. For an account of Linnaeus’ administration of his disciples’ travels, see Sverker Sörlin, “Globalizing Linnaeus: Economic Botany and Travelling Disciples,” *Tidschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 29.1–2 (2008): 117–43. For an overview of Linnaeus, see Sten Lindroth, “Carl Linnaeus (or von Linné),” *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Carolus_Linnaeus.aspx (accessed 12 June 2012).

For Sparrman, language was, indeed, more than the God-given tongue. He was a theorist, a linguist in particular, and a communicator with a heart, whom Linnaeus must have appreciated for this very (and perhaps only) reason. I will examine three aspects of what I have called 'fieldwork as translation', by which I mean the asymmetrical modes of linguistic-cultural communication as it evolved between him and his informants during his two stints of data collection (botanical, zoological, physio-theological, and anthropological) in the Cape colony in 1772 and in 1775–76. In the first section, I discuss his viewpoints on the translational given in any subject–target language exchange and its bearing on the multilingual situation in the colonial environment and infrastructure that Sparrman was to be part of. In the second, I analyse how the Linnaean travellers' pedagogy or guidelines, as outlined above, both stimulated and hampered him. Their advocacy of free speech openness and tolerance gave room for Sparrman's creative interaction with the Khoisan (Khoikhoi and San) language speakers, yet he was troubled by eurocentric and hierarchical taxonomies – down to the act of picking and naming flowers. The third section extends the notion of Sparrman's fieldwork in a discussion of the delayed transformation of his notes into the Swedish "Hottentot" book (1783), its complex history of translation into German (1784) and English (1785, 1786), and the equal entangled historiography of Sparrman's postmodern reputation.

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Language Dissemination and Language Suppression

During his voyage on board the *Castle of Stockholm*, a Swedish East India ship bound for Cape Town, which landed there on 12 April 1772, Anders Sparrman admitted that he had "made a shift to pick up a little German"[3] as preparation for his time in the Dutch colony (the first visit extending from 12 April to 22 November 1772 and the second from 25 July 1775 to 15 April 1776; between the two, he was on board HMS *Resolution* for Cook's second circumnavigation). Mastering German was an alternative mode of understanding the Dutch-speaking colonists, above all Postholder or Resident Johan Frederik Kirsten at Simonstown in False Bay, whose family of six children he would be tutoring in subjects such as French, English, and mathematics, but not religion (his choice), for seven months. During the early part of his first South African stay, Sparrman struggled to accommodate the dynamics of the language mixture among sailors and traders in his residential community, both mentally and intellectually. The story that the Dutch colony was another Babel was a traveller's tale taken up by Sparrman. Initially, he likened the situation he had landed in to anarchy. Coming straight out of the monolingual cocoon of Sweden, the dinner conversations in the Kirsten household, their 'confusion of tongues' ("*språkvilla*," "*mélange*," "*Sprachmischung*"), no doubt added to his disorientation and anxiety. The passages where these phrases occurred could be read as a sociolinguistic overview of the mid-eighteenth-century colonial community at the Cape of Good Hope as well as a reflection at this point of Sparrman's uncritical re-enactment of the Babel narrative. He did not understand Portuguese (vol. 1: 57) and was consequently unable to rank Portuguese speakers' degree of familiarity with the language, whether it was good or "very bad." But he did, as we see:

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[3] Anders Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, towards the Antarctic Polar Circle, and Round the World: but Chiefly into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffres, from 1772, to 1776* (London: Printed for C.G.J. & J. Robinson, 1785), vol. 1: 14, http://archive.org/search.php?query=sparrman%20AND%20mediatype%3Atexts (accessed 10 February 2012). I will use the first English edition of *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* of 1785, and not the *best* of 1786, both, allegedly, authorized by Sparrman himself (see my discussion of this later). My choice is pragmatic. As the 1785 edition is web-based, it provides easy navigation within the text both for this writer and the readers. All page references in the main text are to the two volumes of the 1785 edition.

> The ships of various nations, English, French, and particularly Dutch East-Indiamen, anchored this season in *Simon's Bay*. The principal officers and passengers of this nation lodged chiefly with the resident; so at all mealtimes, various European dialects, together with the languages used in commerce with the Indians, viz. the Malay, and a very bad kind of Portuguese, were spoken all at one time, so that the confusion was almost equal to that of the Tower of Babel. (vol. 1: 22)

He soon started to recognize the realistic side of the Biblical simile – the methodological and oppressive control connoted by the Babel comparison. Returning from a botanical excursion to Paarl towards the end of his first stay (in October), he and his assistant Daniel Immelman, having lost their way, approached a group of intoxicated sailors / traders for guidance. Sparrman commented:

> Jabbering to me all at once in High Dutch [the official colonial language], Low Dutch ['Pidgin' Afrikaans], Hanoverian [a German dialect], etc., they all endeavoured to make me believe that I should meet with rivers, mountains, deserts [...], if, according to their sea dialects, I did not steer my course right. (vol. 1: 71)

Interestingly, this episode occurred close to the hill called the 'Tower of Babel' (Babylonstoren; today a history-drenched Cape Dutch farm estate popular with tourists), on the lands of a Boer farmer who, despite his scholarly mannerism and racial hospitality, had the reputation of beating his slaves to death. This was hearsay that proved to be more than that. "I was waked here," Sparrman reported, "by the horrid shrieks and cries of [the slaves] *January* and *February* who were undergoing the discipline of their master's lath, because the horses had not been found the preceding evening" (vol. 1: 70). At this stage, if not before, Sparrman had realized that as a travelling translator and exploring naturalist, he had to listen even better, attend to the innuendoes, discover the methods of using and collating the spoken word as readily and precisely as his knife penetrated searchingly the bird's breast. This Babel was of a special, segregated kind with a local racist grammar or nomenclature of its own that he had to attend to, not respect nor yield to, but from which he had to learn.

"The necessity [...] that I was under of communicating my thoughts, contrary to what I had supposed," he explained, "increased my power of comprehending others, as well as that of expressing my own meaning (vol. 1: 14). This was a declaration in line with Linnaeus' instruction to travelers to listen well and report accurately. Sparrman's "restless inquisitive disposition" (vol.

1: xiv) furthered in him a natural interest in languages, especially their instrumental and useful functions, by which he was determined to set himself apart from the self-contained monolingual and phlegmatic Dutch colonists. They did not bother to communicate with others than themselves, he noted:

> They learn very little of any foreign language, though they are otherwise indefatigable in their application to trade, and every thing that tends to their emolument; and although the income of the whole colony, as well as the particular interest of most of the inhabitants, depends entirely on their trade with foreigners. (vol. 1: 16)

'Comprehending' and 'expressing' were collateral, interdependent conceptions of the Linnaean translating traveller. To travel, to translate, to understand, to express is the ladder to knowledge. In the ideal world!

The narrative leitmotif of the Cape as the prime site of Babel diversity was true but was not understood in terms of what it really stood for. The simile in fact represented the Cape Dutch panoptical bias and narrowness of sight, in a multilingual, racist colony. From his hiding position on top of "the hill," alienated, unseen, the Boer farmer stood fast, shackled, not bothering to understand what Africa both asked for and offered. Spurred by Linnaeus' recommendations about adapting to "all kinds of people," Sparrman knew all too well that in order for him to "steer the course right" within the contact zone with its fuzzy borders, his inquisitiveness needed to incorporate the views of all for any participatory knowledge to materialize. Metaphysically, he had to stay on the ground, not climb the masculine hill of optical illusions. As Per Wästberg explains, "Of all the early explorers of South Africa, Anders Sparrman was the only one who spoke not only merely about the slaves, but also with the slaves."[4] We will see how.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the settler population of Dutch, German, and French settlers in the Cape was mainly native-born with more or less the fully established segregationist social status distinctions that Sparrman registered, as we have seen. Even more frequent in his travelogue were his sour comments about the Khoisan losing their grazing rights due to the ongoing colonial intrusion and the establishment of Boer livestock or nomadic farms. The importation of slaves[5] was also going on under Sparrman's alert eyes. He repeatedly criticized its brutality throughout his narrative. The slave communities in the Cape region were multilingual.[6] In the following episode, Sparrman was confronted by a semi-hostile group of perhaps runaways speaking among them the Cape slave lingua franca, a blend of Malay and creole Portuguese. Note that Sparrman gave a conciliatory socio-cultural explanation for their snubbing of him:

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[4] Per Wästberg, *The Journey of Anders Sparrman*, tr. Tom Geddes (London: Granta, 2011): 197.

[5] Africa 26%, India 26%, Indonesia 33%, Madagascar 25%; Ana Deumert, *Standardization and Language Change: The Dynamics of Cape Dutch* (Amsterdam: John

> These fellows were so malicious as not to answer me, though certainly some of them understood me extremely well, and though, after having promised them something to drink, I asked them the way in tolerable good Dutch; on the contrary, they conferred with each other in broken Portuguese or Malay, in such a manner, as to make me suspect, that they had no better will towards me, than they have to others of a different nation from themselves, who are accustomed to sell them here, after having partly by robbery and open violence, and partly in the way of bargain or purchase, got them from their native country, and thus eventually brought them to the grievous evils they then sustained. (vol. 1: 38; see also vol. 1: 61)

Their interaction via Sparrman's self-acclaimed "tolerable good Dutch" and their hybrid lingua franca positioned their incompatibilities. Sparrman's adjustments to the use of improvisation, sign language, and bi- and trilingual solicitations for attempts at contact failed (despite his additional lubricating manoeuvre). He realized, however, that the slaves had the best reasons in the world to treat him as another "Christian" with presumptive suspicion. He understood the reasons why they refused to 'understand' or accept his mediations. From the slaves and the Khoe, he would learn – from this episode and others – about the strategies of silence and those of double-talk as well as the pose of feigned misunderstanding or not understanding at all – all vital stratagems for survival in a situation involving the inequitable communication at the Cape colony. The language chicanery that he had discovered became a method that he, too, would practise – as happened in the contorted talks with the Resident family – to still his hunger for the *accurate* words of his Linnaean pursuit. 'Knowledge' was out there, but masked either by the limitations of his eurocentric perceptions or by the political ruse of the Other. He was aware of both, if not necessarily of how they worked. The colonists would also

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Benjamins, 2004): 25, http://books.google.fi/books/about/Language_Standardization_and_Language_Ch.html?id=8ciimg5gGqQC&redir_esc =y (accessed 10 June 2012).

[6] Deumert, *Standardization and Language Change*, 27.

practise, he noticed, a similar tactic of deceit to achieve their far more sinister purposes (vol. 2: 305).

The further Sparrman 'penetrated' into the Hottentot world in his quest for biological and zoological specimens, the more the non-natural world and its administered inhumanity sharpened his observations. The contestation of his spoken dialect and the written formula of pragmatic, non-standardized Swedish[7] together with the jaundiced language *mélange* of the Cape colony formed a catalyst for a liberatory license of expression that helped him formulate not only what he saw but also what fettered him. The academic imperatives to be as "concise, expressive, and easy comprehendable [as] any schoolboy that has made the least progress in this department," hitherto associated with the Latin language (vol. 1: 244), could be formulated not only in other languages but also differently in style. Sparrman was not aiming for the unsophisticated text, and 'precision', he would have added, could be achieved without the deadly rigid and chillingly unsentimental prose of Carl Peter Thunberg. I will now discuss Sparrman's application of three clusters of terms (with their derivations) – 'Christian' (also 'christian'), 'savage', and 'heathen' – to demonstrate his discursive complexity and foresight, which was much more advanced than Mary Louise Pratt has been willing to admit.[8] I will return to the 'problem of Sparrman' in colonial translational historiography at the end of my investigation.

Of the thirty-five samples of the word 'Christian/christian' in Sparrman's South African travelogue, only five refer to the meaning a 'Christian in the civilized world'. In his book, Sparrman naturally identified himself with this 'minority group' in terms of the Cape population. The following is an example of his way of neutralizing the word (from within the nomenclature of his time), in stark contrast to all the other thirty applications of the word. Returning from his voyage with Cook, Sparrman wrote, "At length on the Wednesday following, being the 22d of March, 1775, after a voyage of sixty thousand miles, and an absence of two years and a quarter from the Christian and civilized part of the world, we came again to anchor in *Table-bay*" (vol. 1: 102). The other thirty uses of the term identify skewed-up, dislocated colonists of various calibres whose only purpose, in Sparrman's view, was to profit from the land they were colonizing – in Christ's name. Sparrman used 'colonist' and 'C/christian' sporadically as synonyms, apparently to remind his readers that the colonists were born Christians, and thus were Christians in theory but not in practice. This means that in most of the cases the concept was contextualized and modulated to serve a non-relativist approach to what he experienced as stigmatizing cultural difference, colonialist repression, and violence. Each occurrence of the 'Christ'-word told its own story, and it told it variously from within, recording disparaging dichotomies of 'us' and 'them' with the Khoisan as the integrated subject (not always as a victim). The term related to differences in social relations, in the cultivating of land, in the usage and respect for nature, and, reciprocally, as a stark anathema of colonialism. In the following, Sparrman discusses the tactics of the colonists to rob children from their mothers in order to undermine Khoisan resistance:

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[7] Rut Boström, *Anders Sparrmans brev till Carl von Linné: En kulturhistorisk och språklig undersökning med naturvetenskapliga inslag* (Uppsala: Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi, 2011): 78–87.

[8] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992): 49–57.

> The amiable tenderness of the mother, which, perhaps, glows with a more lively flame in the breast of this poor heathen, than in those of her Christian tyrants, is the very circumstance laid hold on by their persecutors, in order to rivet the chains of this wretched female so much the faster. (vol. 1: 206)

He then compares the grazing practices of the Hottentots and the Christians:

> In direct contradiction to the custom and example of the original inhabitants the Hottentots, the colonists turn their cattle out constantly into the same fields, and that too in a much greater quantity than used to graze there in the time of the Hottentots. (vol. 1: 251)
>
> What contributes not a little to this fertility is, that the land is fresh, that is to say, not yet worn out by being too frequently and too closely grazed off by the numerous flocks and herds of the Christians. (vol. 2: 164)[9]

The two words 'heathen' and 'savage' were not so frequently employed as their alleged opposites.[10] In discussing the consequences of sexual intercourse between the local women and the settlers, Sparrman castigated white men's levity (rape) by provocatively juxtaposing the two categories of the 'heathen' (the slave woman) and the 'Christian' as if they were ideally equal or as if the rights to their bodies were interchangeable. The prime etymology of 'heathen' as the person 'not of the city' (or 'not of the community') interacted tentatively in his reasoning with the concept of the Christian privileging the institution of conversion as a passageway into the freedom assigned to the colonized 'bastard'. A complex pattern of apartheid-like affiliations was established and discussed by Sparrman as cynical gifts from Heaven. His critique of the Christian mission as just another enslaving colonial trick sprang from the same dialectic of provocative inverted standpoints (vol. 1: 212–13). What was conversion about? Who benefited from it?

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[9] See William Beinart, "Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Cape," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24.4 (December 1998): 775–99, http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/pdf_files/117/1175857244.pdf (accessed 1 August 2012).

[10] The word 'African' is predominantly used for geographical, zoological, and botanical units or types; seldom for people. His Africa-born Afrikaner assistant Immelman is the only qualified "young African" (vol. 1: 115). Only twice in the 790-page

And who/what is the 'savage'? Are we, the Westerners, the real savages and the Others imaginary ones?

> The Peruvian *bark*, *senega*, *ophiorbiza*, *sarsaparilla*, *quassia*, with many other useful remedies, calculated for preserving millions of our species, have not we learned them all from *those we call savages*? and perhaps might *learn still more, if our tyranny had not* already, I had almost said, entirely extirpated them, and together with them the fruits of their useful experience. (vol. 1: 144)[11]

The primeval or the 'natural' savage state, the precolonial phase, was not an incarnation of innocence, a Biblical fairytale; it was real and living. Sparrman's language revision was embedded in verbal self-as-type castigations. "Our tyranny" has made us immune, callous, and unconcerned about their alternative civilization, he said. It was not only colonial lassitude and ignorance – the antithesis of enlightenment – that he condemned, but the brutality it fostered. He shifted the names for it and their meanings. He played angry dichotomous tricks. 'Savage/savagery' was not the synonym for the mythic connotations of static otherness; it was a factual description of contemporary colonial practices in the white Dutch Cape colony in the 1770s. Sparrman's daring reappropriations of the Western glossary of African de-

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text is the word allowed to signify indigenous peoples, in each case as a collective qualifier ("African rustics"; "African waggoners").

[11] Emphases added; Sparrman's italics for the plant names; this writer's added emphasis elsewhere, for the others.

humanization would remain radical for a long time.[12] Notice the gliding shift of meaning between the two "savage" words in the following:

> Without doubt, the Boshiies-men have been a long while *in a savage state*, and many of them are now brought even into a still more miserable situation, since the *Christians* have invaded their country, and *pursue them with chains and fetters* into their deserts. In *so savage a state*, they probably neither have, nor ever had, many manners or customs different from those few I have already mentioned, or may describe in the course of this work. (vol. 1: 207) (my emphases)[13]

Translating Khoisan

Travel and translation occur in Sparrman's ox-wagon itinerary in a convoluted form. An anonymous group of travel auxiliaries and translators accompanied him. Identifying routes and the material to investigate, camping, finding food, and avoiding dangers from humans and animals, required multiple language interaction shaped within the asymmetrical relations of power. The word, or, rather, his understanding of it, would have to reach Sparrman before any forward action could be taken. In this sense, the word was 'colonial'. Only when a physical and social contextuality had been formed could ethnographic translation be performed.[14] Sparrman, taking shorthand notes, jotting down memos, transforming them into shorthand,[15] drawing, and writing, and above all listening, was engaged in transposing the translated oral text into a written text in this double-faced ethnographic manoeuvre. In this section, I will discuss a few examples of his technique of translating Khoisan language performativity into the target-language(s), "expressed," as he explained in the Introduction, "sometimes in one language and sometimes in another [...] and sometimes in many languages blended together in one" (vol. 1: xiv). I hope to add a further appraisal of what William Beinart has described as Sparrman's "fluid approaches to the product of knowledge and [...] to masculinity of a particular group of men."[16]

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[12] It is easy to find examples of Sparrman talking, like any other contemporary traveller, about the Hottentots in negative terms – as "lazy," "stupid," "dirty." These are instances of accommodating generalizations that are not infrequently followed by qualifying comments that underscore his concern with the fallacy of classifications and his daring insecurity. His face-to-face judgments and descriptions of the Khoisan are mostly tangible and specific.

[13] See José Manuel de Prada–Samper, "The Forgotten Killing Fields: 'San' Genocide and Louis Anthing's Mission to Bushmanland, 1862–1863," *Historia* (Durban) 5.1 (May 2012): 172–87. This is a review article on Mohamed Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples* (Cape Town: U of Cape Town P, 2010).

[14] Jeremias David Sturge, "Translation Strategies in Ethnography," *The Translator* 3.1 (1997): 21–38.

[15] Probably to safeguard his notes for future publishing in book form.

Sparrman was a listener and a sound-tracker. Sounds or phonemes were the smallest particles in his acquisition of the oral/aural cognitive world that he encountered and tried to make sense of. He recognized that the cultural frontiers that separated him from his informants were bound to produce differences that no translation could bridge.[17] His job was to register as well as he could the variants and the near-synonyms, whether they were what we would call phonological, morphological, lexical, or cultural, without judging them. He often listened to two to three language expositions of the same artefact, where each was contextualized, however offhandedly. Hearing well was not hearing right (and there is no 'right') but it was worth trying. So he went for it, practising Khoisan when he had a chance throughout his journey, eventually compiling two word lists of the Khoisan – the earliest written records of the South African indigenous languages (vol. 2: 349–53). He made observations about Khoisan dialects along the way, noting ad-hoc differences in the clicking (vol. 1: 227–28; vol. 2: 6). His 'scholarly' approach to these attempts was hedged with self-deprecation and doubt, but also with admiration and respect for the richness embedded in the languages that he confronted. He was fascinated by what he heard.

> This is with respect to the pronunciation, the most difficult and singular language in the universe. Almost every word is pronounced with a smack or clacking of the tongue against the roof of the mouth.[18] Words of many syllables are accompanied with two clacks; but what cannot but render this language still more difficult for strangers, is, that these clacks are said to be performed, according to different circumstances, in three different ways, viz. more or less forward or backward on the

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[16] Beinart, "Men, Science, Travel and Nature," 772.

[17] See Chris Low, "Khoisan Healing: Understandings, Ideas and Practices" (DPhil., Oxford University, 2004): 74, http://www.thinkingthreads.com/files/Khoisan_thesis.pdf (accessed 18 June 2102).

[18] The London edition translation of "gom-smällningar" ("palate-smackings" in the Stockholm edition) was "gutturo-palatial sounds" (vol. 2: 278).

> palate. This distinction, however, I had not from the Hottentots themselves, who were, perhaps, too ignorant to go too deep into the matter. For my part, I own that my ears were not nice enough to attend to such minute differences. (vol. 1: 227)

If the Hottentots were ignorant about phonetics, Sparrman was ignorant about language phonology, admitting to his incapacity to distinguish the differences in meaning resulting from the production of the click sounds.[19] Having heard children in Cape Town speak several languages (Dutch, German, Malay/Portuguese, Khoisan) with ease, he advised, being the teacher–scholar he was, that "the tenderest age of childhood might be advantageously employed in learning several languages" (vol. 1: 228). He envied these children their unbounded capacity for shift-language talking. Those who spoke the "Malay tongue" or the "Hottentot language" in conjunction with Dutch were particularly brave.[20] The "minute differences" that he failed to distinguish in the ethnographic sessions with the Hottentots were compensated for by his strenuous efforts to register visually some hundred individual Khoisan words, to engage in simultaneous translation-cum-interpretation events, and to improvise interactive conversations with his informants. Linnaeus had sent a dedicated young apostle to Africa! Sparrman was pleased to be able to say "You reek like a dead rat" in Pidgin Dutch/Afrikaans,[21] and he did so while he implemented innovative solutions in complex multilingual situations where mutual incomprehension was a threat. The solving of the linguistic problem in the following situation could not have been better handled at a modern business meeting where the English language is – hypothetically – unknown to everybody:

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[19] Vernon S. Forbes, editor of an English edition of Sparrman's travelogue, was quick to point out all kinds of inconsistencies in Sparrman's attempts at written representation of the languages he heard, whether Dutch, Pidgin Dutch, or any of the Khoisan speech forms, as if there had been a widely adopted technique to do so, and as if there were stable language systems. He also questioned the use of the term 'Khoisan' for Hottentot. See Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope towards the Antarctic Polar Circle, Round the World and to the Country of the Hottentots and the Caffres from the Year 1772–1776 based on the English editions of 1785–1786 published by Robinson, London*, ed. V.S. Forbes, tr. J. & I. Rudner (1785–86; Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1975–77), vol. 1: 181, n. 23.

[20] See "The Development of Indigenous African Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education," a report compiled by the Ministerial Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education in September 2003, http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=VVy05Mi9bJY%3D&tabid=452&mid=1036 (accessed 1 June 2012).

[21] Wästberg, *The Journey of Anders Sparrman*, 192.

> The six newly-arrived Hottentots did not understand a word of Dutch, on which account we were obliged to make use of the three others as interpreters; though, in general, we made them understand us pretty well by signs, and some few Hottentot words we had learnt the meaning of, and could ourselves pronounce with the proper clack against the roof of the mouth. (vol. 2: 22)

Notations of sounds required a specific technique. Sparrman's was simple: normal letter combinations that he adapted to encapsulate or mimic graphically what he (as a Swedish native speaker) could hear, and, when these would not do, episodic accounts of both human and animal vocalizations. His rambling description of the young gnu's voice undulations reflected as well Sparrman's humour and picaresque prose style. He transcribed the gnu's voice as Swedish '*onje*', which, in addition, continuing his metonymy, sounded like the colonists' '*nonje*' (for 'miss'?) and their greeting '*goeden avond*' (Dutch for 'good evening'). In all, he summed up, the gnu sang like a child saluting her parents (2:176).[22]

More relevant for our purpose is Sparrman's attempt at capturing human sounds in his translational quest to record the native words of not only the material that he collected, examined, and catalogued, but also the words for indigenous eating habits, social conventions, and the names of animals and rivers. "The smacks, or clacking with the tongue, I imagined it would be most convenient to denote by a 't' with an apostrophe over it," he explained (vol. 2: 227, 352). He did this eighty-six times (missing about twenty other Khoisan/ Xhosa words or word-formations). This 't' became a Sparrmanian trademark! He registered the Khoisan (?) spellings (I transcribe here his orthographic versions – and they can vary – and their alternate non-indigenous synonymous names) of a number of words for animals such as *'ta'kai'kene* (tantalus hagedash) (vol. 1: 280); *kaunaba* (here he missed the 't') (haartloopers, runners, wood-swine), which, he added, were fond of eating *da-t'kai*, the root of a mesembryanthemum (vol. 2: 27; see also below); *duyvel* (devil) or *t'kau* (buffalo) (vol. 2: 64, 290, 352); *t'gnu* (gnu) (vol. 2: 131). The iris flower *oenkjes* and its function for the Khoi was a subject for another of his many meditations on the inconsistencies of the contemporary perspectives of Hottentot culture:

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[22] For eighteenth-century Cape sea-cow sound patterns, in Swedish, see 2: 277–78; for a chanting mantra at a country dance "card play," see vol. 1: 232.

> The Hottentots, with more reflection than generally falls to the share of savages, use the word *oenkjes* in the same sense in which Virgil used that of arisla that is, for reckoning of time; always beginning the new year, whenever the *oenkjes* push out of the ground, and marking their age and other events by the number of times in which, in a certain period, this vegetable has made its appearance. (vol. 1: 148)

"There is not a bridge to be found in Africa," Sparrman wryly complained, I guess with a smile (vol. 1: 53), in an early one-liner triggered, one can surmise, as much by the ox-wagon trip ordeal as by his topological draughtsman project of producing, en route, the celebrated map of the southernmost tip of South Africa.[23] The name-giving of rivers fascinated him and inspired him to register their multilingual variances and individual meanings. He took down the *t'Ku-t'koi,* as it was "pronounced" for the *Kukoi,* which meant 'head' (vol. 1: 305; vol. 2: 323) but was also used to denote Hottentot 'captains' (vol. 2: 257); the (San word) *t'Kurenoi* for the "Little Sunday-river" (vol. 2: 27); *t'Kau-t'kai* for the "Great Visch-river" (vol. 2: 190); and the *Keusi kunni aati* (which "bears pretty nearly the signification of *Let not the ugly drink here*") for the colonists' depreciating of the "Little Boshies-man's-river" (vol. 2: 71). The last one is my favourite. Its sardonic message of resistance has travelled across the ocean waters.

Sparrman had no problems adjusting to the scholarly protocol of his master at home who stressed being alert to people's ways of socializing. How did they treat each other, fall in love, have sex, hate? Here, too, he was attentive to recording individual words and expressions: *t'Ku-t'kois* (a respectful word for addressing a leader) (vol. 2: 257); *t'kabé* (goodbye) (vol. 2: 307); *'t'guzeri* and *t'gaunatsi* (also spelled *gaunazi*), meaning 'sorcerer' and 'imp', used for insulting or abusing (vol. 1: 203, 208); *t'katsi* meaning "See here! Bravo!," "an interjection of very extensive import and signification" (vol. 2: 49, 352).[24] (See also his comments about women's *t'neite* [spelled *t'Netie* in the glossary], an apron to cover the genitals [vol. 2: 325]). He followed intensively what he called a song and dance session. He recorded the refrain of the song in his fieldwork notebook.

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[23] For the history of the famous map drafted by Sparrman, see Forbes's edition of Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, 1: 11–12.

[24] The clause "an interjection of very extensive import and signification" was not in the Swedish edition. No one other than Sparrman could have added it for the first English edition. This is just one of many indications that he revised his text in cooperation with a London translator.

> We seldom see such happiness and contentment as seems to be indicated by this festive custom, in a handful of people totally uncultivated, and subsisting in their original savage state, in the midst of a perfect desert. Mr. Immelman accompanied me, in order to behold with his own eyes the real archetype of that state of pastoral felicity, which the poets are continually occupied in painting and describing. (vol. 2: 28; for his musical notation of it, see vol. 2: 352)

Watching the villagers wreathing, twisting, and twining their bodies, hopping and jumping, Sparrman was somewhat irritated, "though, perhaps," he admitted as in an afterthought, "a Hottentot might be induced to form the same opinion of our most fashionable dances" (1:356). It would take the anthropologists writing about 'dance in Africa' another two hundred years and more to reach the same theoretical self-reflexive standpoint.

Nature, culture, and politics seemed to coalesce in Sparrman's pre-Darwinian exploration and findings in the eighteenth-century Cape colony. Even Richard Dawkins would be happy reading this section! Sparrman's very last project in the Cape was to kill and dissect a rhino. For this purpose he had recruited a number of helpers. One of them vanished into the bush but returned after a while. The interpreter reported to an irritated Sparrman the man's actual words

> "That the *honing-wyzer* (cuculus indicator) had enticed him quite away from that part of the country, where the rhinoceros was, to that where the elk lay; but that he had now brought with him a considerable quantity of honey to smear my mouth with." I, on my part, accepted both of the excuse and the bribe; as my brother sportsmen, whose mouths began to water at the latter, unanimously voted, that the Hottentot had done better in following the honey-guide, than he would have done had he obeyed our orders. (vol. 2: 297–98)

Sparrman was pacified not only by the masculine camaraderie of the group but by the man's daredevil decision to trust his evolutionary bank of knowledge and follow loyally the bee-cuckoo's "grating cry of *cherr, cherr, cherr* to excite, as it were, the attention of the ratel [Afrikaans for a honey badger, a weasel; see Sparrman's drawing of the animal at the end of book 2, np] as well as of the Hottentots and colonists" (vol. 2: 187). Such a by-nature-imposed contract no enlightened naturalist could resist! In this communion, in this instance, the colonists were excused, as we saw, but not so in the following, about another hidden natural resource.

> I learned from this Hottentot, who […] was very communicative, that the root of the *da-t'kai*, a shrub of the mesembryanthemum kind pretty common here, eaten raw, was, in fact, very well-tasted, yielding a sweetish substance, which might be sucked […] The African colonists, who are not near so forward to investigate the virtues of the plants of the country itself, were as yet ignorant of the use of this root. (vol. 2: 94–95; see also vol. 2: 27)

He was back in Cape Town on 15 April 1776, sailed to Sweden a last time with the *Stockholms Slott* a couple of weeks later, and landed in Gothenburg in August,

> quite gruelled after his eight months in South Africa […] [taking] with him to Stockholm a bushbuck, an anteater, the foetus of a gazelle, a green woodpecker and a long-tailed cuckoo, whose stomach contents he had catalogued.[25]

Was the cuckoo the helpful honey-guide that he had shot?

Transformations and Translations

Seven years later, the first part of his travelogue (the "Hottentot Journey," as he called it in his correspondence with Georg Forster) was produced in a small edition by Anders Jacobsson Nordström's printing house in Stockholm.[26] It would take him another thirty-five years to complete the full 1772–76 story about his voyage in the *Resolution* and the Cape colony sojourn (1783–1818). "He was a laggard author," explained his South African editor, V.S. Forbes. "He lacked the drive and competitiveness to strive for eminence: he opted out of the rat race."[27] We have to thank him for that. In his introduction, Sparrman returned to the book's hybrid language context, with the implications of its provocative resourcefulness that I loaded it with in the earlier discussion.

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[25] Wästberg, *The Journey of Anders Sparrman*, 201.

[26] Anders Sparrman, *Resa till Goda Hopps-udden, Södra pol-kretsen och omkring jordklotet, samt till Hottentott- och Caffer-landen, åren 1772–76* (Stockholm: A.J. Nordström, 1783), vol. 1.

[27] See Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), vol. 1: 5–6.

> With respect to my *style*, which, in consequence of my being *unused to composition*, is sometimes so unequal, as well as unhappy in point of expression, that I have frequently been displeased with it myself, I have need, more than most authors, to beg for the reader's kind indulgence. In fact, all my writing for these many years past, has consisted chiefly in short notes and memoranda, expressed sometimes in one language and sometimes in many languages blended together in one. From this medley I have now *translated* and expressed in a more *diffuse style*, *and in my native language*, what I had formerly set down, in the manner above-mentioned, by way of memorandum only. (vol. 1: xiv) (my emphases)

Transforming the data of the journal into a narrative that Sparrman intended to be pleasant, lively and humorous was a difficult and a risky endeavour. It was difficult because the material consisted of unsorted fragments and notes in different languages, formatted, as we have seen, in shorthand.[28] It was risky because the style of writing he was to adopt was personal and unorthodox for a naturalist and might not induce the economic triumph he hoped for. The word *translate* in the Sparrman passage above should be understood in its much broader eighteenth-century sense. Sparrman was transferring and recomposing his deciphered material into a text that everybody could read, a narrative that in its Swedish edition of 1783 was to be "vidlöftigare på mitt modersmål" (more outspoken in my native language).[29] This was a comparative and competitive way of claiming linguistic precedence or the creative *jouissance* (or 'licence', as I have called it) that he associated with his writing in Swedish, his first-acquired language. "In the swedish [sic] language I hope my style will be pleasing and flowing, a little humorous and interesting," he wrote to Forster on 2 September 1777.[30] The literary criteria he hailed pertained exclusively to his own language. It was only here that he could claim excellence of a kind, he thought, rightly or not. In another letter two years later, while he was still working on a bilingual manuscript, creating one (Swedish) and self-translating the other (English), he rehearsed his posture. Linnaeus does not care "for any Ciceronian epistles, he as well as myself, hates scruples and pedantic niceties," he wrote, quoting for emphasis the Latin proverb *ars non habet osorem nisi ignorantem* ("art has no haters except for the ignorant").[31] The double-tongued characterization of the *style* of the compendium harmonized with the divergent but simultaneous bilingual manipulation that Sparrman subjected his text to.

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[28] The German translation (Sparrmann, *Reise nach dem Vorgebirge der guten Hoffnung, den südlichen Polarländern und um die Welt: hauptsächlich aber in den Ländern der Hottentotten und Kaffern in den Jahren 1772 bis 1776*, tr. Christian Heinrich Groskurd, foreword Georg Forster [Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1784]) follows the Swedish, "Aus dieser Sprachmischung übersetze ich jetzt weitluftiger ausgeführt in meiner Muttersprache" 3. ("From this medley of languages I have now translated in a more diffuse style in my native language").

[29] Sparrman, *Resa till Goda Hopps-udden*, xii.

The alternate English translation, replicating the "diffuse style […] in my native language" of the London editions, was not 'wrong'; it merely reflected the expressive side of his concerns. The wording could have been Sparrman's own, evolved in the communication with the London translator or with secondary translators/readers such as Georg Forster. It highlighted the second and very active theme of the Sparrman–Forster correspondence as well as that of Forster and the German publisher Spener.[32] The problem was how to transform his South African material into a more "compendious"[33] or circumstantial world of multilingualism. Sparrman worried that his Cape travelogue would be 'lost in translation', and he did his best to prevent this from happening.

Promoting a casual and, on occasion frivolously daring, conception of how a naturalist could/should formulate the scholarly predicament, particularly in a dubious 'romantic' style of narration with a direct oral address to the reader, the book was bound to displease and baffle Linnaeus' Swedish followers. It was, indeed, considered 'chatty', too 'philosophical', and, what was worse, it was found to harbour errors of orthography and mistakes concerning names of places and samples. It simply was a failure at home, explains his Swedish biographer.[34] However, in the course of two years, the Cape journal, in its unorthodox "diffuse style," revised and corrected, was to reach larger readerships, and not only beyond the scholarly community. Sparrman was to become a European celebrity.

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[30] Georg Forster, *Johann Georg Forsters Briefwechsel* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1829): 729.

[31] Forster, *Johann Georg Forsters Briefwechsel*, 737.

[32] Johann Karl Philipp Spener was Georg Forster's publisher at Haude & Spener in Leipzig.

[33] This is the English word that Sparrman used in a letter to Forster. In addition to "compendious," he would like his printed journal, he wrote, to be "short tho' sometimes philosophizing or reasoning, as you call it." Forster copied this section of Sparrman's letter in a speedy letter of his own (3 September 1776) to Spener, who was anxious to be the first to publish Sparrman outside Sweden and would remind Forster intermittently to intervene with Sparrman on his behalf. Not before mid-October 1782 did the publisher agree to have the book translated, but with Forster in full charge of the text. See Georg Forster, *Georg Forsters Werke: Sämtliche Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe*, ed. Siegfried Scheibe (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1978): 47, 354.

During their last year together (1774) on Cook's second voyage to the Pacific, the Forsters had met Sparrman's ambitions to the full. The three produced a translation into impeccable English of Nicholas Rosén von Rosenstein's *Underrättelse om barn-sjukdomar och deras botemedel* (1764) (*The Diseases of Children and Their Remedies*), a book that would not have seen the light of the day without this on-board cooperation. As Sparrman's English was less than mediocre, which he frequently and unabashedly acknowledged (and which is evidenced, as we have seen, in his English writing: vol. 1: 83, 101, 118), the Forsters must have spent as much time reviewing, revising, and correcting Sparrman's manuscript as he did writing it. For Sparrman to be dubbed translator and the sole named author of the work must have been an act of great loyalty on the part of the two men toward their assistant naturalist. Fettered by a ship on the sea and the flatness of the routines, the three had time in abundance to do the translation; they shared the spirit for recognition, and there was no gentlemen's room for father and son to opt out, even if they had wished. And why would they? The Forsters liked their friend. Cook's *Resolution* departed from the Cape on 27 April 1775 to return to London, separating Sparrman also from the Rosén manuscript forever. Two years later, self-translating the Hottentot journal, he asked Georg Forster to have it returned to serve him as a linguistic reference book: "I could remember several things better by the corrections."[35] He generously acknowledged his debts "to Messrs. Forster for various alterations they were so kind as to bestow on the translation [...], which my slender knowledge of the English tongue[36] made extremely necessary; as likewise for their taking care of the impression of it at London in the year 1776."[37]

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[34] Kenneth Nyberg, "Anders Sparrman," in *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon* (2007–2011): 8, http://www.nad.riksarkivet.se/sbl/Presentation.aspx? id=20001 (accessed 9 April 2012).

[35] Forster, *Johann Georg Forsters Briefwechsel*, 2: 712.

[36] In the Swedish edition, he wrote "min då ännu mindre färdighet i Engelska

In his letters throughout the 1770s, Sparrman was telling his friend Georg Forster, *in sum*, that 1) he would prefer to translate the English text himself but that his capacity was insufficient, 2) he would like Forster to review what he had already done or was going to do, and to dress it up, correct it, and find a publisher for it, and that 3) he was urgently in need of money and anxious to see the book in print, in Berlin and in London. "Could you help?" Also at this time, Forster lived up to Sparrman's renewed expectations. By the beginning of 1781 Sparrman had "finished" the lopsided texts, the Swedish and the English. In July, Forster wrote Sparrman a letter, agreeing to do the job on the English text, with the hesitant recommendation to have it published, side by side with the German edition, by Haude & Spener in Berlin. Forster knew that this would not work, as a printed English version required an English publishing house – something he no longer had access to now that he was living in Germany. He was obviously hard pressed by Johann Karl Philipp Spener, who was fervidly engaged in the European publishing race for Sparrman's Hottentot adventure.[38] Sparrman sent a frustrated Forster in Kassel only his Swedish text. Forster was relieved. The assumption must be that he knew that Sparrman's English text, although straight from the horse's mouth, would not be a reliable document. He could have corrected its English but, not knowing Swedish, he would not have been able to synchronize the two, and seeing once more Sparrman's "slechten Englisch" [sic] (69), he would not for a moment have considered (as his publisher did) using Sparrman's self-translation as a source text. So the makeshift English manuscript sailed west.

Forster could now focus on the German text production and translation. On 15 October 1781, he wrote to Sparrman a comforting letter, stating that a translator, Christian Heinrich Groskurd, would assist him and that he "was convinced that this Work will add to Your reputation in Germany" (354–55). By mid-June the next year he had read through Groskurd's translation, underlining in a note to the publisher ("God, it is true") Sparrman's indulgence for "Sprachgemenge" (language confusion) (383). In mid-November 1782 (413),

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Språket" (Sparrman, *Resa till Goda Hopps-udden*, 118). The temporal adverb *då* ('then') was deleted in the London edition, as if Sparrman wished to advertise his progress in the command of English.

[37] Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), 1: 115.

[38] Forster, *Georg Forsters Werke*, 348. Further page references are in the main text.

he returned the manuscript a first time to Spener, now complete with maps and illustrations. Throughout the first part of the following year he went on adjusting it (440, 454, 464). In his foreword to the edition,[39] he explained that he had also deleted Sparrman's defence of Linnaeus contra de Buffon[40] as it would have been decried as "redundant" by a better-informed German readership. So, too, he explained, with a slant of irony, had he omitted Sparrman's description of ox-wagons with braking devices as "Bei dem schwedischen Fuhrwesen scheint eine Hemmkette noch eine ganz neue Sache zu sein" ("It seems that in Swedish wagons a braking system using chains is a quite new idea"). Forster's intervention in Sparrman's journal was considerable and not only motivated by a sheer concern for its academic claim of correctness and coherence.[41] There is no evidence to suggest that Forster played any role in the production of the 1785 and 1786 London editions, although, indirectly, he may have contributed to them through the likely impact on them of the earlier German translation. Sparrman's name also appears only peripherally in the registers of Forster's post-1784 correspondents. In any case, he was a key agent in the production stage and the global diffusion of Sparrman's Cape Colony journal.[42]

The South African translators Jalmar and Ione Rudner (Jalmar was a native Swede), for their Van Riebeek Society edition of *Sparrman's Voyage* (1975–77), succeeded in establishing (with their editor Forbes), in a roundabout way, that the London editions were translated "by an Englishman with a knowledge of Swedish and not by a Swede with a knowledge of English," although, they added somewhat ambiguously, "there [were some] [...] passages that seem to have been written by a Swede rather than by an Englishman."[43] They had checked the alterations made to the English texts and discovered roughly forty instances that "misrepresent[ed] to a greater and lesser degree the meanings of the words in the Swedish original." They were not happy about their findings. They explained that the translator had paraphrased passages instead of translating them and "embellish[ed] Sparrman's usually simple style," thereby, in fact, distorting him (vol. 1: 19).[44] On the other hand, the explanatory insertions could only have been supplied, they also claimed, by a naturalist who was, directly or indirectly, familiar with the Cape colony (i.e. Sparrman!). Beyond the vagaries of their presentation, their basic argument was that there were two interacting translation agents, Sparrman and the English translator. In instances where a textual alteration by Sparrman in the 1785–86 editions dissatisfied the editor, the author, as it turned out, was deprived of the last word. None of the "distortions" that Forbes picked out was, it shows, anything other than Sparrman adding a word or two of clarification, dressed up or not. I will return in a while to the manner in which Forbes edited Sparrman.

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[39] Sparrman, *Reise nach dem Vorgebirge der guten Hoffnung*, [b2].

[40] Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), vol. 1: 238–48.

[41] I would like to thank Professor Emeritus Kjell–Åke Forsgren (Umeå University) for helping me with the German texts.

[42] The German text was used for the translation of the Dutch edition in 1787; the English (1785–86), translated by Pierre Le Tournier, for the French (1787–88). In 1788, quite conveniently, Sparrman passed through Paris on his way home from Senegal. Between the years 1783 and 2011, one hundred and three editions of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* were published (in five languages).

[43] See Forbes's edition of Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, vol. 1: 8. Further page references are in the main text.

The most likely scenario is, then, that the 'final' text (1786), the second London edition, progressed through the hands of an active, inspired, and ambitious Sparrman (who had delivered a crude self-translated draft with a list of corrections and additions) and an English translator, who, in his turn, may have been influenced by the German translation of 1784 (and thus by Forster) and maybe by local Swedes in London.[45] The concept of 'origin' again demonstrates its treacherous nature. Sparrman's London edition was a typical eighteenth-century phenomenon where the individual translator was de-individualized so as not to undermine the authority of, as here, a prestigious Linnaean source text. For the same reason, Sparrman had remained publicly the sole and unassisted translator of the pediatric textbook. So, who was this London translator? Forbes believed, on circumstantial evidence (as he put it), that it was Charles Rivington Hopson,[46] who was to translate into English both Johann Reinhold Forster's *History of the Voyages and Discoveries Made in the North* (1786) and Thunberg's *Travels at the Cape* (1793–95), facts that should speak in Hopson's favour. He also featured, as I have noticed, in early biographical sources as translator of Sparrman and Thunberg.[47]

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[44] See also *Carl Peter Thunberg Travels at the Cape of Good Hope*, ed. Vernon S. Forbes, tr. J. & I. Rudner (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1986): xxviii.

[45] Forbes's edition of *Carl Peter Thunberg*, xxiv.

[46] Forbes's edition of *Carl Peter Thunberg*, xviii, and his edition of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1975–1977): 2:3.

[47] *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle for the Year MDCCXCVII* 67.1 (1797): 80; Jeremias David Reuss, *Das Gelehrte England oder Lexikon der*

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To end this study, I will briefly consider three examples, culled from within my material, that illustrate, variously, the unwillingness to exempt Sparrman from the sloppy apparatus of historiography's generalities and totalities. They refuse, in short, to attend to those of us who try to communicate along the defaced and skewed pathways of the time. The first example is the apartheid syndrome that shaped Forbes's commentaries; the second, the reductionist method of Pratt's postcolonial reading (already noted); the third, the nationalistic (Swedish) partisanship that constrains the now completed formidable eight-volume *The Linnaeus Apostles: Global Science & Adventure* (2007–12).

Forbes, we saw, recognized Sparrman's active presence in the revision, correction, and accretion process of the London issues. But his editing was conspicuously biased. He accepted in most cases changes of a more specific and neutral nature as legitimate reflections of Sparrman's second reading insights for necessary clarification and correctness, and followed in these cases the London editions. As a rule, he turned against Sparrman's many revisions that dealt with Khoisan life-style and the Boer practices of violence against them, and for this returned to the unfinished Swedish edition for support. Forbes rejected, for instance, Sparrman's modification of "sedition, or cruel murder" to "aggravated with peculiar circumstances of cruelty and barbarity,"[48] as well as Sparrman's sympathetic rendering of a story about an ill-treated Khoisan couple,[49] and he re-introduced two passages that Sparrman had deleted (about Hottentot idleness and vermin-eating!).[50]

Jeztlebenden Schriftsteller in Grossbritannien, Irland und Nord-Amerika: Nachtrag und Fortsetzung vom Jahr 1790 bis 1803, vol.1: *A-K* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1804): 505; *A Catalogue of the Subscription Library, at Kingston upon Hull: Established in December 1775* (Liverpool: Printed by C.F. Harris's Widow and Brother, 1822): 418.

[48] Forbes's edition of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1975–77), vol. 2: 252; Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), vol. 2: 340.

[49] Forbes's edition of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1975–77), vol. 1: 282; Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), vol. 2: 305–307; Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1786/2007): 156.

[50] Forbes's edition of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1975–77), vol. 2: 67–68.

Forbes admitted that Sparrman had a lively sense of humour and a "tolerant attitude towards his fellow-men."[51] This was as far as he went in qualifying his status as a unique traveller in the Afrikaner colony. He sprinkled his footnote apparatus with anti-Sparrman bashing comments by the Dutch traveller Robert Jacob Gordon, Sparrman's contemporary rival. He lamented that Sparrman did not write more about the white colonists, their life-style, language, and traditions, instead of focusing on the Other, producing, for instance, "curious lists [of words that] abound in inaccuracies and errors."[52] But it is these "errors" or approximations of the Khoisan and Khoikhoi-influenced Xhosa languages that are studied by linguists today. The South African edition is invested with apartheid apologetics.

Mary Louise Pratt theorized Sparrman into a ghost figure, an idealized abstraction for her populist purpose of homogenizing travel literature. It is as if she had never read him with open eyes. Beinart's timid footnote stating that "Pratt does not allow for an element of 'reciprocity' in the scientific travel writing"[53] could serve as a rubric. Why did she not go for Thunberg? I also ask. Maybe he was too much of a lame duck? To conclude her nine-page section on "Naturalizing the Contact Zone: Anders Sparrman and William Paterson" in *Imperial Eyes*, she summarized her observations with this lofty homily:

> In the literature of the imperial frontier, the conspicuous innocence of the naturalist […] acquires meaning in relation to an assumed guilt of conquest, a guilt the naturalist figure eternally tries to escape, and eternally, invokes, if only to distance himself from it once again.[54]

It was not "innocence" and "guilt" that pestered the "naturalist figure" from Sweden; it was, if anything – anger. His last words in his last letter (1780) to Forster read, "I believe the Dutch are all sheep, thieves and rogues at the Cape. […] The Rascals murder Hottentot Children in a bloody cruel manner."[55] What worries me is the scholar's "distance" from her subject.

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[51] Forbes, *Pioneer Travellers of South Africa,* 57; Forbes's edition of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1975–77), vol. 1: 13.

[52] Forbes's edition of Sparrman's *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1975–77), vol. 1: 3–4; vol. 2: 263.

[53] Beinart, "Men, Science, Travel and Nature," 884, n.47.

[54] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 57.

[55] Forster, *Johann Georg Forsters Briefwechsel*, 2: 750.

The first and very important volume in *The Linnaeus Apostles* was designed to provide a background of domains called "The 18th Century," "Seekers of Truth," and "The Practical Aspects," divided into twelve chapters (including one by Linnaeus himself and the other by Henry Smeathman ([1742–86], an English natural historian). Six of these chapters were written by elite Swedish scholars of history and science ('idéhistoria'), thus according a single discipline a dominant position. The other four were produced by an historical cartographer, a cultural geographer, a textile historian, and a taxidermist. The two title tenets, 'global science' and 'adventure', presume a much broader scholarly and critical input. The introductory volume is narrow; it is partisan. There is no particular discussion emanating from the interface of the humanities and the social sciences with a focus on ethical and postcolonial asymmetries, on the 'meeting-place' of looting and collecting, on confrontations, on the apostles talking to people, and on what Linnaeus recommended and Sparrman practised, the necessity of 'socializing' with the Others. The fact that there is not a single representative chapter/discussion in the background volume that activates affiliated disciplines such as colonial travel studies, translation studies, postcolonial linguistics, gender studies, colonial narratology, oral studies, or visual studies is highly remarkable. A handful of Swedish apostle–scholars were sent out to explicate and make saviours of the seventeen apostles out there in the wilderness. They failed. They never arrived.

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Orality and Performance

A Source of Pan-African Social Self

KOFI ANYIDOHO

For several weeks – indeed, almost five months – I had been struggling with an unfinished introductory statement on a special issue of *Matatu: A Journal of African Society and Culture,* which I had been invited to co-edit with James Gibbs, on "Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film."[1] Gathering and analysing various texts, observing and living through a variety of performance situations, reliving several past experiences of performance situations and their lasting impact on memory and sensibility, I was gradually coming to the realization that perhaps the greatest frustration for the contemporary scholar of performance is the lack of an appropriate critical methodology and vocabulary that enables a full revelation of the communicative impact of the well-ordered performance event as a confrontation with and victory over forces of opposition, of conflict. With my own concentration eternally torn between one deadline and the next, between one meeting and another, I was beginning to despair of ever making meaningful sense of the rich variety of performance situations I had assembled in preparation for an introductory statement that was in danger of probably never getting done.

It was with this sense of continual disruption that I sat on the L Train at 95th Street, South Side Chicago, in the middle of a cold rainy night. As the train pulled into 87th Street, two young African-American men made a sudden appearance in our coach, put a large size ghetto-blaster on one of the seats, turned it on, and flooded the coach with the steady heavy beat so typical of rap music. They stood some ten feet apart, facing each other, and began to sway to the rhythm of the beat. Then the one standing almost parallel to my seat began to do his thing. All this time, however, most of us in the coach reacted with visible annoyance at this invasion of our 'private space'. What followed next was, for me, a brief but pointed lesson in the complex dynamics of the informal performance deliberately planted in the social context of the politics of race relations in America.

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[1] *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film* (Matatu 21–22; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA, 2000).

Let me begin by confessing that I was myself initially annoyed at this sudden intrusion into my private thoughts, even though I cannot now recall what in particular I was so busy thinking about. But this was how I came to miss most of the narrative of the performance. Gradually, however, the force of the rhythmic intensity of the music, combined with the carefully coordinated dialogue between the two performers, began to force its way into my consciousness, in spite of my initial annoyance and subdued hostility. I looked across to the young African-American woman sitting across from me, and saw on her face a clear concentration on the unfolding performance. I was obliged to follow her into that inner space of the performance where deep historical, political, and social meanings were created and re-enacted. The performer on the far end of the coach from me took up the narration in a voice deliberately pitched above that of his partner, dangerously close to breaking point. He spoke of the FBI and the KKK and of early death for the brothers and the sisters whose only crime was that they would

> lick no ass –
> snow white
> or charcoal black –
> they'd rather be free
> like who they was born to be.

He took us with him into the jails of Babylon, all filled with

> black brothers as young
> as fresh as dream or dawn
> but sure to go down
> with the midnight train hell-bound.[2]

At this point, the sister across from me smiled. Then brushed a tear away. She dipped her hands in her purse, pulled out a dollar bill, and handed it out to the performer standing next to her. He took it in with a casual sweep of the arm in its measured glide to the rhythm of his blues. At Garfield station, the two young men disappeared into that night of wind and rain and cold.

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[2] My own re/formulation, based on recollections of bits of the lyrics of the two rap artists.

In that brief moment, the two rap performers had taken possession of a space we had assumed was ours, and, with the audacity that only artists are often able to claim and maintain, transformed our consciousness into an arena of contending forces, challenged us to serve as jurors in an historical drama of social in/justice. But they left us without demanding a verdict, without providing any answers of their own. "Artists do not give prescriptions," says a character in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, "they give headaches."[3] On this particular night of bitter cold and rain, the headache the two rap performers left me with became quite obvious halfway through my ride on the L Train. The Dan Ryan to Howard train actually traverses a wide expanse of social boundaries that many of us cross every day without pausing to reflect on the full significance of our particular locations within this continuum. From 95th Street on the South Side of Chicago almost all the passengers were black and other people of colour. As we moved beyond Chinatown, the full spectrum of the 'rainbow coalition' emerged with its sometimes unsettling sense of a world in search of harmony. By the time we got to Washington Street and crossed Clark/Division moving towards Loyola, the rainbow had paled away into a uniform white occasionally 'disturbed' by dark spots obviously searching/yearning for a space they could claim as their own.

Back in my apartment at Evanston, I went straight to Homi K. Bhabha's then recent book *The Location of Culture*, in particular to his essay "Dissemi-Nation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," which I had been re/reading just before I took the Greyhound bus the previous night on my way to Detroit. Based on my brief encounter with the performance of the two anonymous rap artists on the now symbolic Chicago night train, Homi K. Bhabha's opening statement suddenly took on new meanings and probably unintended significations:

> I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and *émigrés* and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny

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[3] Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (Garden City NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1987): 148. Achebe's character was speaking of writers as artists.

> fluency of another's language; [...] gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics [...] In the midst of these lonely gatherings of the scattered people, their myths and fantasies and experiences, there emerges a historical fact of singular importance.[4]

For Homi K. Bhabha, that historical fact of singular importance takes us to the rewriting of "the history of the modern Western nation from the perspective of the nation's margin and the migrants' exile" (139). For me personally, especially in my quest for a unifying metaphor for all the threads of a common social and cultural identity I see in the performance traditions of African peoples worldwide, the historical fact of singular importance is to be located not in the margins of the modern [Western] nation, but in the mythic memory of African ancestral time and space.

For the scattered people of the African world, even the sense of nation has to be revised against the implacable logic of a furious history of fragmentation. For them, the nation is neither here nor there. Even though the continent of Africa remains a basic geographical, cultural, and spiritual point of reference, the space it once occupied in the lives of African peoples of countless diasporas has since long become occupied by alien and alienating forces whose presence and authority have created severe disruptions that cannot be wished away. Perhaps of even more serious import, the outside forces of occupation have in turn caused massive displacements of African peoples into other locations of the world where they are nevertheless constantly forced back on that African origin as sometimes their only legitimate sense of being and belonging. So that, whether by choice or by a conspiracy of historical forces, African people, wherever they are, must revert to a sense of nationhood sometimes devoid of geographical and political grounding. This sometimes imagined nation's constant search for metaphors of self-definition and self-renewal is all part of historical processes whose origin and logic trail off beyond history into mythic time, and ancestral memory itself becomes a privileged zone of consciousness accessible only to those who have mastered the ability to dream the future through the re/fracturing prism/prison of the present and the past. This is where the artists as performers and re-activators of ancestral time come into the global picture of an African presence with considerable impact.

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[4] Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (1990), in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 139.

The pan-African ideal as a political and economic proposition has so far not left too many hopeful signs of possible fulfilment, despite notable attempts by several generations of revolutionary leaders of considerable stature in history. It is to the artists of the pan-African world that we must often turn for the most visible re/constructions of an African identity as a social self. And with almost all the African and African-heritage artists, it is the factor of performance that stands out as probably the most distinctive and the most compelling characteristic of their work and their presence.

> So poetry for me is song, performance; it is utter-ance. In the beginning was not the Word, in the Word was the Beginning. But the Word was […] mute and immobile until endowed with the animating power of the human voice. Meaning is sounding, sounding meaning.[5]

Many of us are used to thinking of performance and other cultural practices in Africa only in relation to the 'traditional/rural' as opposed to the 'modern/urban' setting. We need, however, to quickly update this mode of thinking and analysis, since some of the most vigorous and often most analytically challenging situations of performance must now be sited in very complex contemporary contexts, often transcending even the boundaries of a recognizable nation-state into the larger global arena, with possible encounters with new contexts and traditions that may attempt to challenge or even undermine several of the traditional/orthodox ground rules. A particular case in point is the many ways in which contemporary African and African-heritage artists as writers are attempting to incorporate elements of orality and performance into their practice in the context of a pan-African consciousness in its global dimensions.

Beyond Word: Poetics of Orality and Perfomance in Pan-African Literary Arts

An approach to the study of African literary arts that focuses narrowly on the verbal icon as the primary container of meaning is bound to run into difficulty. Such difficulty is shared by artist and critic alike. For the critic, there is the problem of analysis and interpretation, which encompass significant dimensions of the universe of discourse often projected in the best of African literary arts. For the artist, there is the difficulty of achieving depth, complexity, and clarity of expression.

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[5] Niyi Osundare, "Yoruba Thought, English Words: A Poet's Journey Through the Tunnel of Two Tongues," in *Kiss & Quarrel: Yoruba/English, Strategies of Mediation*, ed. Stewart Brown (Birmingham: Centre for West African Studies, 2000): 26.

We may bear in mind for our discussion the semiotic distinction between "auditory signs" in their predominantly *symbolic* use of time as "a major structuring agent," and "visual signs" in their largely *iconic* use of space.[6] And it is in the view of literature as an essentially iconic system composed of graphic signs that we speak here of difficulties for both critic and artist. In the development of literary arts in twentieth-century Africa we can read a history of fusion and separatism between oral and written tradition in literature. What are some of the implications of this relationship? My fundamental concern here is to demonstrate various ways in which the artists themselves have been creatively engaged in this fundamental issue of medium of communication and artistic re/presentation.

This essay attempts to provide a brief outline and discussion of some of the essential structural elements and organizing principles that make for depth, complexity, and clarity in the successful artistic construct. The attempt is made from the perspective of what certain leading contemporary African artists as writers are trying to do in order to recover in their work as much of the density and the expressive power we tend to associate with the best in oral tradition. The essay further suggests that in seeking to achieve a deeper communicative power by trying to transcend the disjunction between the oral and written modes of artistic composition and expression, the writers are likely to find that certain genres may be more amenable to adaptation than others. I examine the relative constraints and possibilities of the poem, the novel, and the dramatic piece in relation to the attempt by selected African writers to imbue their written work with peculiarly oral techniques and structures.

Much of the work of the pioneer creative writers of the first half of the twentieth century is marred by a disruption arising from two contrary tendencies – an intensely nationalist spirit shackled and often tamed by the language and artistic conventions of colonial metropolitan cultures. The phenomenon is not unique to that generation, nor to African cultural history. Casely Hayford, himself a leading spokesman for the generation, draws a close parallel between their condition and that of the Irish by quoting James O'Hannay on a people who "inherits a Celtic spirit and grows up in an Anglo-Saxon atmosphere, with the English language on its lips." Such people, O'Hannay is quoted as saying,

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[6] Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: U of California P, 1977): 135.

> will tend to develop inconsistencies of character – amazing force rendered useless by recurring spasms of weakness, brilliant intellectual capacity sterilized by inability to grasp the conditions of material progress.[7]

Elsewhere in Hayford's work, we find a discussion of even greater relevance to our argument when he identifies "certain characteristic root ideas" in an African language and sees in its oral poetry ("unrecorded songs") "deep meanings constituting the soul of life."[8]

Of particular interest to us here is Hayford's attempt to identify in African languages and systems of artistic representation a certain capacity to achieve depth, complexity, and clarity of expression that often takes us beyond the purely physical-intellectual to the domain of metaphysical reality. This progression, from the physical-intellectual to the metaphysical-spiritual, appears to be an essential preoccupation of several important contemporary African writers. I identify this preoccupation as a search for *depth* of expression in artistic communication.

Orality and the Poet as Writer

> Those who write poetry for self-enjoyment do not set out to create memorable words or phrases. [...] they simply bring to life, through the medium of words, the beauty and excitement of a new plane of existence where men may release themselves from the inconsistencies in their daily lives, and contemplate the joy of truth as revealed in intellectual realities.
>
> Poetry like philosophy is therefore based on an understanding of truth and reason. But poetic truth is elusive. When poets describe notions and imagery that do not appear to accord with everyday experience, we should understand that they move in a plane of discourse

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[7] J.E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911. London: Frank Cass, 1969): 195–96.

[8] Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, 214–15.

> different from the familiar everyday one, and create dimensions of vision and understanding where life assumes a new significance.[9]

Most of the points Michael Dei-Anang makes here in his introduction to his 1962 collection of poems may be already familiar, even if arguable in some instances. But what interests us is the embarrassing gap between his intellectual understanding of the business of the poet and the manifest failure of art in much of what the collection offers as poetry, a failure which Dei-Anang himself seems to be aware of and indeed warns us about. The above passage is immediately followed by what must stand as one of the most significant confessions of aborted poetic effort in contemporary African literature. He laments his inability to give "full expression" to "the beauty of African life and philosophy" and blames his failure on "the old school system" and its programme of alienation from "this vast and as yet untapped source for literary development" – *the oral culture*. Finally, with full patriotic zeal, he invites the new generation of African poets to spare themselves "this humiliation":

> They should sing with the true voice of Africa in their mother tongue
> so that they can preserve the beauty and vitality of the musical cadence
> in traditional poetry for posterity.[10] (7)

We observe that not many of Dei-Anang's successors have gone back to their mother tongue as he suggests, but certainly most of the major voices among the current generation of African poets as writers have had to search for a new poetic medium in which the word in its iconic representation as a system of 'graphics' is constantly vitalized, amplified, and projected into a temporal domain as acoustic essence. And in that domain of conjunction between spatial and temporal order, the poetry achieves a depth of expression that is often at once intellectually stimulating and spiritually uplifting.

There are important semiotic implications for written poetry that draws heavily on the principles and techniques of orality rather than on the technology of print poetics. We notice that both Hayford and Dei-Anang in their references cited above take us not just to the oral tradition but to the song tradition in particular. Most of the poets who have followed this call to return to an oral poetics have often spoken of their poems as songs. The example of Okot p'Bitek is probably the best known in African literature, as witnessed by the titles of all his major poems: *Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol, Song of Malaya, Song of Prisoner.*

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[9] Michael Dei-Anang, *Ghana Semi-Tones* (Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot, [1962]): 6.

[10] Dei-Anang, *Ghana Semi-Tones*, 7.

The poem, conceived and created as 'a kind of song', minimizes the separation between the visual and the auditory, which is very much encouraged by print poetics. And, in so doing, it both complicates and enriches the texture of the poem as a system of codes. To the visual and the auditory, we must also add "such signifying systems as human bodily communication (*kinesics* and *proxemics*)."[11] This third dimension of the semiotic structure of the poem has implications far beyond the normal parameters of print poetics. It takes us directly into the domain of performance. And with that we move into the full realization of poetry in the context of an oral poetics.

But first, we must draw a critical line here. A poem committed to paper, no matter how successfully it may draw on orality, cannot completely escape some of the limitations of the medium of print. In particular, it must contend with an audience that is inevitably separated from the poet in time, space, and social context. And when we add to all this the frequent separation in cultural context, several of the codes embedded in the poem either lose their significations or, worse, become liable to confused or distracting interpretations. The crucial missing link here is the communal basis of much of oral poetry in its natural context, such as is described for us in the following terms:

> Zulu poetry 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 still another, a dance. The audience is thus held spellbound, not only by the meaning of words and their sounds but also by the performance. The audience demonstrates its approval or participation by either imitating the poet's movements or devising appropriate actions related to the meanings of words.[12]

It is clear from this statement that in its ideal context of realization much of the power of the oral poem has to do with the multiple structure of its encoding. Not only does it structure itself into space and time. We must also experience it through as many of our senses as possible – sight and hearing, above all. Then we must isolate the kinetic energy of the oral poem for its special, psychological, and physical impact on an audience.

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[11] Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, 125.

[12] Mazisi Kunene, *Zulu Poems* (London: André Deutsch, 1970): 12.

Most of these treasures of the oral poem are difficult if not impossible to realize in print poetics. Hence the determination among contemporary African poets to overcome the limitations of print by introducing performance as an integral part of their poetic practice. Okot p'Bitek confesses his embarrassment when his mother asked him to *sing* his (so-called) *Song of Lawino*. He may have done his best to give Lawino a poetic voice that successfully mimics the oral medium. But his work will still have to be *restructured and performed* in order for it to become an authentic song.

Occasionally the written/printed poem may achieve such powerful oral essence as to evoke an irresistible sense of sound and movement. Such is the poem by Kofi Awoonor significantly titled "The Dance":

> Come let us play at resolutions
> let us work out the dance sequence
> and the movements,
> I your choreographer and your mover
> You my dance and my movement.
> No, no your hands must encircle the invisible
> Your hips must harmonize with your feet.
> Your chest must beat the time.
> Yes, my dance, my movement,
> They must tell the primal story
> of birth waters, blood, umbilical cords
> in defiance of moon marks at every turn.
> Yes, my dance, my movement
> They are not steps, no:
> they are journeys, roads, avenues, boulevards
> Dream boulevards of life incarnate.[13]

A poem such as this should be eminently adaptable to the dramatic context of the oral performance. And indeed, the dramatization of already printed poetry is now an almost established tradition in many parts of Africa, as I have tried to demonstrate in my essay "Poetry as Dramatic Performance: The Ghana Experience."[14] But perhaps the most significant lesson of the Awoonor poem is that it is also entirely successful even in print. Contemporary African poets must face up to the reality of the social context of their art. In that context, the oral medium may indeed be dominant, but writing is not necessarily an anomaly. The split in their audience must be seen as a challenge rather than as a tragedy. So far, those who have taken it in the spirit of a challenge to their creativity, have gone very far in the direction of forging a unique and enriching literary tradition in which the benefits of the technology of print are further enriched by some of the peculiar delights of oral poetics.

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[13] Kofi Awoonor, *Until the Morning After: Selected Poems 1963–85* (Greenfield Center NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1987): 56.

[14] Kofi Anyidoho, "Poetry as Dramatic Performance: The Ghana Experience," *Research in African Literatures* 22.2 (Summer 1991): 41–55.

The Novelist as Performer of Tales

> To the Reader/Listener
>
> This story is imaginary.
> The actions are imaginary.
> The characters are imaginary.
> The country is imaginary – it has no name even.
> Reader/listener: may the story take place in the country of your
> choice!
>
> The story has no fixed time.
> Yesterday, the day before yesterday, last week…
> Last year…
> Or ten years ago?
> Reader/listener: may the action take place in the time of your
> choice!
>
> And it has no fixed space.
> Here or there…
> This or that village…
> This or that region.
> Reader/listener: may you place the action in the space of your
> choice!
>
> And again, it does not demarcate time in terms of seconds
> Or minutes
> Or hours
> Or days.
> Reader/listener: may you allocate the duration of any of the
> actions according to your choice!
>
> So say yes, and I'll tell you a story!
> Once upon a time, in a country with no name…[15]

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[15] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Matigari*, tr. Wangui wa Goro (London: Heinemann, 1987): ix.

This is the opening passage/moment in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novel/tale *Matigari*. In a prefatory "Note on the English Edition," Ngũgĩ informs us that "This novel is based partly on an oral story about a man looking for a cure for an illness" (vii). And we note also that the work is dedicated to "all those who love a good story; and to all those who research and write on African orature; and to all those committed to the development of literature in the languages of all the African peoples" (vi). Finally, there is considerable significance in the fact that Ngũgĩ's novel was originally written and published in Gikuyu. Ngũgĩ's position on the language of African literature and on orature is most fully documented elsewhere.[16] For the purposes of this essay, we shall limit our consideration to only two issues arising from the impact of his innovative novel.

First, we take what has been called its 'written orality'. It is clear from the way Ngũgĩ opens his novel that he is attempting to fuse writing and orality into one perceptible continuum, but the oral moment is clearly dominant in this introductory space of the story. Indeed, so effective is he in projecting the orality of his discourse that even as we read we feel more like listeners than readers. This foregrounding of the oral moment yields a very remarkable effect in this opening space. It imposes an unmistakably poetic structure on the text, especially as realized in rhythmic patterning and parallelism, both of which happen also to intensify the musical moment in the text. The combined effect of all this is the feeling we get of a certain depth to the structure of this portion of the narrative.

Something of this depth, which is largely attributable to orality, is successfully carried into the main body of the narrative. But it is also clear that, after this introductory moment, Ngũgĩ steps out of the role of the purely oral narrator/performer and situates himself in a discourse zone that seeks to address a special kind of audience identified in his text as "reader/listener."

In spite of all the good things we may identify about this mode of discourse, we still must come to the conclusion that the novel as a form of written text imposes its own logic on the structure of the narrative, and in the process blocks some of the special effects we may find in a purely oral narrative communication situation. One of the special effects so affected is the dimension of performance, performance as is usually experienced in a face-to-face narrative situation. We as readers can see neither Ngũgĩ the writer nor his fictive narrator, nor can we directly respond to any stimulation generated by their narration. This intervention of the written document deprives Ngũgĩ's 'written orality' of what may be termed the intrinsic dynamism of the narrative as an orally performed event. As pointed out elsewhere, "In the oral mode, performance is a key aspect of the process of symbolizing or of the expression of meaning. In this mode, meaning is both expressed and *demonstrated*. Language itself takes on an expanded meaning, becoming both verbal and non-verbal."[17] The novel, like the poem in print, can share only some of the benefits of the poetics of orality and performance. For the fullest possible incorporation of orality and performance into literature, we must turn to drama.

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[16] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

The second issue we would like to consider in Ngũgĩ's novel is its unusual *communicative impact*, despite the limitations of the novel as a written document. Ngũgĩ himself describes probably the most significant aspect of what I call here the communicative impact of *Matigari:*

> For a short period in 1987, Matigari, the fictional hero of the novel, was himself resurrected as a subversive political character. The novel was published in the Gikuyu-language original in Kenya in October 1986. By January 1987, intelligence reports had it that peasants in Central Kenya were whispering and talking about a man called Matigari who was roaming the whole country making demands about truth and justice. There were orders for his immediate arrest, but the police discovered that Matigari was only a fictional character in a book of the same name. In February 1987, the police raided all the bookshops and seized every copy of the novel.
>
> Matigari, the fictional hero, and the novel, his only habitation, have been effectively banned in Kenya. With the publication of this English edition, they have joined their author in exile. (viii)

Two facts may explain the unusual communicative impact of this novel: the use of an indigenous African language, and its 'written orality', which made it possible, indeed easy for the narrative to be immediately assimilated into oral tradition and carried around the country, "by word of mouth." In an important sense, this is a replay of the earlier, perhaps more dramatic case of Ngũgĩ's involvement with the Kamĩrĩĩthũ community-theatre programme.

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[17] Kofi Anyidoho, "Realism in Oral Narrative Performance," *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 34.1–4 (1986–88): 53.

Another dimension of the poetics of orality and performance as it applies to the work of the novelist may be seen in Ayi Kwei Armah's efforts at developing a narrative form and set of techniques that take us directly to the art of the traditional griot or storyteller. We see the results of his attempt most clearly in his *The Healers*, where a self-critical narrator breaks off the narration and begins to critique both the structure and the technique of the narration, all for the benefit of a putative listening audience:

> But now this tongue of the story-teller, descendant of masters in the art of eloquence, this tongue flies too fast for the listener. It flies faster than the story-telling mind itself [...] The speeding tongue forgets connections. Let the deliberate mind restore them. [...] Did you remember to tell your listeners of what time, what age you rushed so fast to speak? Or did you leave the listener floundering in endless time, abandoned to suppose your story belonged to any confusing age? [....] In the joy of your eloquence keep faith with the mind's remembrance, lest the teller's forgetfulness spoil the listener's joy.[18]

The Dramatist and African Performance Tradition

The structure of the dramatic text and the discourse situation of its enactment allow the dramatist ample room to operate much more fully in the oral domain than is possible for either the poet or the novelist. Also, precisely because performance is a normal, perhaps the most crucial, component of drama (even in the tradition of written literature), the dramatist is able to move us as far beyond the verbal icon as is possible in the stage performance, an appropriate discourse situation and/or cultural context within which the semiotic structure so established may become meaningful.

Mazisi Kunene reminds us of certain facts that are relevant to "understanding a literature which has evolved in a communal context":

> The literature, to have meaning for the community, uses a kind of shorthand system, comprising communally evolved symbols which represent a special system of ideas.
>
> In this sense symbols, at least some of them, have specific cultural meanings. In order to understand fully the poetry or literature, the cultural significance of the symbols themselves must be understood.[19]

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[18] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers: An Historical Novel* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978): 2–3.

[19] Kunene, *Zulu Poems*, 12.

Another important sense in which the discourse framework of drama allows significations not usually available to the printed poem and novel is what Goody and Watt have tried to explain with their theory of semantic ratification:

> the meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations, [accompanying] physical gestures, all of which combine to particularize both its specific denotation and its accepted connotative usages.[20]

The situation described here is often explored by many African dramatists far beyond the levels of signification indicated in this theory of semantic ratification. The structure of symbolic action and movement in many an African drama moves us into the peculiarly complex domain of festival and/or ritual.

We conclude by briefly drawing attention to African dramatists who have made significant and largely successful use of elements and techniques of oral dramatic tradition in the composition and production of their scripted plays. Two Ghanaian dramatists, Efua Sutherland and Mohammed Ben Abdallah, provide some of our best examples. Among the features to be observed in most of their work are the following: peculiarly oral-dramatic use of language; the implications of their structuring of drama as an enactment of story in the manner of the folktale performance; the management of space and time; the elements and structure of symbolism especially as it evolves into frameworks of festival and ritual; and, finally, the communicative impact of this kind of drama.

One of the most spectacular demonstrations of the communicative impact of this kind of drama at its best occurred at the National Theatre of Nigeria in Lagos, on the occasion of two major productions staged to mark Wole Soyinka's sixtieth birthday. There was a production of *Death and the King's Horseman*, in English. And there was also a production of the Yorùbá version of the same play, translated as *Elesin Oba*. As I watched the two productions in turn on two consecutive nights, one thing became clear: that the production in Yorùbá made a more lasting impact on me, in spite of the fact that I did not understand Yorùbá. It is difficult to explain, but I came out of the theatre feeling quite certain that I understood Soyinka's great tragedy much better in the Yorùbá performance. I was also quite certain that it had something to do with the combined effect of such 'authentic' performance features as the kinetic energy of the actors, their verbal dexterity beyond the dictionary meaning of words, especially the tonal modulations of the Yorùbá language in full poetic flight, the incredibly rich costumes, the music, especially the relentless rhythmic drive of a pair of *dundun* drums, and, of course, the dance, the elegant rhythm of Elesin Oba's dance towards the Gulf of Transition.

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[20] Jack Goody & Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5.3 (April 1963): 306.

You needed to listen to the honeyed clarity of the praise-singer's voice as if calling from afar, from the other side of eternity; you needed to listen to the drums as they wove a complex graceful poise for Elesin Oba's dance of death; you needed to catch that haunting look in Elesin's eyes as he drank the full measure of the poetry of words and drums…. Then you began to understand how it could be that a man *commits death* by dancing across the Gulf of Transition. It is not logic, but the magic of total theatre, of the ultimate aesthetic transformation in performance.

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Africans and Ireland

History, Society, and the Black Nexus

C.L. Innes and Gordon Collier

Some years ago, while researching the context for Equiano's very successful 1791 tour of Ireland,[1] I (Lyn Innes) spent several days in Dublin's National Library leafing through eighteenth-century Irish newspapers. It soon became clear that the anti-slavery movement in Ireland was not just concerned with abolishing the slave trade and slavery in other parts of the world,[2] for some of these papers carried advertisements for the sale of slaves or offers of rewards for the recovery of slaves or servants who had run away. Among the most poignant of these advertisements was the following in a 1768 issue of the *Dublin Mercury*:

> A neat beautiful black Negro girl, just brought from Carolina, aged eleven or twelve years who understands and speaks English, very fit to wait on a lady, to be disposed of. Applications to be made to James Carolan, Carrickmacross, or to Mr Gavan in Bridge Street, Dublin.[3]

Two years previously a notice in the *Belfast News-Letter* had promised three guineas for the capture and return of "a young negro manservant" named John

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[1] See Nini Rodgers, "Equiano in Belfast: A Study of the Anti-Slavery Ethos in a Northern Town," *Slavery and Abolition* 18.2 (August 1997): 73–89, and *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast* (Belfast: Belfast Society, 2000).

[2] In which the Irish themselves had been active – see, for example, entries in the Works Cited for Nini Rodgers, Lydia M. Pulsipher, Lydia M. Pulsipher & Conrad M. Goodwin, and Joseph J. Williams.

[3] *Dublin Mercury* (11–13 August 1768): 3.

Moore, described as “straight and well made.”[4] As late as 1781, several years after the outlawing of slavery in Scotland (but not in England), a notice in the *Belfast News-Letter* offered a reward for a runaway “Indian Black.”[5]

The Belfast Amicable Society responded to this last advertisement with an offer to assist and protect this “Indian Black” and to enable him to prosecute his “intended enslaver.”[6] Five years later, the Belfast merchant Waddell Cunningham, owner of a plantation called ‘Belfast’ in Dominica, proposed the establishment of a ‘Belfast Slave-Ship Company’. The proposal was denounced by the Irish dissident Thomas McCabe with the following curse: “May God wither the hand and consign the name to eternal infamy of the man who will sign the document.”[7]

If the existence of a slave community in Ireland has been ignored by most Irish historians, so, too, has the presence of free black and Asian men and women. In the early eighteenth century, some young Africans were brought to England and Ireland so that they could learn English and become interpreters and middlemen for English-speaking traders when they returned to Africa. One such person was the Ghanaian Thomas Awishee (or Ouisie), who was living with a Widow Pennington in Cork in 1715. There were also servants and freed slaves. We can catch just a glimpse of one of those freed black people in a letter written by the Irish radical William Drennan in 1790, where he describes a procession led by his fellow nationalists Grattan and Fitzgerald, and notes: “In particular I distinguish a negro boy well-dressed and holding on high the Cap of Liberty […].”[8] The eighteenth century Irish actor and playwright John O’Keefe refers in his autobiography to the singer Rachael Baptiste, whom he describes as an African and “a native of Ireland” and who led a successful career as a singer in Ireland and England for over twenty-five years. O’Keefe wrote:

> My fondness for song had often led me to the concerts at Marlborough Green, Dublin. Among the many fine singers there was Rachael Bap-

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[4] Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken, 1770–1866* (Dublin: Allen Figges, 1960): 294.

[5] McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken*, 295.

[6] Nini Rodgers, “Equiano in Belfast,” 83–84.

[7] Rodgers, “Equiano in Belfast,” 84

[8] *The Drennan Letters: Being a Selection from the Correspondence which Passed between William Drennan, M.D., and His Brother-in Law and Sister, Samuel and Martha McTier, During the Years 1776–1819*, ed. D.A. Chart (Belfast: H.M.S.O., 1931): 51–52.

> tiste, a real black woman, a native of Africa: she always appeared in the orchestra in a yellow silk gown, and was heard by the applauding company with great delight, without remarks upon her sables.[9]

There are newspaper reports of Rachael Baptiste's concerts in Dublin and Kilkenny, Limerick, and Cork. Her Kilkenny appearance inspired one poet to write:

> Fame's done thee right, thou hast the lulling art,
> That can soft Music's melody impart;
> Envy herself must thy perfection own,
> And say thou'rt worthy of the laurel crown.
> Let the white Fair-ones swell with proud disdain,
> Despise thy colour and thy dusky mein [*sic*];
> Yet what of that – even these nor want their charms,
> Nor grace to lure the lover to thine arms.[10]

Rachael Baptiste married a Mr John Crow, and is referred to in later advertisements for her performances as Mrs Crow. (My guess is that her husband was also of African descent.) A few days after the publication of the poem quoted above, she is mentioned in a letter, also published in the *Leinster Journal*, as taking part in a benefit concert given by Mr Tenducci, Mrs Crow, and Mr Ryder in aid of the Kilkenny Infirmary. Like the poem, the letter remarks upon both her colour and the quality of her singing:

> Kilkenny may now justly be called a Capua; a town of pleasure, rather than a town of trade; where all ranks of people can sit down after the labours of the day to indulge in a variety of pleasing amusements. On the one side, the Theatrical entertainments, garnished with Pantomime Dummies, are laid before us; which like so many rarities we greedily devour three times in the week. On the other side, a celebrated Black Syren, by the irresistible charms of her throat, warbles encore his majesty's picture set in silver, not in miniature, out of our pockets; and the famous Italian who is going to raise both his price and his voice some notes higher than the other exhibitors, will sooth us no doubt, by his soft lullabies, into further expense.[11]

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[9] John O'Keefe, *Recollections from the Life of John O'Keefe, Written by Himself* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826): 66.

[10] William A. Hart, "Africans in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," *Irish Historical Studies* 33/129 (May 2002): 30–31.

[11] Letter to the *Leinster Journal* (17 December 1767).

As an African Irish opera singer appearing in concerts in the major Irish cities, Rachael Baptiste was no doubt rather exceptional in eighteenth-century Ireland, but she was not unique as a professional. There are, for instance, references to black musicians playing in the Irish regiments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The regimental Drummers for the Irish 29th Regiment were all black men, and Mr Cudjoe, a black servant to Lord Halifax, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, was appointed to be one of Ireland's state trumpeters. But the majority of the people of African descent living in Ireland at this time would have belonged to the working class. The Irish historian William Hart has noted nearly two hundred references in eighteenth-century newspapers and documents to black people in Ireland, mainly in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and estimates that by the end of the eighteenth century the black population in Ireland would have been somewhere between two and three thousand, mostly servants, slaves, and sailors.[12]

Additionally there were a number of *ayahs* and other Indian servants brought back to Ireland by Irish families serving with the East India Company Army. According to the historians Jo Mokyr and Cormac Ó'Gráda, at the beginning of the nineteenth century over fifty percent of the men serving in the East India Company Army were from Ireland.[13] It was an Irish officer in that army who brought one of the sepoys in his regiment, Dean Mahomet, to Cork with him when he returned from India in 1784. Dean Mahomet remained in Cork for nearly twenty years, married an Irish woman, and became the first Indian author to publish a book in English, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet.* Published in Cork in 1794, this memoir may have been partly inspired by the success of Equiano's narrative, which had been published in Dublin in 1791 and sold in Cork when Equiano spoke there that same year.

As in England, status was conferred by the possession of a black or Indian servant, and in 1783 the *Dublin Journal* condemns the "preposterous Prediliction for Exotics" displayed by those who prefer black foreigners to native Irish servants.[14] But the newspapers also carry apparently unbiased descriptions of marriages between black male servants and Irishwomen.

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[12] Hart, "Africans in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," 20–23. See also Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 1612–1865*, 127.

[13] Joe Mokyr & Cormac Ó'Gráda, "Height and Health in the United Kingdom 1815–1816: Evidence from the East India Company Army," *Explorations in Economic History* 33.2 (1996): 145.

[14] *The Dublin Journal* (26–28 August 1783).

Despite the aforementioned activity of Irish planters in the Caribbean (catering to the Irish sugar refining industry), efforts to establish slave trading companies in Limerick, Belfast, and Dublin failed, and the presence of a black community in Ireland stems largely from slaves and freedmen brought there from other parts of the British Empire. The West Indian connection is, however, a central feature of a stage farce that enjoyed immense popularity in London and North America, *Irishman in London; or, The Happy African* (1793), by the Dublin-born William Macready.[15] On the less light side, there was a climate of Irish opposition to British slavery, notably among merchants and Quakers, often with understandably strong echoes of latent resentment at a long history of colonial subjection at home.[16] The Irish party at Westminster, led by Daniel O'Connell, was strongly abolitionist in spirit.[17] As a result of this campaigning energy, during the early and mid-nineteenth century, many African-American fugitive slaves and freedmen visited Ireland. Tours by Charles Lenox Remond, Sarah Parker Remond, Henry Highland Garnet, and Edmund Kelly were an enormous success,[18] and many of them – like Equiano – comment on the warmth of their reception in Ireland. Frederick Douglass stands out for the depth and consequentiality of his engagement,[19] and he himself was explicitly associated with O'Connell.[20]

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[15] William Macready, *Irishman in London; or, The Happy African: A Farce in Two Acts* (London: Woodfall, 1793). See Christopher Flynn, "Challenging Englishness from the Racial Margins: William Macready's *Irishman in London; or, The Happy African*," *Irish Studies Review* 16.2 (2008): 159–72; Louis S. Gerteis, "Blackface Minstrelsy and the Construction of Race in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Union and Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era*, ed. David W. Blight & Brooks D. Simpson (Kent OH: Kent State UP, 1997): 79–104 (esp. 83–90, also covering an American version of Macready, Samuel Woodworth's *The Forest Rose* [1825]). See also Nathans and Dominique in the Works Cited.

[16] See, for example, entries in the Works Cited for Angela F. Murphy, William H. Mulligan, Jr., Ellen M. Oldham, Douglas C. Riach, Richard S. Harrison, Samuel Haughton, Jr., and Hannah Maria Wigham.

[17] See, for example, entries in the Works Cited for Nelson, Kinealy, and Riach.

[18] See, for example, entries in the Works Cited under Kelly, Charles Lenox Remond, Henry Highland Garnet, and Sarah Parker Remond.

[19] See, for example, Douglass's speech "I Am Here to Spread Light on American Slavery" (Cork, 14 October 1845), repr. in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series One: *Speeches, Debates and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame & John R. McKivigan (New Haven CT & London: Yale UP, 1979–86), vol. 1 (1979): 43. For highly

O'Connell's proselytizing for freedom on both sides of the Atlantic, and his personality, impressed other black visitors. In a speech before the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society, Charles Lenox Remond praised Daniel O'Connell as "a good and mighty man, who has put himself forth the undaunted and fearless champion of liberty and the rights of man in every clime the sun adorns."[21] Douglass's coeval, William Wells Brown, likewise the author of a slave *Narrative*, and the writer of the first novel (*Clotel*) by a black, visited Ireland briefly in early August 1849, his sojourn coinciding with an official visit by Queen Victoria, which he described with great interest. His summation of the Irish is acute:

> the Irish are indeed a strange people. How varied their aspect – how contradictory their character. Ireland, the land of genius and degradation – of great resources and unparalleled poverty.

And he notes, in conclusion: "To the Webbs, Allens, and Haughtons, of Dublin, the cause of the American slave is much indebted."[22] Samuel Ringgold Ward, who visited Ireland in 1854 and 1855, devotes a whole chapter of his *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro* to Ireland. His opening comments convey his mixed feelings about the Irish:

> [Ireland] is a country so full of interest, making such rapid strides and improvement, capable of such vast development, so rich in material and intellectual resources, so deficient in moral and spiritual cultivation, that it would be most unjustifiable presumption […] to attempt to speak of it at length.[23]

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relevant studies, see the entries in the Works Cited for Ferreira, Hardack, Maclear, Rice & Crawford, Quinn, Rolston, and Sweeney.

[20] See, for example, Lee Jenkins, Luke Gibbons, and Christopher Allan Black in the Works Cited.

[21] Remond, "Slavery and the Irish," quoted in Elisa Joy White, *Modernity, Freedom, and the African Diaspora: Dublin, New Orleans, Paris* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2012): 32.

[22] William Wells Brown, "Letter II," in Brown, *Three Years in Europe: Or, Places I Have Seen and People I Have Met*, intro. William Farmer (London: Charles Gilpin & Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1852): 19–20; 21. See also Brown, "Wm. Brown in Dublin – No Colorphobia There," *North Star* (14 September 1849).

[23] Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, & England* (London: John Snow, 1855):360. See also Ronald K. Burke, *Samuel Ringgold Ward: Christian Abolitionist* (diss., 1975; New York & London: Garland, 1995), and Tim Watson, "'This fruitful matrix of

Ward ends his chapter by deploring the anti-Negro sentiments expressed by so many Irishmen in America ("The bitterest, most heartless, most malignant, enemy of the Negro, is the Irish immigrant") but goes on to conclude:

> Nevertheless, were the Irishman true to the sentiments I found prevalent in every part of his native country on this subject, he would with but little exertion turn the tide of persecution from the Negro, and proving himself his friend, receive his gratitude; then the two would grow up as brethren. The wit, warmth, and enthusiasm – the capacity to imitate, to improve, and to endure – the cheerfulness, bravery, and love of religion – said to be peculiar to the Celt, are well-known natural characteristics of the Negro.[24]

The manichaean division between autochthonous and transplanted Irish with regard to the Other provides rich fare for historians and social scientists to this day. The general nineteenth-century perception of American abolitionist visitors towards their Irish abolitionist hosts was expressed by William C. Nell: "The opposition of Irishmen in America to the colored man is not so much a Hibernianism as an Americanism"[25] – the implication being that the Irish in nineteenth-century Ireland were not racist. Henry Highland Garnet, who was well-received in Ireland, reacted to the participation of Irish immigrants in the July 1863 anti-black riots in New York by attributing this racism "to the debasing influence of unprincipled American politicians."[26]

The warm reception encountered by such black speakers may have encouraged William Allen to tour Ireland and settle there for some time. Allen, a Professor of Classics, had fled to England in 1852, after being threatened by a lynch mob in New York State following his marriage to one of his white students. However, his lectures in England were perhaps too academic to attract large audiences, and he decided to try his luck in Ireland. He was the keynote speaker at the first annual meeting of the Cogler Anti-Slavery Society

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curses': the interesting narrative of the life of Samuel Ringgold Ward," in Watson, *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008): 104–53.

[24] Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, 383.

[25] *North Star* (3 Dec 1847), quoted in Benjamin Quarles, "Duet with John Bull," in Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (1969; New York: Da Capo, 1991): 133, thereafter in Elisa Joy White, *Modernity, Freedom, and the African Diaspora*, 32–33.

[26] Garnet, reported in *Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men, Held in the City of Syracuse, N.Y., October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864* (Boston MA: George C. Rand & Avery, 1864): 12.

and drew a huge crowd in June 1855. Allen explained that the origins of the arts and sciences could be found in Africa, whence they had travelled via Egypt to Greece and Rome. He also denounced the degrading effects of slavery and racial prejudice, praised the nobility and indomitable spirit of Native Americans who defied the European conquerors, and argued that "the fusion of races produced the greatness of nations." The Irish papers in Belfast and Dublin gave very full reports and favourable reviews, commenting on his diction, "which is peculiarly pure, his voice remarkable for power and admirable modulation, and his whole manner that of an accomplished gentleman."[27] This response encouraged him to move with his family to Dublin in 1856, where he made a rather meagre living teaching elocution and giving private tuition, as well as lectures. Three of his children were born in Dublin, and he published his autobiography, *A Short Personal Narrative* (1860), there. However, he was unable to make enough money to support his growing family in Ireland, and in 1860 he returned to London, where he became head of a school in Islington.[28]

Nineteenth-century Ireland also responded warmly to tours by black actors, singers, and minstrel groups. Bernth Lindfors details Ira Aldridge's many performances in Dublin and the Irish provinces in the 1830s, stagings greeted with enthusiasm by critics and audiences.[29] Throughout the century, Irish newspapers display frequent advertisements for tours by "Ethiopian" and minstrel groups, and pantomimes featuring "genuine" black and Indian performers. Such tours increased in number after the end of the American Civil War, and one of the many black theatrical groups that toured Ireland in the late-nineteenth century may have been a significant influence on Irish national theatre. William Fay, who helped found and manage Ireland's Abbey Theatre, records in his autobiography that he spent a year in the early 1890s touring with a black company staging *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* (Fay had the role of the overseer, Simon Legree.) The manager, George Lewis, was an ex-slave from Virginia, and died rescuing members of his cast from a fire in the boarding house where they were staying in Fermoy. Fay tells us that the "colored boys" taught him step-dancing, and says of George Lewis, "He was a good actor, a beautiful singer and a kind manager to his company. May he rest in peace in Irish soil."[30] It is fascinating to speculate on what Willie Fay learned from George Lewis and put into practice when he himself became an actor–manager for the Irish National Theatre, and how the uses of dialect and peasant realism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influenced the presentation of the peasant realist plays for which the Abbey became famous in the early-twentieth century.

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[27] *Ulster Banner* (23 June 1855): 2.

[28] R.J.M. Blackett, "William G. Allen: The Forgotten Professor," *Civil War History* 26.1 (March 1980): 51.

[29] Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge: The Vagabond Years, 1833–1852* (Rochester NY: U of Rochester P, 2011).

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Irish involvement in British imperial projects and African missionary schools encouraged a constant flow of African students to Ireland. One student was Osmond Tisani, who was sent to Galway from South Africa during the Second Anglo-Boer War to stay with Marcus Og Lynch. While Osani was in Galway he learned Irish and became a fluent speaker of the language. The Igbo scholar Donatus Nwoga studied at Queen's University Belfast, where he became a friend of Seamus Heaney. On Nwoga's untimely death in 1991, Heaney wrote an elegy in his memory, "A Dog was Crying Tonight in Wicklow Also." It is a poem that illustrates powerfully the importation of a specific African myth into an Irish English tradition. I quote a few lines here:

A Dog was Crying Tonight in Wicklow Also
In memory of Donatus Nwoga

When human beings found out about death
They sent the dog to Chukwu with a message:
They wanted to be let back to the house of life.
They didn't want to end up lost forever
Like burnt wood disappearing into smoke
And ashes that get blown away to nothing.
Instead, they saw their souls in a flock at twilight
Cawing and headed back for the same old roosts
(The dog was meant to tell all this to Chukwu).

Then Chukwu saw the people's souls in birds
Coming towards him like black spots off the sunset
To where there were no roosts or nests or trees
And his mind reddened and darkened all at once
And nothing that the dog would tell him later
Could change that vision. Great chiefs and great loves

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[30] W.G. Fay & Catherine Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre: An Autobiographical Record* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935): 79.

> Obliterating light, the toad in mud,
> The dog crying out all night behind the corpse house.[31]

Another African scholar and poet who lived in Ireland was the scientist Dr Raphael Armattoe (1913–53), a Ghanaian and advocate for the rights of the Ewe people in Ghana. Armattoe practised as a doctor in Londonderry from 1939 to 1948, and founded the Lomeshie Research Centre for Anthropology and Race Biology there. He lectured and published several works, including *The Golden Age of West African Civilization* (1946) and two volumes of poetry. In 1949, a group of parliamentarians from Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, and Westminster nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, declaring that "in numerous publications he has advocated peaceable understanding between all Nations and races and is a noted supporter of settlement between Nations by peaceable means."[32]

In the second half of the twentieth century, Africans and Asians came to Ireland mainly as students, clerics, nurses, doctors, and refugees. Black musicians have also made an impact in Ireland: the Afro-Guyanese-Irish rock musician Phil Lynott (1949–86)[33] is now commemorated by a statue in Dublin's city centre, and the Afro-Irish music group De Jimbe became popular in the 1990s.[34] Not to be omitted is the singer, actress, and model Samantha Mumba, Irish-born of Zambian/white Irish parentage.[35] The 2002 census recorded over 20,000 people of African birth living in Ireland (a little less than 0.6% of the population). Independent councillor Rotimi Adebari, of West African origin, was elected mayor of Portlaoise (County Laoise).[36] There are at least two Aladura churches registered in Dublin,[37] as well as a number of other Nigerian cultural organizations, including journals and newspapers directed at an Irish-Nigerian readership.[38]

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[31] Seamus Heaney, "A Dog Was Crying Tonight in Wicklow Also," in Heaney, *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996): 55–56.

[32] Quoted in Kate Newman, *The Dictionary of Ulster Biography* (www.newulsterbiography.co.uk). See also: D.E.K. Amenumey, Philippa Robinson, and Keith A.P. Sandiford in the Works Cited.

[33] See John Horan, "Phil Lynott: Famous For Many Reasons," *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 4.3 (July 2006): 154–56, online; Mark Putterford, *Phil Lynott: The Rocker* (London: Omnibus, 2002).

[34] See Elisa Joy White, *Modernity, Freedom, and the African Diaspora*, 84–88.

[35] See Joe Jackson, "Samantha Mumba," *Hot Press* 24.20 (25 October 2000): 18–22, 85.

[36] See Elisa Joy White, *Modernity, Freedom, and the African Diaspora*, 84–88.

[37] Dara DeFaoite, "Town elects first black mayor," *Irish Independent* (29 June 2007). The Nigerian Adebari was the first black mayor in Ireland. This appointment

The African presence in contemporary Dublin is acknowledged in a recent re-writing of J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* by Roddy Doyle and Bisi Adigun. Performed at the Abbey Theatre in 2007 to mark the centenary of the original production of the *Playboy*, this version makes Synge's Christy Mahon, the exotic stranger from County Mayo, a Nigerian refugee who wins the heart of the local girls. The production was received enthusiastically by Dublin audiences, although some critics doubted the possibility that an African would be so readily accepted in a white working-class Dublin neighbourhood. Others regretted that the relentless comedy emphasized in this production had failed to allow the exploration of the tensions and misunderstandings experienced by immigrant communities in Ireland.

It is only during the past decade that Irish institutions have begun to acknowledge the presence of black and Asian people in contemporary Ireland, with all that this means in terms of the span of race relations from racism through bicultural harmony to intermarriage. But, with rare exceptions – for instance, in the important work published by the Northern Irish historians William Hart and Nini Rodgers – the long history of black people in Ireland prior to the 1980s continues to be ignored. The aforementioned transatlantic links, including Irish emigration to the USA during and after the Famine, suggest ironies of ethnicity that might have sharpened positive contemporary responses to the black presence in Ireland and Northern Ireland.[39] For a start,

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suggests a certain degree of openness. If Portlaise is an outlier well beyond Dublin, there are concentrations of Nigerians elsewhere, such as Athlone (County Westmeath). On the question of suffrage generally, see Bryan Fanning in Works Cited.

[38] A particularly rich study of the sub-Saharan presence in Dublin itself is Elisa Joy White's *Modernity, Freedom, and the African Diaspora*, esp. 31–178. See also her articles "Paradoxes of Diaspora, Global Identity and Human Rights: The Deportation of Nigerians in Ireland," *African and Black Diaspora* 2.1 (January 2009): 67–83 and "Forging African Diaspora Places in Dublin's Retro-Global Spaces: Minority Making in a New Global City," *City* 6.2 (2002): 251–70, as well as the entries in the Works Cited for Anaele Diala Iroh, Julius Komolafe, and Charlotte McIvor, as well as Ronit Lentin's essay "At the Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis: Spatial Narratives of Ethnic Minorities and Diasporic Communities in a Changing City," *City* 6 (2002): 229–49.

[39] On the black American abolitionist and post-emancipation harnessing of the trope of the oppressed Irish, see, for example, Michael Stancliff, "Black Ireland: The Political Economics of African American Rhetorical Pedagogy after Reconstruction," in Stan-

Irish aspirations to independence after O'Connell, in Ireland and more recently in Ulster, have traditionally been supported reciprocally by internationalist African Americans and coupled with the notion of the 'white Negro'.[40] A notable exception is the academic preoccupation, in US historiography, with the 'racialized' status of Irish immigrants vis-à-vis the African-American population; this has been a source of inter-ethnic tension, although Irish immigrants to the USA, after being marked by the racist stigma of association with blacks, began to revalorize the label by associating themselves with the African-American quest for freedom and civil rights.[41] There have even been conspicuous instances of involuntary Irish/black 'miscegenation'.[42] Creative interest in the Irish/black American nexus finds an early exemplar in the US-based Irish dramatist Dion Boucicault with his popular play *The Octoroon*

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cliff, *Frances Ellen Watkins Harper: African American Reform Rhetoric and the Rise of a Modern Nation State* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 106–29. This section is largely devoted to an analysis of Harper's novel *Trial and Triumph* (1889), with some reference to her equation of Jim Crow exploitation of black labour with the impoverishment of "black Ireland," but there are also useful pages (110–12) on Ward, Allen, and Douglass and their conflicted view of the Irish as depraved and racist, on the one hand, and deserving of self-determination, on the other.

[40] Cf. Arnold Shankman, "Black on Green: Afro-American Editors on Irish Independence, 1840–1921," *Phylon* 41.3 (1980): 284–99; Fionnbarra O Dochartaigh, *Ulster's White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1994); John Brannigan, "'Ireland, and Black!': The Cultural Politics of Racial Figuration," in Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009): 179–221; Luke Gibbons, "Whiter Shades of Pale," in Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture* (Galway: Arlen House, 2004): 33–44. Cf. also Kevin Howard, "'The Irish Are Not Black': Ascribed Ethnicity and the Struggle for Recognition," in *Border and Borderlands in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Aoileann Ni Éigeartaigh & David Getty (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2006): 42–55.

[41] See, for example, Brian Gallagher, "About Us, For Us, Near Us: The Irish and the Harlem Renaissance," *Éire–Ireland* 16.4 (Winter 1981): 14–26; Catherine Eagen, "Still 'Black' and 'Proud': Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia," in *The Irish In Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2006): 20–63; Hazel Carby, "What Is This 'Black' in Irish Popular Culture?" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.3 (2001): 325–49.

[42] For example, the Georgia planter Michael Morris Healy and his slave Eliza (treated by O'Toole – see Works Cited), and voluntary 'interbreeding' (e.g., Irish/black Seminole: see Neil Allen O'Rourke Williams in Works Cited).

(1859). Other early, politically active Irish writers in the USA identifying with black Americans include John Boyle O'Reilly.[43]

To return to the isles: all too often, political and cultural histories of Ireland have remained preoccupied with the English/Irish binary, and have sidestepped the complex interactions of class, race, enslavement, and colonialism which involved Irish people with African, Caribbean, and Asian peoples and as participants in the imperial project. Particularly as a result of the need to meet European Union expectations and obligations regarding human rights and in the face of often heavy-handed measures taken by the Irish government to expel West African migrants and asylum-seekers, Irish sociologists have been devoting intense scrutiny to the question of race relations. In contemporary Ireland there is a growing awareness, given the influx of Eastern Europeans as a workforce during the boom years and of Africans as refugees/migrants, that the island, north and south, is becoming ineluctably multicultural.[44] Worries about racism are now inevitable.[45] One focus is women (in a culture marked by the 'Marian' elevation of motherhood).[46] This sharpened awareness has taken on a political dimension.[47]

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[43] For recent studies of Boucicault, see Howes in the Works Cited, and, on O'Reilly, Betts and Onkey.

[44] See, for example, *The Expanding Nation: Towards a Multi-Ethnic Ireland*, ed. Ronit Lentin (Dublin: Ethnic and Racial Studies, Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin, 1999), and entries for Fagan and Ejorh in Works Cited.

[45] General surveys include Abel Ugba & Ronit Lentin, *Africans in Ireland: Experiences of Racism* (Dublin: Pan Africa Organisation, 2003). An especially useful collection of relevant essays is *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*, ed. Ronit Lentin & Robbie McVeigh (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002); worthy of specific mention in the context of African immigration is Ronit Lentin, "Anti-Racist Responses to the Racialisation of Irishness: Disavowed Multiculturalism and its Discontents" (226–38), see also the entries for Asava, Casey & O'Connell, Gartland, Goldstone, Gjurgjan, Loyal, Mann–Kler, McVeigh, and Guerin in the Works Cited.

[46] On discrimination against African women immigrants and asylum-seekers in particular, see: Ronit Lentin & Robbie McVeigh, "'Black Bodies' and 'Headless Hookers: Alternative Narratives of Globalisation for 21st Century Ireland," *The Irish Review* 33 (2005): 1–12, and the relevant studies by Lentin and Luibhéid in the Works Cited. In Ronit Lentin's "Pregnant silence: (En)gendering Ireland's asylum space," *Patterns of Prejudice* 37.3 (2003): 301–22, the title alludes to Nigerian women getting themselves pregnant in order to gain permanent-resident status.

[47] Cf. Rebecca Chiyoko King O'Riain, "Counting on the 'Celtic Tiger': Adding ethnic census categories in the Republic of Ireland," *Ethnicities* 7.4 (2007): 516–42;

What more positive social indications are there to offset troublesome racist tendencies? Contemporary Irish and Irish-American cultural expression continues to identify strongly with black American identity, particularly in music (e.g., U2 or Van Morrison, the 'king of white blues', or the novel and subsequent film *The Commitments*, about Dublin youths forming a soul band), and sometimes in oblique form, as in Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* (1992).[48] More recent films explore further aspects of the Irish/black nexus, whether immigrant encounters in New York or the problems of biracial Irish returnees to the homeland.[49] Dublin theatre companies that focus on granting expression to African communities in Ireland include Arambe Theater Productions and Calypso Productions. As Jason King has argued, however, there is a danger in employing marginalized and often asylum-seeking black persons as actors to enable factitious confirmation of a racially diverse Irish society that in fact does not yet deserve this status.[50] A more inclusive understanding of Ireland's multicultural history makes it more difficult to draw clear distinctions between colonizers and colonized, victims and oppressors. The recognition of the part played by black and Asian residents in con-

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Steve Loyal, "Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: Racism, Immigration and the State," in *The End of Irish History? Critical Approaches to the Celtic Tiger*, ed. Colin Coulter & Steve Coleman (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003): 74–94; Steve Garner, "Other People's Diasporas: The 'Racialisation' of the Asylum Issue," in Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto, 2004): 140–67.

[48] Alan Parker, *The Commitments* (Ireland/USA/UK 1991; 118 min.); Neil Jordan, *The Crying Game* (UK/Japan 1992; 107 min.). See, for example, Lorraine Piroux, "'I'm Black an' I'm Proud': Re-Inventing Irishness in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*," *College Literature* 25.2 (Spring 1998): 45–57.

[49] Jim Sheridan, *In America* (Ireland/UK 2002; 101 min.); Eugene Brady, *The Nephew* (Ireland 1998; 106 min.). See Kathleen Vejvoda, "The Blood of an Irishwoman: Race and Gender in *The Nephew* and *In America*," *Irish Studies Review* 15.3 (2007): 365–76; repr. in *Screening Irish-America*, ed. Ruth Barton (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009): 341–55.

[50] See Jason King, "Black Saint Patrick Revisited: Calypso's 'Tower of Babel' and Culture Ireland as Global Networks," in *Performing Global Networks*, ed. Karen Fricker & Ronit Lentin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007): 38–51. See also Loredana Salis, "Saint Patrick," in Salis, *Stage Migrants: Representations of the Migrant Other in Modern Irish Drama* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010): 33–38; Sarah Heinz, "The Whiteness of Irish Drama: The Irish and Their Black Other," in *Staging Interculturality*, ed. Werner Huber, Margarete Rubik & Julia Novak (CDE 17; Trier: WVT, 2010): 195–217.

structing that nation and its culture might also prove a useful basis for confronting racial misunderstanding and hostility as members of varied ethnic groups make their homes in contemporary Ireland.

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Ira Aldridge in Stockholm

Bernth Lindfors

When Ira Aldridge arrived in Stockholm in May 1857 to perform at the Royal Theatre, he was already famous throughout Europe as a talented black actor who claimed royal African ancestry. Though born and raised in New York City, he had made his professional debut on stage in London in 1825, playing Othello and several racial roles in melodramas about slavery and thereby earning early publicity as an 'African tragedian'. Conscious of the novelty of this equivocal identity, Aldridge fabricated a tale about being the son of a Christian Fulani prince from Senegal and started touring provincial theaters in Britain as the 'African Roscius', an honorific title alluding to the great Roman actor Quintus Roscius Gallus. Audiences who thought this a joke and turned out in numbers expecting to laugh at the antics of an ignorant, uncouth Negro thespian were astonished to discover that Aldridge could handle his serious roles with force, dignity, and intelligence. And when they saw him perform splendidly in farces, too, punctuating common racial stereotypes with skilful irony, they were even more impressed, for they recognized their own mistaken assumptions about black people as a legitimate target for much of the humour. Aldridge had instructively turned the joke back on them.

For twenty-five years, Aldridge remained a popular performer who drew large crowds to theatres in cities and towns throughout the British Isles, but he seldom was invited to appear in London, and on those rare occasions when he did manage to secure engagements there, he met with less success than he had experienced elsewhere.[1] As a consequence, he decided in mid-career to try his luck on the Continent. His first tour abroad, which lasted from July 1852 to April 1855, took him to many parts of Europe, where he won more honours, awards, decorations, and medals, often from kings and other heads of state, than any other nineteenth-century actor. He mainly performed a selection of plays by Shakespeare and did so with such originality and power that he was often hailed as one of the greatest interpreters of such classic roles as Othello, Shylock, Macbeth, and Richard III.

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[1] For details on Aldridge's career in the UK, see Herbert Marshall & Mildred Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian* (London: Rockliff, 1958); Bernth Lindfors, *Ira*

Newspapers back in England followed his travels with interest and curiosity, reporting on anything extraordinary that happened. On 2 July 1854, the *Sunday Times* told its readers that

> "The African Roscius," having made a most successful tour throughout Prussia, Bavaria, and Hungary, has recently appeared at some of the principal theatres in Switzerland, where he has been most favourably received. On the 24th of June he played at Soleure in the presence of her Majesty the Queen of Sweden, who, at the conclusion of the performance, desired that Mr. Aldridge might be presented to her in the state box, when, after complimenting him upon his histrionic talent, she invited him to visit Stockholm during the ensuing season, assuring him of the protection and patronage of the court.[2]

Aldridge may have been unable to accept this generous invitation at that time because he was too busy fulfilling back-to-back engagements at theatres in Germany, Prussia, Austria, and the Netherlands for the next nine months. In the spring of 1855 he returned to London and, after a brief rest, resumed touring the United Kingdom for another two years.

However, on 3 March 1857 the invitation was offered again, this time through the office of Major Norman Pringle, the British Consul in Stockholm, who received the following letter from Gunnar Olof Hyltén–Cavallius, director of Stockholm's Royal Theatre:

> The Royal Theatre at Stockholm gives ordinarily, by full houses a recett [box-office returns] of 1000 RB Swedish Banco.

Aldridge: The Early Years, 1807–1833 (Rochester NY: U of Rochester P, 2011); and Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge: The Vagabond Years, 1833–1852* (Rochester NY: U of Rochester P, 2011).

[2] Anon., "Mr. Ira Aldridge," *Sunday Times* (2 July 1854). The date cited may be incorrect. The local press in Soleure (Solothurn) reported that Aldridge performed there only three nights: in *Othello* on 18 June, in scenes from *Macbeth* and *Othello* and in Isaac Bickerstaff's farce *The Padlock* on 22 June, and in *The Merchant of Venice* on 25 June. It is not known which of these performances the Queen saw.

> The Expenses for every night are cirka [*sic*] 300 RB Bko.
>
> The Direction offers to Mr Ira Aldridge 25£ (resembling to nearly the half-part of the Netto-Recett, or 300 RB Swedish Bko) for every night he publicly appears on the Stage.
>
> The number of representations cannot be limited forwards; but so many times as it will be worth the trouble.
>
> Only one Character – *Othello*.
>
> The time at the middle or between the middle and the end of the month Maji [May].
>
> Answer is to be expected. –
>
> Stockholm d. 3 Mars 1857.
>
> G.O. Hyltén–Cavallius[3]

Pringle forwarded this letter, along with an accompanying note of his own, to J.H. Keene, an agent in London who had been helping Aldridge seek engagements abroad by translating into German his letters to Continental theatre managers.[4] Keene relayed both messages to Aldridge, saying:

> I have just received a letter from Major Pringle, Stockholm, enclosing one from the Director of the Theatre Royal. The letter offers £25 a night for Othello – the only character he requires – number of representations not to be limited beforehand. The best time between the middle and end of May. The Consul thinks you would be able to do something at Copenhagen on your way to Stockholm and afterwards at St. Petersburg.
>
> In great haste, yours,
> J.H. Keene
>
> The best day at the theatre is Sunday. The Consul wants to know if you would object.[5]

Aldridge accepted the offer but could not leave for Sweden until mid-May because he had a prior commitment to perform for a month at the Britannia Theatre in London starting on 13 April. While he acted at the Britannia, rumours began to swirl in the local press about the terms of his contract with the Court of Sweden, "an engagement which is indeed princely in its munificence."[6] The *Sunday Times* gave concrete details, saying he was "to give representations at Stockholm, Upsala, and Gottenburg [*sic*]. We understand that he travels at the expense of the government, with free quarters during his stay, an equipage and attendants, and a hundred pounds weekly."[7] A New York paper that picked up this story estimated that the high salary involved was equivalent to "$500 per week, in addition to a liberal allowance for table, equipage, etc."[8]

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[3] Letter held at the Music and Theatre Museum, Stockholm.

[4] See, for example, the letter from him to Aldridge reproduced in Marshall & Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian*, 202. No source given.

[5] Quoted in Marshall & Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian*, 206. No source given.

Aldridge finished his run at the Britannia on 9 May and left for Stockholm three days later,[9] passing through Hamburg, the Prussian towns of Stettin and Swinemünde, as well as Kalmar on the southeastern coast of Sweden. Upon arriving in Stockholm on 21 May,[10] he wrote a lengthy letter to his wife, telling her of the journey and his reception in Sweden:

> [In Kalmar] I with some gentleman sauntered into the town, and going to a Confectioners to get some coffee – in all the Swedish papers I was announced – it spread over town like wildfire that I was there and such a crowd assembled at the steamer, their curiosity excited in the highest pitch but no rudeness. [...] It was telegraphed from Kalmar to Stockholm that I was coming by the steamer and on my arrival Major Pringle was waiting to receive me – a carriage also with attendants awaited me and accompanied by the Major drove to my lodgings. [...] I am to attend a rehearsal tomorrow and fix the first appearance. They have been at work with *Othello* ever since they have received it and have not yet perfected themselves. The King who is ill has expressed a wish to see my first representation, all the Royal Family will be present also. [...] As usual the leading man [Carl Georg Dahlqvist, who was to play Iago] is grumbling about the disadvantage he says he will be at not understanding English. He forgets that I am at a greater disadvantage, his language is understood by the entire audience while I am but partially so. However, that is easily got over.[11]

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[6] Anon., "Britannia," *The Era* (19 April 1857).

[7] Anon., "Mr. Ira Aldridge," *Sunday Times* (5 April 1857).

[8] *New York Sunday Atlas,* quoted on 26 June 1857 by the *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper published in Boston. According to comparisons of relative value available at http://www.measuringworth.com, a salary of £100 or $500 in 1857 would have been equal to a salary of £7,440 or $12,900 in 2010.

[9] Anon., "Mr. Ira Aldridge," *Theatrical Journal* (13 May 1857).

[10] Anon., "Hr Ira Aldridge," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (22 May 1857).

[11] Quoted in Marshall & Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian*, 207–10. No source given.

In the weeks before and after his arrival, newspapers were circulating the tall tale of his birth and upbringing in Senegal[12] and telling of his triumphs on stage not only in the United Kingdom but also in other European countries where, as in Sweden, he was allowed to play his roles in English while his supporting cast performed their parts in their native language. These unusual details stimulated a great deal of interest in this foreign star, but the language issue disturbed a few journalists who were already critical of Director Hyltén–Cavallius for having also hired in the same season a Dane, a Professor Nielsen, to perform a French comedy in Danish with the Swedish-speaking company at the Royal Theatre. The theatre critic for the *Söndagsbladet* sarcastically suggested that in Aldridge's case, if only actors speaking in German as well as the Mesopotamian language also had some representation in *Othello*, the whole arrangement would be complete.[13]

The same critic had earlier pointed out that "The Royal Theatre, like every other theatre, has only one prompt box, with only enough room for one prompter. The same prompter cannot properly prompt in both English and Swedish at the same time," so a second box would have be constructed above the stage so the black man could be prompted from above and the whites from below, "an arrangement which already reminds one of the topsy-turvy world."[14] To address the language problem, Hyltén–Cavallius quickly published and sold a small booklet in which theatregoers could read Othello's lines in Swedish while listening to Aldridge speak.[15]

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[12] See, for example, the account in Anon., "Skådespelaren Ira Aldridge," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (12 May 1857), and a similar condensation published in Anon., "Skådespelaren Ira Aldridge," *Göteborgs Nyare Handels- och Sjöfarts-Tidning* (11 June 1857). Both were drawn from Anon., *Negern Ira Aldridge: Lefnadsteckning med porträtt och fac-simile af hans namnteckning. Minne af hans uppträdande i Stockholm Sommaren 1857* (Stockholm: Hos J.L. Brudin, [1857]), a sixteen-page Swedish summary of Aldridge's British stage biography, Anon., *Memoir and Theatrical Career of Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius* (London: Onwhyn, [1848]).

[13] Anon., "Det omtalas," *Söndagsbladet* (31 May 1857). The satirical paper *Kapten Puff* had asked if the Royal Theatre, featuring dramatic artists from Denmark and the Sahara desert, should continue to be called a national theatre. See Anon., "Theater," *Kapten Puff* (9 May 1857).

[14] Anon., "Ira Aldridge," *Söndagsbladet* (17 May 1857).

[15] Anon., *Othellos Role uti "Mohren i Venedig" af Shakespeare. Återgifven på Engelska språket af Ira Aldridge* (Stockholm: Hörbergska Boktryckeriet, 1857). A

As it turned out, language was not as big an issue as had been anticipated, partly because Aldridge's sounds, gestures, and facial expressions were eloquent enough to convey the emotions he was expressing. Even the critic for the *Söndagsbladet* was won over, admitting that Aldridge

> put such a nobility, a worthiness into his playing, which in places was truly sublime as well as in the smallest parts many-sided and finely nuanced, that it could not escape conveying a deep impression on the audience, even on those who did not understand the language in which Othello's role was played. [...] Both languages blended together in a less disturbing way than one would have expected, but what then seemed disturbing in a high degree was that those who followed along with the printed text, when the actors came to the end of one page, they all turned the page at the same time, resulting in an unpleasant and long-lasting paper rustling, sometimes during the scenes which kept the audience in the highest suspension.[16]

The opening night was a huge success, drawing a full house despite a fifty-percent increase in ticket prices.[17] The *Aftonbladet* exclaimed that Aldridge's "talent is varied, but always great; whether mild or furious, an angel or a demon, Aldridge is always great. [...] There is nothing pedantic in his acting, nothing of exaggeration in his look or gesticulation, as is too often the case with other representatives of Othello."[18] The *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* reported that "He was recalled to the stage three or four times with thundering applause, and received a mass of flower bouquets and a laurel wreath. Acquaintance with Mr. Aldridge's interesting artistry was an extraordinary novelty for our public. [...] We do not hesitate to name Mr. Aldridge a great actor."[19] The *Illustrerad Tidning* published an engraving and two sketches of

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similar booklet was prepared for *The Merchant of Venice*: Anon., *Shylocks Role uti "Köpmannen i Venedig"* (Stockholm: Hörbergska Boktryckeriet, 1857).

[16] Anon., "Onsdagen," *Söndagsbladet* (7 June 1857).

[17] B—n, "K. Theatern," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (4 June 1857); Anon., "Negern Ira Aldridge," *Göteborgs Nyare Handels- och Sjöfarts-Tidning* (8 June 1857); Anon., "Stockholm d. 5 Juni," *Kalmar-Posten* (10 June 1857). The foreign press claimed that ticket prices had been doubled. See Anon., "Ira Aldridge," *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Amsterdam; 29 June 1857); Anon., "Stockholm," *Theater-Vereins-Zeitung* (Berlin; 4 July 1857); Anon., "The 'African Roscius'," *Belfast News-Letter* (15 July 1857).

[18] Anon., "På kongl. teatern," *Aftonbladet* (4 June 1857), as summarized in Anon., "The 'African Roscius'," *Morning Chronicle* (London; 10 July 1857).

[19] B—n, "K. Theatern," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (4 June 1857).

him and confirmed: “that he is an artist of the highest order, and not just a black artist, cannot be denied. His power of making interjections is uncommon. Those ‘Ohs!’ and ‘Ahs!’ which cause despair to most other actors and, consequently, the public, have more meaning in his mouth than an entire monologue. For the rest, there is more moderation in his playing than one could expect from someone of simmering Negro blood.”[20]

Illustrerad Tidning

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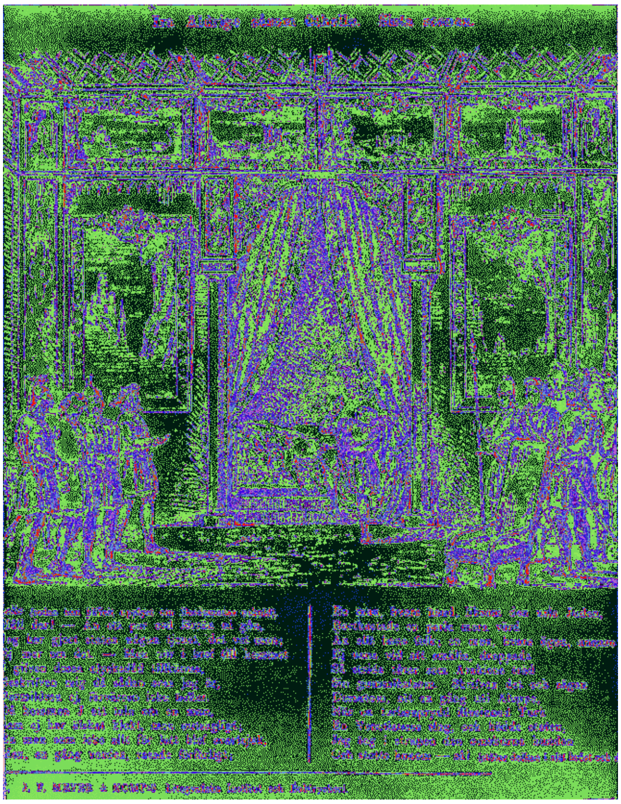
[20] Anon., “Hvarjehanda,” *Illustrerad Tidning* (6 June 1857).



Nevertheless, there were some aspects of his acting that audiences found strange and off-putting, such as his rapid swings of mood “from the warmness of love and the happy, open and knightly frankness to the jealous torments and the demonic, wild rage for revenge,” a passion which, though “natural for southerners[,] is one with which our people find it difficult to identify.”[21] Another paper made the same point about these rapid transitions, finding them “foreign for northerners” but still “truthful” in representing the temperament of Moors and Negroes.[22] A Gothenburg paper affirmed that Aldridge “is, without a doubt, a great actor, but he draws out the tragic perhaps a bit longer than our Swedish nerves can tolerate. In particular, certain guttural sounds, at the highest intensification of the effect, seemed ugly, if not downright repulsive."[23] But the general tendency was to attribute such defects to his racial heritage and to forgive him for displaying perfectly natural African peculiarities.

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[21] Anon., “På kongl. teatern,” *Aftonbladet* (4 June 1857).

[22] B—n, “K. Theatern,” *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (4 June 1857).

In a second performance of *Othello* two days later, Aldridge

> received loud and often-repeated approbation for his moving and masterly playing. [. . .] [His performance] does not lose anything in being seen a second time, but rather the opposite. The unfamiliar [. . .] impression of singular, overwhelming passions gives way, with more familiarity, so one has more composure in which to examine the artistry, which well bears being scrutinized. [. . .] The piece went well, although Mr. Aldridge and Mr. Dahlqvist were both unwell.[24]

A third performance of *Othello* scheduled for 7 June had to be cancelled because Dahlqvist "had the misfortune to get smallpox, although, it is said, of the less serious sort." Five other members of the company were also sick.[25] Performances involving Aldridge did not resume until 18 June, when the Royal Theatre mounted a production of the first four acts of *The Merchant of Venice* as well as the fifth act of *Othello*, with Edward Mauritz Swartz substituting for Dahlqvist as Iago.

Aldridge's performance of Shylock received a glowing review in the *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar*:

> Mr. Aldridge displayed in Shylock, in a new and remarkable manner, his great talents as an actor. There was but one expression of opinion regarding the merits of the performance; he was called in front of the stage not less than three times, and at the end was greeted with a shower of nosegays and laurel wreaths. His representation of that character was a noble and sublime one, he seemed fully impressed with the great poet's ideas, and entered into [them with] the highest degree of intelligence. One of the best *traits* in the character of the Jew is his tenderness for his daughter, and that tenderness was manifested by Mr Aldridge in the most pathetic manner. An irresistible sensation was produced by his general representation of the strongly defined psychological and tragic part of Shylock, and as we gazed on the, so to say, colossal proportions of the actor, and caught, as it were, all the oriental

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[23] Anon., "Upptagen som man är," *Göteborgs Nyare Handels- och Sjöfarts-Tidning* (9 June 1857).

[24] Anon., "K. Theatern," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (6 June 1857).

[25] Anon., "Aldrig har sjukligheten inom Kongl. Theaterns personal [. . .]," *Söndagsbladet* (14 June 1857).

> colouring of the acting, we seemed to be listening to one of the mighty men of the Old Testament, pouring out his whole soul in biblical language.[26]

Aldridge was due to repeat his parts in a second double bill featuring four acts of *The Merchant of Venice* and the fifth act of *Othello* on 21 June, but in the meantime, perhaps as a favour to Director Hyltén–Cavallius, he consented to contribute to a vocal and instrumental concert at the Royal Theatre on Saturday, 20 June, by reciting Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not to be." His participation in this musical entertainment "was met with particularly warm greetings."[27]

Trouble began the following day when an unsigned critique was published in the *Aftonbladet* remarking on the "somewhat artificial and rather strange charm" of this famous foreign actor. While acknowledging that Aldridge had several advantages – a handsome figure, a great confidence and practice on the stage, a lovely voice, and economical gestures – the anonymous critic pointed out that he also had shortcomings, most of which could be subsumed in a category of representation called "mannerisms." "There's no truth, no nature in his playing." He adopts a most affected style of speech "in which he has something of the tone of a Methodist preacher when he reads his prayers." Later this gets worse when he becomes passionate and falls into a frenzy. "He hisses, he shrieks, he howls, he takes short breaths as if to shriek – in a word, he is very atrocious and not for a moment aesthetic."

> And then there are his pauses! Yes, his pauses, they are no normal pauses, either in time or meaning. He stops in the middle of a sentence where there is not the slightest reason existing for the sense, he looks around himself, he casts a look around the theatre floor, he waits, he considers his interlocutors and the public, who are visibly perplexed both on the stage and in the auditorium – finally, after an interruption sufficient for a short scene, he decides, to the obvious satisfaction of his fellow actors, to say the missing word. […] In contrast to the pauses, when he says *nothing*, are the equal moments when he says *too much*, that is to say, repeats what Shakespeare only says once. […] [In

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[26] [B—n], "K. Theatern," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (19 June 1857), as summarized in Anon., "Stockholm," *Sunday Times* (5 July 1857). See also Anon., "Mr. Ira Aldridge at Stockholm," *The Era* (5 July 1857).

[27] Anon., "Hr Ira Aldridge," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (22 June 1857); Anon., "Hr Ira Aldridge," *Svenska Tidningen* (23 June 1857).

> addition,] he acts independently of his colleagues, and no ensemble playing can arise from that.

The critic went on to illustrate these “debits” by commenting at some length on specific faults in his representation of Shylock where Shakespeare’s spirit and thought were most mishandled – notably the Jew’s vacillating attitudes towards his daughter, whom he dearly loves but ultimately despises. Another example cited was Shylock’s interaction with Gratiano at the end of the trial scene, when one of Aldridge’s long pauses led a stagehand to believe the play was over, to bring down the curtain prematurely, and then to raise it again so the conversation could continue – a gaffe that was “unbelievably comic.” As if this were not enough, the critic also faulted the Royal Theatre for billing its new star as Ira Aldridge *Esquire* and charged that he “is by no means as dark as some have made him. He has Negro blood in his veins, but it is well-mixed; and to call him a Negro is obviously a misuse of the word.”[28]

The theatre critic at the *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar*, who signed himself B—n, immediately fired back, condemning the vanity, contempt, meanness, and coarse bullying of the *Aftonbladet*’s anonymous contributor, whose “so-called ‘critique on aesthetic (!!) grounds’ ” displayed the stupidity of his powers of understanding and his lack of skill in judging artistic phenomena. “How undeserved is such handling of a great and renowned artist, who is able to speak to the human heart and so understands what he does and how he sounds.”[29]

The critic at the *Aftonbladet* responded in like manner, calling his accuser a “fanatical admirer” of Aldridge and dismissing his “fit of temper, wrath, and rage, which surpasses all of the blows we have seen in the Swedish press in a long time” as worthy only of ridicule. Surely an aesthetic critic maintains the right to judge impartially even artists whose skin is somewhat coloured.[30]

The theatre critic for the *Svenska Tidningen* then weighed in on the dispute, offering the opinion that “Aldridge’s talent is probably not easy to understand correctly. That there is an uncommon power and a deep study ought to be indisputable,” but it would be strange to deny that this deep psychological presentation, brilliant though it may be, often reveals itself in startling effect-seeking, in broad *mannerisms*, such as animal-like guttural noises, hissing breathing, and minute-long pauses that are not at all charming or enchanting. "It has been said that our own actors have much to learn from Aldridge. Yes, that is certainly possible: but they should be most strongly dissuaded from imitating him; that would certainly only introduce a new burlesque tragic element." This critic confessed to siding with the assessment of Aldridge that had appeared in the *Aftonbladet*. He, too, found more debits than credits in this African's unorthodox style of acting.[31]

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[28] Anon., “Teater: Hr Ira Aldridge på kungliga teatern,” *Aftonbladet* (22 June 1857).

[29] B—n, “Omdömen om hr Ira Aldridge,” *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (23 June 1857).

[30] Anon., “*Posttidningens* theaterreferent,” *Aftonbladet* (25 June 1857).

B—n replied over the next two days with a lengthy rebuttal to the issues raised in the *Aftonbladet*'s original article. Beginning with two of the smaller matters – the objections to the billing of Aldridge as an *Esquire* and to his self-description as a Negro – he provided arguments justifying both appellations and then proceeded to tackle point by point the larger questions of interpretation, especially those concerned with Aldridge's unconventional "mannerisms." B—n felt that mannerisms come from a school of acting, and when we find great merits, we forget small shortcomings, particularly if we believe we cannot eradicate them. If certain mannerisms are regarded as offensive because one is unaccustomed to them, then one is merely responding with a subjective judgment. An actor who moves quickly from one mood to another may look strange to some spectators, but such mood swings may be exactly right for the kind of character he is attempting to portray. Aldridge "has had the good judgement to choose a repertoire which is best suited for the quality of his sensations: above all, Shakespeare's strong male characters, with great, violent passions. As long as the actor chooses roles for which his abilities are suitable, he is not to be censured."[32]

As for representing Shylock's personality, "we declare that a man such as Mr. Aldridge, who himself knows what persecution against a race means, does not have the heart to represent Judaism quite so detestably as Shakespeare sketched it nor to portray Shylock as he is played in German theatres." By creating a new Shylock, Aldridge makes the play a greater and better work for the audience, so that Shakespeare is surpassed. The metamorphosis that the role undergoes in Aldridge's hands, from a dramatic to a deeply tragic person, is in and of itself a masterpiece of intelligent acting. Aldridge removes every trace of caricature.[33]

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[31] Anon., "Konstiga bref," *Svenska Tidningen* (25 June 1857).

[32] B—n, "Striden om Hr. Ira Aldridge," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (26 June 1857).

[33] B—n, "Striden om Hr. Ira Aldridge," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (27 June 1857).

Writing in the *Svenska Tidningen* on the same day that this bold defence of Aldridge's Shylock appeared, Ernst Ludvig ventured to suggest that Aldridge did not seem to have been totally clear about *how* he should understand this character. The actor's yelling, howling, endless pauses, and false vocal stresses were terrible mistakes, as was his tendency to turn his back to the tribunal in Venice. But, worst of all, his interpretation of Shylock's relationship with his daughter was completely un-Shakespearean, lacking proper attention to the text of the play. Aldridge's modifications did not improve *The Merchant of Venice*; they spoiled it.[34]

Aldridge's final performance occurred on 29 June. Dahlqvist had recovered from his illness by then, so the Royal Theatre was able to mount another full production of *Othello*. The reappearance of Aldridge in the title role was greeted by the *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* with characteristic enthusiasm:

> His acting this evening was even more spiritual than previously. [He depicted the Moor] as a noble and grand figure, presenting him with a deep inner warmth and psychological truth stemming from his suffering and with the well-sublimated strength of his passions. [His acting] electrified and, in the softer moments, moved the audience.[35]

The same paper, the day before, had published a letter of appreciation addressed to "Ira Aldridge Esquire!" in both Swedish and English, stating that

> Some warm votarists of Dramatic Art beg, by this means, to testify their gratefulness for the distinguished enjoyments which you have bestowed upon us by your lofty and charming performance of the parts which you have acted upon the principal dramatic scene of Sweden. As you may have already richly experienced unequivocal proofs of the raptures and sympathies of the Swedish public, and enjoyed, on proper ground, the finest triumphs of an artist, this manifestation through the medium of the press would be uncalled for, unless [sic] your artistical performance and your person had become the subject of an attack, as narrow-spirited as mischievous, against the injustice and niggardness [*sic*] of which we wish, by this, to convey an animated protestation, in the name of justice, civilization and offended Swedish hospitality.
>
> Accept, noble artist, this testimony of gratitude for the eminent gratification afforded us by your appearance in this city, and be assured that our public as highly estimates and does honour to your

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[34] Ernst Ludvig, "Bref till en vän i Stockholm," *Svenska Tidningen* (27 June 1857).

[35] [B—n], "K. Theatern," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (30 June 1857).

> mastership as a dramatic artist as it entertains warm sympathies for your person and the race to which you belong.[36]

The *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Tidningen*, meanwhile, gave the revived *Othello* only a cursory notice, the latter nonetheless noting in slightly more detail that Aldridge had been "greeted enthusiastically at his first entrance, and even during the play's progress was given many proofs of the public's satisfaction with his artistry. Mr. A was recalled after the end of the play and presented with several flower bouquets and then he gave a speech in English in which he expressed his thankfulness for the good will and the applause he had received in Sweden."[37]

However, the following week, after Aldridge had left to return to England, the *Svenska Tidningen* re-opened the debate by publishing in its issue of 4 July two lengthy articles, one an essay on "The Dramatic Critic's Relation to the Development of National Art" by an anonymous contributor, the other a "ninth letter" to "Aunt Aurora," a regular column commenting on current events in the capital that was written by someone identified only by the initials E.A.O. Both pieces dealt with a range of issues, only one of which was the controversy over Aldridge's acting, but in addressing that particular dispute, both for the most part supported the *Aftonbladet*'s position on the matter.

The anonymous essayist began by condemning the "fanatical bitterness" with which B—n had attacked the review in the *Aftonbladet*, which, while not rejecting many of Aldridge's unusual techniques, had tried to put a stop to exaggerated admiration for an artist so unnatural:

> In our eyes and to our understanding, Aldridge was sometimes truly sublime, as we seldom, if ever, see in our theaters, but one must agree with what the *Aftonbladet* says about his false pathos, false declamation, false stress on all the wrong words […] as well as his repulsive, animal-like sounds. […] What we cannot agree with, on the other hand, in the *Aftonbladet*, is the censure for pauses. Possibly they happened too often; perhaps they were sometimes too long. But in general we found it was natural, done in a truly artistic way that increased the dramatic impression to a high degree. […]

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[36] Some Votarists of True Dramatic Art, "Till hr Ira Aldridge Esquire! / To Mr. Ira Aldridge Esquire!," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (29 June 1857).

[37] Anon., "Hr. Ira Aldridge," *Svenska Tidningen*, 30 June 1857; Anon., "Kongl. teatern," *Aftonbladet* (1 July 1857).

> [B—n's] lamentations are preposterously ridiculous. […] Something funnier than his hasty comical attack on the *Aftonbladet* we have seldom read.[38]

E.A.O., meanwhile, was telling his Aunt Aurora that

> I have seen this black diamond among the actors in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Our honoured reviewers are just now at loggerheads with each other and the fight seems to be getting serious. The *Aftonbladet* is speaking its mind and attacking the African actor, and the *Posttidningen* is valiantly trying to defend its preserve. […] It seems to me that the *Aftonbladet*'s reviewer is correct in most cases, but he has sometimes forgotten that it is excellent when one is a calm and moderate corrector of another's faults but that one ought to avoid being the executioner. Ira Aldridge ought to be regarded from the standpoint of what he possesses. As Othello he is not a Moor, he is a Negro. His art has many times stiffened up into mannerisms, and the nature he presents is, even if true, still not beautiful. His wildness is not human, it is the hyena's or tiger's – it is low. To deny that Aldridge displays proof of true artistry in many scenes would be unfair. – The performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was, at least for me, a true torture. […] Still, it is easy to judge, easy to censure. I don't love it. I admire the true artist too much to braid thorns into his crown.[39]

Two days later, B—n offered his "Final Words in the Critical Dispute," suggesting that a paper such as the *Svenska Tidningen* that claims the exclusive privilege to be Swedish and to understand what is Swedish, should, when lecturing others about the critic's duties, apply the same principles to its own practice and not assume superiority in critical debates. B—n believed his own assessments of actors were fair, transparently honest, morally sound, and respected by the actors themselves. He did not consider it honourable to return to the controversy over Aldridge again, even though it would have been tempting to employ the same arsenal of weapons wielded by the *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Tidningen* in their blind and untruthful attacks on him. It was sufficient to know that the *Svenska Tidningen* at least recognized, and was willing to admit publicly and belatedly, that Aldridge, despite his "unnatural" faults, "was sometimes truly sublime."[40]

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[38] Anon., "Den dramatiska kritkens förhållande till den inhemska konstutvecklingen," *Svenska Tidningen* (4 July 1857).

[39] E.A.O., "Epistlar till tant Aurore," *Svenska Tidningen* (4 July 1857).

[40] B—n, "Slutord i den kritiska tvisten," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (6 July 1857).

Ernst Ludvig, however, couldn't let the matter rest there. A week later he re-emerged in the *Svenska Tidningen* with a full frontal assault on B—n, having "for the first time seen in print the view expressed that we are bound to praise foreign artists out of a duty to hospitality, particularly when they belong to oppressed races – for example, the Negro race." Ludvig pointed out that B—n had said nothing in refutation to the *Svenska Tidningen*'s excellent article on criticism but instead had talked about his own excellence, his insights, his warm feelings for art, and, most of all, his fairness, his conscience.

> He beats himself on the chest with unction […] swings himself up onto one of his high horses and exclaims: Just look at me! Here you see a critic without blame, a knight without anguish. […] Whoopee! Who would dare to step on the rails with me? Out of the way, columnists! Here rides a member of the higher columns, a critic ex professo, […] a judge, as infallible as fair. […]
>
> Mr. B—n was recently seen huffing under the weight of an enormous Negro. But this time, it looked as if the colossal tragedian with the weight of a millstone would threaten to drag the struggling critic down into the depths.

Ludvig's diatribe continued in this vein a bit longer with further examples of B—n's giant ego and dwarfish acuity as a theatre critic until it petered out with a plea that the public be left alone to form its own judgments on matters theatrical.[41]

The *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* dismissed this provocation as a contribution by one of the lost children of *Svenska Tidningen*'s light troops who lacked good sense and cleverness and expressed himself in a manner resembling that of a small boy bickering on the street.[42] The tenor of Ludvig's remarks as well as the tone in this response to them reveal that the critical debate about Aldridge's acting sparked by the *Aftonbladet*'s initial intervention had by now deteriorated into an intramural mudfight. It no longer focused on Aldridge. Instead, it had become an uncivil civil war between theatre critics who exchanged angry insults and abusive *ad hominem* attacks.

This was not an unusual phenomenon. It had happened in much the same way when Aldridge first appeared in Berlin, in January 1853, in Vienna a few months later, and afterwards in other large Continental cities with strong theatrical traditions and heightened artistic expectations. Critics had never seen anyone like Aldridge on stage before. More to the point, they had never seen these classic Shakespearean roles – not only Othello and Shylock but also Macbeth – performed the way Aldridge rendered them. It wasn't just the fact that he was black and spoke in English that set him apart. It was also the energy and passion he displayed in interpreting each character he represented so dramatically. As in Sweden, theatregoers in Germany were accustomed to seeing paler versions of Shakespeare's protagonists.

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[41] Ernst Ludvig, "Bref till en vän i Hufvudstaden," *Svenska Tidningen* (13 July 1857).

[42] Anon., "Tidnings-ofversigt," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (15 July 1857).

Among German critics there was often disagreement about whether Aldridge's "lurid" style was the product of nature or of art. Was it authentically African or theatrically British? One answer given was that it was natural because Africans were by nature theatrical. Another was that it was a learned art, proving that Africans could be educated and civilized if given an opportunity to develop their intellects and talents. A third opinion was that it was a perfect blend of native wildness and European restraint and polish.[43] The debates over such issues sometimes became very heated, pitting one group of critics against another. Aldridge, in such circumstances, became a disturbing theatrical presence, an actor who challenged conventional aesthetic notions, forcing critics to deal with something odd and unusual that they had never experienced before.

In Sweden there may have been an additional reason why Aldridge's performances, especially when playing Shylock, led to controversy. Ann Fridén has pointed out that when Carl Georg Dahlqvist had assumed this role at the Royal Theatre in 1854, his laudable restraint in make-up, costume, and action, and his portrayal of Shylock without any trace of caricature or cynicism,[44] had contributed to an ongoing debate on Jewish emancipation that resulted in the three upper classes voting for extended rights of settlement for Jews. Dahlqvist's dignified representation of Shylock could thus be construed as supporting the granting of such rights. When Aldridge arrived on the scene three years later and gave a similarly sympathetic interpretation of the role, he reinforced the position of those who favoured Jewish emancipation. "Thus, within a few years there were two clear examples of the fact that Shakespeare's dramas could be related to social problems of current interest in

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[43] Bernth Lindfors, "Ira Aldridge in Germany," *Wasafiri* 23.4 (December 2008): 8–11.

[44] These qualities of Dahlqvist's performance were discussed in Anon., "K. Teatern," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (2 March 1854).

Stockholm in the 1850s."[45] Whether Aldridge was aware of the contribution he was making to a local political issue in Sweden is uncertain. He was playing Shylock as he always played him: "calm, calculating, nervous, and impassioned throughout, with masterly dramatic discrimination."[46] His intense yet carefully crafted acting caused audiences to think differently and more deeply not only about Jews but also, simultaneously, about Africans.

So the appearance of Ira Aldridge on stage in Stockholm in the middle of the nineteenth century was an educational experience for all who saw him perform. But they saw him in only two of his major Shakespearean roles, in both of which he played characters who in Sweden would have been exotic outsiders, racial Others. Blacks and Jews were not numerous in Stockholm in the middle of the nineteenth century, and they certainly would not have blended in easily with the local population, so perceptions of them may have been based more on hearsay than on actual personal experience. Stereotypes of African brutishness and Jewish avarice may have been widespread, conditioning the public response to Aldridge and his representations of Othello and Shylock. Had Swedish theatregoers been able to see him as Macbeth or Richard III, or perhaps even as Mungo, his favorite farcical role in Isaac Bickerstaff's *The Padlock*, they no doubt would have been greatly impressed with his remarkable versatility, as audiences elsewhere in Europe had been.

Yet it may be significant that even his fiercest Swedish critics found something to admire in his acting. Despite his unnatural mannerisms, ugly animal-like noises, long pauses, and strange stresses, they still found moments in his portrayal of Othello to be "sublime." Similarly, in representing Shylock, he may have offered an interpretation that was at odds with what certain critics expected, but even those detractors had to admit that he had made a powerful impact on the audiences that flocked to see him.

Aldridge's performances in Stockholm won him many new fans, and his success there earned him an abundance of additional professional opportunities. Shortly after his return to England, London's *Sunday Times* reported that "Mr. Aldridge, on quitting Stockholm, was conducted to the quay by a great number of admiring friends. It is understood that engagements have been offered him in Russia and Denmark."[47] Indeed, within a few months he had embarked on his second major Continental tour, which took him to parts of Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Baltic countries, Prussia, and Russia. Stockholm turned out to be the launching pad that served to thrust him back into international orbit.[48]

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[45] Ann Fridén, "'Att vara eller inte vara': Shakespeare på kunglig scen i 1800-talets Stockholm," in *Den Svenska nationalscenen: Traditioner och reformer på Dramaten under 200 år*, ed. Clas Rosenqvist ([Höganäs]: Wiken, 1988): 105–106.

[46] Anon., "The 'African Roscius'," *Monmouthshire Merlin and South Wales Advertiser* (2 March 1844).

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[47] Anon., "Stockholm," *Sunday Times* (19 July 1857). See also Anon., "Swedish Theatricals," *The Era* (19 July 1857).

[48] I am grateful to Carol Rhoades, Eva Sahlstrom, and Raoul J. Granqvist for translating the Swedish sources quoted in this essay.

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“Who’ll get my library after I’m gone?”

An Interview with the Septuagenarian Afro-German Africanist Theodor Wonja Michael

Anne Adams

Theodor Wonja Michael is proud to be a Prussian. He is equally proud to be of Cameroonian nobility, indicated by his middle name, Wonja. Born in Berlin in 1925, he was the last of four children of a Cameroonian immigrant and his German wife, both of whom died, however, by the time the boy was eight years old. In spite of young Theodor’s intellectual interests, especially in learning about Africa, as a black person growing up in Nazi Germany, he was not allowed to pursue academic study. Like so many other Afro-Germans of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, he sometimes earned his living ‘on exhibit’ in Germany’s ethnic exhibitions, and later as a performer in German propaganda films set in Africa. Surviving the Nazi era and World War Two, he was later able to earn a degree with double concentration in sociology and economics, followed by a postgraduate year at the Institute of Overseas Studies in Paris. As a head of family, with a German wife and four children, Theodor Wonja Michael would eventually hold positions as editor of a weekly journalistic series about Africa, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and afterwards, for fifteen years, as African Development advisor for the German government. After retirement from the civil service, he spent many years on the theatre stage.

As the following interview makes clear, however, for all of his career working as an Africa ‘expert’, Theodor Michael did not have the benefit of any formal education about anything African. Rather, his interest in Africa emanates from his childhood memories, when his home was a hub of Afro-German community activity in Berlin, which had its origins in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when young men, largely from the German colonies, came to Germany for education and married German women. The elder Wonja Michael had hoped to repatriate to Cameroon with his family. Even though Theodor had begun, as a youth, to read books about Africa written by European explorers and researchers such as Leo Frobenius, it was the writings of African intellectuals that had a life-changing influence on him. The *Négritude* writings, particularly, of Senghor, as well as works by Nkrumah and numerous others, formed a critical component of his intellectual development as a young adult Afro-European. So he speaks, in the interview, about his independent study of Africa – this, in Germany from the 1950s through the 1980s. As a result, he amassed a collection of books, by Africans and Europeans, which numbered nearly 700 volumes. In addition to Frobenius, Senghor, and Nkrumah, they range from the most imperial German colonial studies, travel narratives, etc., through social scientific and literary writings of Fanon, Kenyatta, Césaire, Nyerere, Tutuola, Soyinka, Achebe, and numerous others. Some are in German; others are in their original French or English. They include, for example, Sembène's short stories, where Michael encountered "Le Mandat" [The Money Order], which remains one of his favourite literary pieces. They also include works by fourteen African statesmen, of whom nine would become heads of state. Through his readings from those combined, though eclectic, European and African sources, Theodor Michael came to be regarded as "the walking encyclopedia of African information," as he jokingly acknowledges in the interview.

Soon after his seventieth birthday, Michael decided he wanted to dispose of the collection in a manner that would maintain its integrity. After libraries such as at the late Janheinz Jahn's university at Mainz showed little interest except for some few individual volumes, Michael found the (younger) Bayreuth University, a rising institution in African studies in Germany, willing to take intact the collection of this Afro-German septuagenarian, even though, as the cordial acquisitions librarian said, his library already owned many of the books in the collection.

Lucky for me and my research in Afro-German cultural studies.

Ironically, however, the library did not see the gift as I did: as the collection of an Afro-German self-trained Africanist, hence, *an artifact of Afro-German history*. Consequently, the books were not catalogued as a collection at all. Rather, they were integrated into the library's catalogue and shelving system. When I learned about the gift and spoke with the acquisitions librarian, he was surprised but pleased (perhaps reassured) to learn that there was actual scholarly interest in that gift. But, unfortunately, it couldn't be retrieved from their catalogue. However, through a special effort he managed to have a list produced for me, which was uploaded onto the university's website for a brief week or so, to allow me to download. I also had time to peruse in the library issues of the journalistic publication series *Afrika Bulletin* and *Afrika Schnell-Brief* which Michael had edited.

I have written elsewhere a fuller analysis about the contents of the collection and the influence of those texts on Michael's identity as an Afro-German and about his writings in the two series.[1] The interview with Theodor Wonja Michael, recorded in 2002 when he was seventy-seven years old, discusses his book collection on and of Africa and his decision to donate it. Covering a time-span from his youth through his professional life as African Development advisor, the conversation touches upon the wide range of his thinking about Africa and about his relationship to it as an Afro-German.

The list of books in the collection written by Africans follows the interview as an appendix.

Interview with Theodor Wonja Michael in Cologne, Sunday, 5 May 2002.
This interview with Theodor Wonja Michael is being conducted at his home in Cologne. We want to chat about his book collection that he gave to the Bayreuth University Library, and other relevant topics.

AA: *What made you decide to give away your collection?*
TWM: It was a conscious decision. I had passed seventy and had pulled together this collection after the War. I had already been collecting a few books on Africa in previous years, but they were lost in the War. After the War I started over again collecting everything about Africa that I could get my hands on. At my age the question arises – I have four children – Who'll get my library after I'm gone? My children weren't really interested in the Africa collection. A couple of volumes perhaps, especially those that would be valued as classics. But, as for taking over the collection completely, there was no real interest on the part of either my children or my grandchildren.

Then I spoke with the children and told them I would give away the collection intact, to which they were all pretty much in agreement. That's one of the reasons the books came to be at Bayreuth. My interest was in donating the collection intact, not for some volumes to be plucked out and the rest left. I had first made the offer here [at the university] in Cologne and also sounded them out [at the university] in Mainz. There just wasn't a great deal of interest. 'Right, we'll take a look and see what's in there that we can use'. And that, of course, was not my objective.

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[1] Anne Adams, "'What Is Africa to Me?' Meanings of Africa for a 'First-Family' Afro-German," in *Kuvaka Ukama, Building Bridges: A Tribute to Flora Veit–Wild*, ed. Julius Heinicke, Hilmar Heister, Tobias Robert Klein & Viola Prüschenk (Heidelberg: Weiss, 2012): 49–72.

AA: *What is actually the value of this collection of books?*
TWM: The value of this collection, as you refer to it, lies in the fact that they would now be hard to get hold of. A lot of it is colonial literature, which people would probably be ashamed of today, if they were in the library at all. Some of it is pretty biased. The University of Bayreuth, one of the youngest universities in Germany, with a long African-studies tradition, appealed to me most in my search.

AA: *What were your expectations when you gave the collection to the university?*
TWM: Well, as I said before, I expected that this collection would remain intact, be recorded and designated as a gift. Nothing more than that. I was assured that, anytime I might have need of any of the books, I would, of course, have access in the University Library. I really wasn't expecting a whole lot, just a place where my library would be appropriately preserved.

AA: *As a scholar of African literature, African studies, and especially of Afro-German issues, I view this gesture of the gift of the books as more than a personal gesture, but, rather, as a piece of Afro-German history. Because in my view your collection is a self-directed African-studies curriculum before there was such a thing as '*Afrikanistik*' or different from* Afrikanistik*, before there was African studies, and for other motives than those generally considered in Germany for studying Africa, don't you agree? I view this gift as a piece of Afro-German history. What do you think?*
TWM: Quite right. We have to also take into account German history and the German social environment, the society to which I belong. That is, from the perspective of the underdog, the victim. I had always wanted to do research. And Africa was already an available subject because of my father, from whom I got a lot of African exposure, even though he died when I was only eight years old. So I had always had this interest in Africa. And as a child my relatives would give me books dealing with Africa, even, I might add, my relatives on my mother's side. And, as a child I dreamed of becoming an ethnologist. Unfortunately, those hopes were dashed because the Nazi laws forbade higher education, which was also why I couldn't get an *Abitur*. After

the War – I was already twenty – I couldn’t make up those years that were taken from me, and I couldn’t pick up my pursuits where I had left off.

So I carried on as a self-directed learner and ended up later on being managing editor of an Africa-related magazine called *Afrika-Bulletin* for five years, and was essentially the expert for Africa issues. But, as I said, it was self-taught, without the appropriate scholarly background that would be required today. In that regard it could definitely be regarded as a piece of Afro-German history. For I look upon colonial politics with both a German *and* an African eye. From that perspective the connection to Afro-German is important, because I’m not at all rooted in that colonial tradition but instead, that tradition is a component of my German-African existence.

I must add one remark: my heart naturally bled to see my library being carted away by Bayreuth University.

AA: *But you feel you made the right decision?*

TWM: Let’s put it this way: I don’t regret the decision. I’m assuming I made the right one. It’s impossible to know whether a decision is the right one; rather, we just have to feel confident that it was the right one. And if it was the wrong one – or should turn out to be wrong – I don’t know. In any case, I made it in consultation with my family.

AA: *You were just saying that further schooling was prohibited to you, that you weren’t able to attend university, or that you didn’t have the correct training to become an ethnologist. I think that perhaps May Opitz Ayim’s Master’s thesis could be a step in that direction [a generation later]. In spite of the fact that her thesis is in History rather than Ethnology, nevertheless it’s a step further in the study of Afro-Germans inspired and initiated by an Afro-German herself, similar to your own work or your collection. So I would view both of them together – the Master’s thesis that May Ayim completed and, of course, the book that grew out of it*[2] *– as a next step from your first steps.*

TWM: Yes, in fact the interesting thing is that I didn’t know May Ayim, just as she didn’t know me. We hadn’t met earlier. I lived in – how shall I say? – a completely non-Africa-related societal space. Our perspectives originated from different positions. I was actually able – or allowed, I should say now – to take up studies in Economics and Sociology in the 1950s.

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[2] May (Opitz) Ayim (1960–96) is regarded as the primary articulator of Afro-German consciousness, beginning in the mid-1980s. Her thesis at Regensburg University, “Afro-Germans: Their Cultural and Social History on the Background of Societal Change,” was published as part of the book *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, ed. Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz & Dagmar Schultz (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1986); *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, tr. Anne V. Adams (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1991).

AA: *Did you have to go back and do the* Abitur*?*
TWM: No, I had to take a qualifying exam, which at that time was possible at the so-called Akademie für Wirtschaft und Politik [Academy for Economics and Politics] in Hamburg, the only higher-education institution where – with all due credit – such was possible at that time. I was then a student of the young professor Ralf Dahrendorf, and the topic of my sociology thesis was, roughly: "The Integration of Illegitimate Children of Black American Soldiers and German Women." Dahrendorf was keenly interested in the topic, as was reflected in the mark. It dealt with the integration of black children into a white environment, a topic that I'm still engaged with. It's about the question of how black or dark-skinned people live in a white world where feelings run the gamut from indifference to antipathy.

AA: *I didn't know that you and May Ayim didn't know each other.*
TWM: Yes, we did meet later. But each [of us was] functioning in our own sphere.

AA: *Yes, that I did know. I didn't mean that her work had in any way been influenced by yours, but that you both had similar interests and that, completely independently of each other, you were moving on the same path, or a similar path. That's what I meant.*

Back to your books: Which works had the greatest influence on your thinking as a black person? Of the books you gave away, that is, from your valuable collection, which texts had the greatest influence on you?
TWM: That's simple. The older the materials are, the greater my scholarly curiosity. But what influenced me a lot – or made a great impression on me – was Heinrich Barth's description of his travels in Africa. And Heinrich Barth knew pre-colonial Africa! Others, such as Stanley, Peters, or Wissmann, fully embraced the conviction of European supremacy and hence described the continent the way they saw it. What followed was imperialism and colonialism and white supremacy, "which was supposed to change the world according to its ideas." What mattered to me was the attempt to understand how they thought, or to project myself into what those so-called Africa researchers and discoverers saw as Africa and its people at the time.

AA: *That was important, right?*

TWM: Absolutely – to see it as they saw it. We can't transfer the colonial mentality of supremacy to today's times. Back then, that was simply the thinking. In that regard, Houston Stewart Chamberlain comes to mind or, even earlier, Gobineau, et al. But then there were researchers who judged people with black skin quite differently: physician and ethnologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, for example, who saw black people in neutral or even positive terms. European slavery, or slavery carried out by Europeans, led, of course, to a shift in conceptualizing the world, in that all of a sudden the white race was the fact by which all other non-white human beings were measured.

AA: *In an earlier conversation you spoke about Leo Frobenius – he's from a later period, of course. But I was interested in your opinion that Frobenius laid the basis for* Négritude*. How do you see his role in the context of Black Consciousness or of* Négritude *itself?*

TWM: Leo Frobenius, who died already in 1937, was a nineteenth-century man with an extraordinary thirst for knowledge. Frobenius did not finish high school – a totally unknown fact – he never did 'formal' university studies, never sat in a lecture hall, but instead acquired his knowledge by reading old Africanist scholars. Now, we know that those old scholars did not approach the subject from a neutral position. Frobenius made several trips to Africa and collected materials. Frobenius was an obsessive collector; he collected everything there was about Africa. And what he primarily collected were stories. He collected stories. He recorded what was told to him. I can only imagine the tedious job – it was all done by hand then – and there are some errors in the manuscripts. What kind of translators did he have? I don't even know if he spoke any foreign language. Let's assume he knew English and French, but what kind of native translators did he have? What did they transmit to him? Imagine the lies they must have conjured up! (*Laughs*) So that's why those materials are of great interest today.

But I want to come back to his obsession for collecting. The number of stories that he wrote down is enormous. His volumes are well known; they fill up a whole bookcase on African stories. And Leo Frobenius wrote a very important book, *Die Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* [Cultural History of Africa], which was translated into other languages, including French. And in France at the time there were young blacks from the colonies attending university. Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Léopold Sédar Senghor were two who had read this book. There's this famous quotation from Senghor, where he said, "This man has given us back our identity." He devoured Frobenius. And Frobenius comes up repeatedly in Senghor's writings. But Senghor never saw

Leo Frobenius; those Africans in Paris never met him. At some point after 1933 or 1934, Leo Frobenius moved to Italy and was never heard from again in German scholarly life. Most likely he became unpopular with the advent of the Nazi era. Although his books on Africa weren't forbidden, they were no longer read, no one was interested in them any longer. And so, he was, of course, 'out'.

AA: *Where was his institute?*
TWM: Actually, it wasn't a real institute. In 1932 Frobenius became honorary professor of the University of Frankfurt and simultaneously director of the Municipal Museum for Folklore. [The Leo Frobenius Institute has only been in existence since 1946.] He went on with his work and no one took any notice of this man. I think this is Frobenius's contribution, of which he was totally unaware. He never knew how popular he was among Africans in France. In Germany Frobenius wasn't taken seriously. He saw things in Africa that other researchers didn't see. It wasn't until after the War that he was really taken seriously, when his book *Die Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* was republished.

AA: *And the fact that he didn't have 'proper' academic training was yet another reason that he wasn't taken seriously.*
TWM: 'How can a person exist in the academic world if he has no academic training?' Such was the attitude of the scholarly establishment.

AA: *Getting back to the black writers, I saw less of Césaire in your collection than of Senghor. Or perhaps I should put it differently: which of the earlier black thinkers influenced your thinking the most? For example, I didn't see anything of Du Bois.*
TWM: Yes, that's quite a different matter. The ones I read were less the Americans than the Africans.

AA: *Although Du Bois wrote a lot about the black world, right?*
TWM: Absolutely. *The World and Africa* and other such works. For me Du Bois was relatively insignificant, because that concerned Americans, and the Americans weren't relevant to me at that time. They were there, but somewhat like the blacks of the West Indies. They existed, and that was it. The Americans are sort of like cousins to me, being also in the social position of the underdog here in Germany. At least that's the view of many of my white compatriots. Of course, in the beginning, when the Americans came to Germany, I read Richard Wright and Langston Hughes. His poems are just marvellous, aren't they? Then, of course, James Baldwin, too. Sure, I read

them, but they just didn't have any great significance for me, but rather the Africans. And *Négritude* and everything about it just absolutely fascinated me.

AA: *Well, yes, that was contemporaneous for you, wasn't it?*
TWM: That's right, after the War. And *Négritude* particularly because it was an aid in the search for my identity: 'Where do I belong?' Certainly, you've observed, I belong in the German cultural sphere, in the German linguistic sphere and am nevertheless an 'outsider', or, put another way, I'm often seen as an outsider although that's not at all how I feel. But the backlash is felt, of course. And in that respect *Négritude* was very helpful.

Just like me, Senghor and Aimé Césaire, too, lived in their respective European-based society. Senghor, even though he wrote an incredible amount about *Négritude*, was a Frenchman. It's funny, but he was. In his whole way of thinking he was French. In fact, he was a French officer and, what is largely unknown, he co-authored and edited the constitution of the Fourth Republic. Because he, as a high-school teacher of French, had such perfect mastery of the language, it was he who put the finishing touches on the last version. This is largely unknown.

AA: *How did you come to know it?*
TWM: Well, I just know it! As I said before, I used to be considered the walking encyclopedia of African information.

AA: *Weren't you in France during the War?*
TWM: No, I wasn't in France; I was here in Germany. My siblings – a sister was hiding in France and didn't get caught, and a brother, who, having fled to the Foreign Legion, was gone. But I caught the whole brunt of the Third Reich.

AA: *Since both of your parents were dead, weren't they? Who were you living with?*
TWM: I was with foster parents, Moroccans – he was Moroccan, she was German. They were circus folks. It wasn't until 1960 that I studied in France.

AA: *Where?*
TWM: In Paris, at the Institut des Hautes Études d'Outre-Mer.

AA: *I'd be interested to know whether your readings on Africa were connected with your studies, whether you discovered most of the texts yourself, or, in the course of your studies – either in France or later in Hamburg – you formally studied anything about Africa.*

TWM: No, not at all. There was no such thing. You know yourself how it is in the academic world. African studies in German consisted of African languages. Period. And that was it for Africa in the humanities.

AA: *But wasn't it the case that, after the War, there were other disciplines like African ethnology, African sociology, economics, etc.?*
TWM: Certainly, there were the natural-science disciplines. Agronomy, forestry. There was an Institute for that at Witzleben. But in the academic sphere they were strictly separated. Languages were here, history was there, and sociology was over there. Period! What the linguists were doing was of no interest whatsoever to the historians. And what the literature scholars were doing didn't interest the sociologists, either. In fact, it's been, let's say, conservatively, in the last twenty or twenty-five years that we have those interdisciplinary disciplines that overlap with each other. I have to say that formal studies basically did not help in my Africa focus at all. The only thing that I gained from it was the methodology for approaching the material. 'How do we approach it, how do we proceed?' That's what you learn. There was no possibility for Africanist study. I missed that in France, also.

AA: *You studied a bit of linguistics, too, didn't you?*
TWM: Yes, Swahili, but I only wanted it for professional reasons. I had thought that I might go to East Africa, and would then have a language advantage. Today, if I were still young – which I'm not – I'd take Arabic.

AA: *Yes, Arabic is spoken in a very large area.*
TWM: It's a language that you can say that young Afro-people – whatever might come behind the hyphen – should learn Arabic, in addition to the great world languages. Because it's a language that is growing and will continue to develop.

AA: *You later worked for the German government in Africa for several years, didn't you? Did you already have most of your Africa knowledge before that, or during, or afterward, or all together? And did you collect some of the books in Africa? Probably not too many, right?*
TWM: I learned something from Frobenius, which was about lifelong learning, one of his basic precepts. Learning by doing. And I have to say I'm still learning up to today. I've learned immensely from my children and grandchildren. And I still can't say 'By a certain point I had this', but, rather, it was lifelong learning.

AA: *So, your knowledge about Africa you gained partly through your experiences in Africa and partly —*
TWM: — research and stories and legends from Africans, who would recount historical events to me from their perspective.

AA: *After reading about Africa in books, how were your impressions of the continent changed?*
TWM: Little, actually. Just one thing that I would mention: the year 1960, the dawning of the decade of Independence. Ghana was free earlier, in '57 already. I admired people like Nkrumah very much. For me Ghana was an exception, a positive exception. Then I was confronted with the European reports about the so-called atrocities in the Congo. I was aware during the Lumumba situation. From my vantage point the European colonial powers had a lot to do with the developments in the colonies, because they made incredible errors.

AA: *Which African countries did you work in?*
TWM: I worked in Nigeria, Ghana, and Niger. I was in Niger a little over four years straight, except for vacations.

AA: *Tell me about your work. It was economic planning, wasn't it?*
TWM: Economic planning, right, and studying what had become of projects that had been initiated with great fanfare and crumbled afterwards. I learned something out of it, which was that some things, no matter how well planned, simply do not work; they are not going to succeed. I remember a conversation in a very high circle where I was to lay out my idea, which I did: 'This will proceed in this and that manner, so that …'. Next to me was sitting a government official, gray-haired, probably already fifty years in civil service after starting out as an office messenger, later becoming an official. He looked at me and said "Insha Allah!" At that moment I thought: 'How insignificant you are in the scheme of things!' (*Laughs*)

AA: *Well, he had the more realistic perspective, didn't he?*
TWM: Absolutely! I hadn't even given it any thought, except for 'It's clear, isn't it?' At university you learn: 'When this happens, then that happens, and then this follows, and it proceeds in like manner'. (*Laughs*) But there you fall off your high horse, right to the ground.

AA: *That's African wisdom, right?*
TWM: Yes, that's really the way it is. You can plan all you want, but it's going to go differently.

AA: *You said earlier that you worked and interacted with different groups of people in the African countries, right? Civil servants, certainly, but rural people otherwise?*
TWM: To a lesser extent, because of language limitations, you know. I've often heard it said from the African side, 'Yes, we have brothers in America. Why don't they come and help us over here?' You just have to say, 'They'd gladly come and help, but would you folks really welcome that?'

AA: *Yes, those are the two sides of it, aren't they?*
TWM: When the first Cameroonian ambassador came to Germany after Independence, I went to the embassy just to say hello. I gave my name and my reason for coming. So the fellow embraces me with joy and says: "One of our lost sons!" I say, "Lost son?" Well, not exactly, but someone who is still spiritually connected to Cameroon. So then I had to hear, not from the boss, the ambassador, but from other Cameroonians, that here I was hanging out in Europe, living well, and totally forgetting that I really ought to go back home. My question, naturally: 'Where is my home?' And that I'm doing well here even though I'm needed down in Cameroon. I say, "Oh? I'm needed there? For what?" "Well, to help build the country."

That thing stayed with me for a long time. Then I thought about how it would be in reality: O.K., I'd get down there and say, 'I'd like to get involved here'. So then they'd say, 'Where?' I'd say, 'Well, I don't know. Wherever I'm placed'. So there sits somebody who thinks about it and says: 'Where can he be useful to me?' And they put me there. And with my Prussian concept of fulfilling responsibility, I would carry it out and would realize that, first of all, I'm being exploited, secondly, that I'm in the wrong position, and I'd say something about it. I'd say, 'Just a minute. No, this won't do'. And right away they'd accuse me of something, and where would I end up? In prison! That's how it would look in reality. We always have to figure on the human factor. The human factor is unpredictable!

AA: *I'm reminded of what Kwame Nkrumah said. He invited his brothers and sisters from the diaspora to come to Ghana and told them: "Come and help build this country." Do you think that would have been realistic?*
TWM: No, I don't think so.

AA: *But a few did go. That's how Du Bois went and a few others.*
TWM: But Du Bois wasn't able to accomplish anything.

AA: *True, besides he was already —*

TWM: — pretty old. No, Du Bois wasn't able to accomplish anything. I think that was the disappointment of his last years. What interests me is whether he really wanted to return to the USA. There must be letters where he articulated this. Nkrumah was a man of vision. Nkrumah had the vision of a united – or, put differently, of a unified – sub-Saharan Africa. (The northern part actually belongs to the Mediterranean area, a different region again.) But he had this concept of a unified sub-Saharan African space. But I don't think he saw himself necessarily as its head. Rather, I think he just had the vision that something marvellous would be born from it. And I think that, since his reputation was as a Pan-Africanist, he wasn't thinking primarily about Ghana, but about pan-Africa. That was the main accusation that his country made against him.

AA: *That his vision was greater than his reality.*
TWM: And the reality is Ghana. Really, Nkrumah thought at first in African dimensions. There is the famous Africa House in Accra that he built, in which each country of Africa would have a room. It stood empty for years. But such was the concept of a house in which all the representatives of Africa are housed. But not as embassies, but as peaceful reality.

AA: *I'd like to hear a little about your own writings. I know you headed a magazine,* Afrika Bulletin*, correct?*
TWM: Right, *Afrika Bulletin* was something that came out in the years when Africa was still popular in Germany. Published by a press in Bonn, it received official funds to make Africa popular. Then came a change in government, which didn't consider it so important and cancelled the funding.

AA: *Which years was that?*
TWM: It was the years from 1966 to '71, the 'good years' and the years when there was still money, and then that was discontinued.

AA: *And where was it based? In Bonn?*
TWM: Yes, in Bonn and, among other things, I worked together with the editors of the Deutsche Welle,[3] who also wrote a lot. As I said, I was editor-in-chief. We produced a publication each week, alternating: *Afrika Bulletin* came every two weeks; and every other week the so-called *Afrika Schnell-Brief* [Africa News Dispatch]. *Afrika Bulletin* contained articles from all fields: political, economic, cultural. That's how we pulled it together, wherever we found something; we wrote quite a few political essays and commentaries.

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[3] Deutsche Welle is a radio network roughly analogous to the Voice of America.

And the *Afrika Schnell-Brief*, that was news from Africa: short, little interesting news items from all the countries of Africa.

AA: *You headed up both?*
TWM: I headed up both. And it was a job that made my hair stand on end.

AA: *But one that you enjoyed?*
TWM: Oh, enormously! I enjoyed it very much. I have to say, I learned the most there. But, of course, it has to do with lifelong learning; one should never stop learning. I even wrote a few short stories that weren't really so political but personal.

AA: *Did you also write articles for the* Bulletin?
TWM: Of course, at least every week I had to write a lead article and every week a political essay.

AA: *But have others of your writings been edited or published?*
TWM: No, they're not published. I didn't place much value on it, because I would otherwise be too restricted. I'm supposed to write my memoirs and will certainly do so, although they won't be memoirs but, rather, recollections.

AA: *What's the difference?*
TWM: Oh, there is a difference: Memoirs are chronological; recollections, you can pile together, play around with the arrangement.

AA: *Precisely because they're recollections you could write them down individually?*
TWM: Right, I've already made a start. And my family especially and Hans Massaquoi[4] are constantly asking me: "When will you ever get going on it?"

AA: *Did you two know each other back then? You didn't, did you?*
TWM: No, we didn't know each other. Massaquoi grew up in an 'Afro-free' social space. He had no connections whatsoever to any Africans, after the departure of his father and grandfather. Massaquoi's male role model was not his father but his grandfather, the consul general in Hamburg. He was the role model.

AA: *Yes, that's right. His mother either lived in the grandfather's house* […]

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[4] Hans Massaquoi, the son of a Liberian father and German mother, emigrated to the USA and later published his autobiography *Destined to Witness*: *Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), which was subsequently published in German as *"Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger!" Meine Kindheit in Deutschland* (Bern: Fretz & Wasmuth, 1999).

TWM: No, they lived together in the big house on Elbchaussee in Hamburg. She was the son's fiancée. He was studying in Dublin, and she was a nurse. It never reached to point of marriage. Back then, to be a single mother, was quite a problem in the social environment. And there were several unfortunate factors that came together: namely, that the grandfather was recalled, replaced by someone else, or else he was called upon by his people to run for the presidency. Undoubtedly a matter of great importance. Except that here an issue that plays a big role is that of political factions. To eliminate someone as a candidate, you pin something on him, any kind of concocted story. So he and his son go to prison. In the meantime the elections are over, he's released; it's all over, it wasn't anything. 'Sorry, well, you've been cleared of the charges'. That's how things went in those days and still do. Hans's mother would most likely have been supported by the family if the grandfather had returned as expected and had become president. Instead, he was thrown in prison and had nothing – came out, and everything the family had had was gone. As a result Hans Massaquoi grew up in dire poverty. And, Massaquoi didn't become Massaquoi until after the War, when he went searching for his father. Here in Germany everything was destroyed, torn apart. He looked for his father; he knew from his mother that he was a Liberian, and he went there. There was a German songstress, an Afro-German singer (can't remember her name);[5] she's a legitimate daughter of the grandfather. But her name isn't Massaquoi.

AA: *Oh, yes, I know from the book that Hans's father had a sister or two sisters, who were also students in Germany or in England.*

TWM: Yes, but it's not them, it's another one. She has been totally forgotten and died a year or two ago here in Germany. […] That generation will die out with me, you see? That generation, of the colonials (I myself am already the second generation), but my generation still has memories about the father and back into the colonial times. When we die, without having left anything behind, then it will be very bad. For our children don't know anymore.

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[5] This sister was Fasia Jansen (1929–97), a performer on behalf of peace causes, who has been memorialized through a foundation, the Fasia-Jansen-Stiftung.

Appendix

Selected Works by Africans in the Collection of Theodor Wonja Michael (out of ca. 60 titles by recognizably African authors)

Works by pan-African statesmen

Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (1963).
——, *Challenge of the Congo* (1967).
——, *Schwarze Fanfare* (*The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*) (1958).
——, *Sprung über zwei Jahrtausende* (*I Speak of Freedom*) (1963).
Kwesi Armah, *Africa's Golden Road* (1965).
Tom Mboya, *Afrika: Freiheit – und nachher?* (*Freedom and After*) (1966).
Julius Nyerere, *Afrikanischer Sozialismus* (*African Socialism*) (1972).
Félix Houphouet–Boigny, *Biafra: Ein menschliches Problem, eine menschliche Tragödie* (1968).
Mobutu Sese Seko, *De la légalité à la légitimité* (1966).
——, *Le Président Mobutu vous parle: 24 novembre 1965-24 novembre 1966* (1966).
Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*) (1958).
Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya* (1961).
Muammar Qadaffi, *The Green Book* (1975).
Kenneth Kaunda, *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to Its Implementation* (1968).
Moïse Tshombe, *Il faut sauver le Congo* (*The Congo Must Be Saved*) (1964).
Fulbert Youlou, *J'accuse la Chine* (1966).
Albert Luthuli, *Mein Land, Mein Leben* (*Let My People Go*) (1962).
Doudou Thiam, *The Foreign Policy of African States* (1965).
Frantz Fanon, *Die Verdammten dieser Erde* (*The Wretched of the Earth*) (1969).
The African Summit in Monrovia (1961).
Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Afrika und die Deutschen* (*Négritude et Germanisme*) (1968).

Literary works by African authors

Ferdinand Oyono, *Der alte Neger und die Medaille* (*The Old Man and the Medal*) (1950.
Camara Laye, *Dramouss* (*A Dream of Africa*) (1967).
Ousmane Sembène, *Voltaïque* (1976).
——, *Véhi-Ciosane ou Blanche-genèse suivi du Mandat* (1979).
Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (1975).
Richard Rive, ed., *Modern African Stories* (1964).
Chinua Achebe, *Okonkwo, oder das Alte stürzt* (*Things Fall Apart*) (1959).
Amos Tutuola, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954).
——, *Der Palmweintrinker* (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*) (1955).

Cyprian Ekwensi, *The Passport of Mallam Ilia* (1968).
Peter Abrahams, *Wilder Weg* (*Wild Conquest*) (1952).
Wole Soyinka, *Zeit der Gesetzlosigkeit* (*Season of Anomy*) (1981).
Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Tam-Tam Schwarz* (poems translated by Janheinz Jahn) (1955).

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Massaquoi, Hans. *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), tr. as *"Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger!" Meine Kindheit in Deutschland* (Bern: Fretz & Wasmuth, 1999).

Oguntoye, Katharina, May Opitz & Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1986), tr. by Anne V. Adams as *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992).

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Into the Heart of Whiteness

Performing *African Moon* in Krefeld: Gabriel Gbadamosi in Conversation

CHRISTINE MATZKE

The year 2012 saw the world premiere of *African Moon* by the British playwright Gabriel Gbadamosi at the Theater Krefeld/Mönchengladbach. The playhouse is a typical German municipal repertory theatre with a permanent ensemble catering to three areas of the performing arts – opera, ballet, and theatre – and predominately serves the two eponymous cities located near Düsseldorf in the heart of North Rhine–Westphalia. *African Moon* was specifically commissioned by the theatre department in addition to (though not part of) their 'non-European theatre' stream introduced by the director of drama, Matthias Gehrt. The production is the last venture in a string of collaborations between Gbadamosi and Gehrt which started with *Eshu's Faust* (1992) at Jesus College, Cambridge, and continued with *Hotel Orpheu* (1994) at the Schaubühne in Berlin. Gehrt joined the Theater Krefeld/Mönchengladbach in the 2010/11 season after over two decades of national and international theatre work which included the Schaubühne, the Prince Regent's Theatre Munich, and productions in Lagos, Sri Lanka, and Mexico; Gbadamosi is an Irish-Nigerian poet, playwright, essayist, novelist, researcher, and broadcaster, and a Londoner. As such, he has always explored the intersections and interactions between European and African (diasporic) perspectives and performance forms in his work, as indicated by play titles such as *Eshu's Faust* (Cambridge University, 1992), *No Blacks, No Irish* (Tricycle Theatre, London, 1986), and *Shango* (DNA, Amsterdam, 1997). *African Moon* is also located at this intersection, with allusions to a string of European colonial narratives, above all Joseph Conrad's

Heart of Darkness.[1] As in Conrad's classic, the continent becomes a foil for the projections of white European expatriates and travellers in the play, a canvas for their dreams and desires, but also their wrongdoings and failures. *African Moon* thus performs a journey into the conscience and subconscious of the protagonists, between cliché and brutal reality, between lies and truthful confessions. For the play is above all a play about the search for one's self, projected onto an 'African' space and employing – or enjoying? – the construct of an African 'Other'.

African Moon at the Theater Krefeld / Mönchengladbach: Marianne Kittel as Nora, Joachim Henschke as 'Uncle' Paul (photographer: Matthias Stutte).

African Moon centres on the female protagonist, Nora, "a broken heart"[2] who arrives at a small mission hospital in an unspecified, isolated part of the

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[1] See Stefan Keim, "Reise ins Herz der Finsternis (3/6/2012)," *Welt Online*, http://www.welt.de/print/wams/nrw/article106409218/Reise-ins-Herz-der-Finsternis.html (accessed 4 June 2012).

[2] Gabriel Gbadamosi, "African Moon," playscript (MS, 2nd draft, 2012). Further page references are in the main text.

African continent to visit the director of the clinic, Dr Paul Koenig. Koenig – or 'Uncle Paul' – is the adored but distant uncle of Nora's late lover, Amy, and is her surrogate father figure. Amy died of cancer two years previously, and Nora is finally ready to scatter her ashes and face her lover's thwarted dreams. Amy, whose death left an indelible void in Nora's life, is an absent presence in the play but remains the driving force in the present. Nora's relationship to her lover mirrors Amy's relationship to Uncle Paul. After the suicide of Amy's father when she was nine, Uncle Paul had briefly taken her father's place, only to abandon the girl for a hospital somewhere in Africa. For the remaining thirty years of Amy's life, 'Africa' and 'Uncle Paul' had turned into the canvas of fantasies and unfulfilled needs – "Only ever camouflage for the real jungle of unmanageable feelings" (17) – and had given rise to unanswered questions for which Nora is now trying to find the answers.

Nora is a traveller of emotions rather than of place and quite ignorant about the African continent: "I'm in *Africa* – Africa – It's night – I'm at the airport – Everybody's black – Everybody – You should see" (2). On her arrival she meets a reality she had not anticipated. Instead of Amy's fantasy fairyland she encounters a group of disillusioned, cynical white men and begins to uncover a plot that involves a vaccination programme with counterfeit medicines which causes a strange illness among children. An element of crime is thus added to the overarching emotional drama of mourning and loss. Locals call the disease "*African Moon* – because it makes them look wild, like animals with blank faces" (19). Like Amy – and Uncle Paul in Amy's life – the African population remains an absent presence in the play, and, as in Conrad's novel, we only encounter them as shadows and hearsay fragments. (Here, an essay from the great Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe on *Heart of Darkness* comes to my mind: "Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his [in this case: her] peril."[3]) While African characters as "human factors" are indeed missing from the stage, there is a "human factor" involved, in that the disease also affects the child that Martin, the white nursing officer, has with a local woman. Martin comes across as an angst-ridden do-gooder, well-meaning but weak-willed. Having escaped his narrow surroundings in Germany to become “someone” in Africa (post-performance discussion 4 July 2012), he now pays a heavy price for his corruption. In the course of the play it transpires that it was Martin who dabbled with the medicines to generate an extra income for his family. Koenig has commissioned the journalist David, “an old Africa hand, a motor-cycle cowboy” (1) to enquire into the matter. As the play progresses, more and more truths are laid bare, largely through Nora’s relentless questions, less so through David’s actual enquiry: financial mismanagement of the clinic, emotional confusion (Uncle Paul is Amy’s biological father), sexual misconduct between Europeans and Africans, and a war in a neighbouring village. All this adds to the complexity of the play, but also to the feeling that there is a tendency to take on too many issues. Indeed, when I talked to the cast and the director after the show, actors told me they had grappled with its thematic overabundance. The only things missing, they joked, were “child soldiers, Aids, blood diamonds, and James Bond” (post-performance discussion 4 July 2012). According to Gehrt, one of the core tasks of the creative team had been to reduce rather than develop the issues addressed in the play.

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[3] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1975), in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (1988; Garden City NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1990): 12.

I was able to watch the last performance of *African Moon* in the 2011/12 season – on 4 July 2012 – at the Fabrik Herder in Krefeld.[4] A converted wallpaper factory built in the early nineteen-hundreds, Fabrik Herder now serves as a multi-purpose cultural centre which, among other activities, hosts a local children’s theatre and the fringe professional dance scene of Krefeld. The factory has two studio stages which seem ideal for the workshop format in which the play was produced. Having had the opportunity to read the second draft of *African Moon* prior to the show (not the final stage version in a German translation), I found the dramatic text skilfully translated onto the stage. The non-naturalistic set by Elissa Bier consisted of a simple red cross covering the stage, indicating the clinic surroundings but also suggestive of the ‘red earth’ found in many parts of the African continent. Empty bottles of gin were lined up on stage – symbolic of the desolate surroundings – with few props interspersed; cheap white plastic chairs and a long table eventually turned the evening meal into the iconography of the Last Supper (with allusions to the social collapse in Brecht’s *The Wedding*). Ingenious was the use of suspended loudspeakers over the stage – a threatening presence, especially when in motion – which seemed to emit what some reviewers have called “jungle sounds,"[5] thus helping project an idea of 'Africa' clearly recognizable as a projection. (This was compounded by the actual stuffiness and heat in the auditorium on that night; one elderly woman had to be led out by her family half-way through the performance, as she was feeling faint.) Commendable also the performances of the actors: Marianne Kittel as the blond avenging angel of the play, naive, grieving, but growing and toughening up in the course of the play; Joachim Henschke as the aging, sinister, enigmatic Paul Koenig – a "dark and dangerously attractive man" (13); Christopher Wintgens as the timid nursing officer Martin (and a very eloquent discussant after the show); Felix Banholzer as David, the handsome, cynical motor-cycle cowboy who also happens to be an ex-cleric (1). (This was one of the traits I found less believable, not so much from the performance as from the initial conception of the part.) Gbadamosi has thus created characters that correspond to certain (neo-)colonial archetypes that lead us straight into the 'heart of whiteness'. In this isolated community of white German expatriates everything seems to revolve around the search for self; the running of the clinic seems somewhat secondary. Martin, for example, only feels needed in "somewhere smaller, wetter, hotter, darker" (11) than the small hometown he has left behind. David has mutated from missionary to macho. Nora changes costumes to play with who she is: initially in typical female tourist gear, a beautiful floral-green shoulder neck dress; 'performing' Amy in her late lover's evening gown at the communal supper or donning a trench-coat on her departure from Africa which seems to highlight her role as investigator. Nora is the only character who goes through some form of development in the course of the play. She is the one to arrive and leave. Those remaining in Africa remain stagnant; their various misdeeds are being swept under the carpet. The two short essays in the theatre programme equally address these themes. In "Vom Verlust des Selbst in der Fremde" [On the Loss of Self in Distant Parts], Jens

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[4] The play was scheduled to move to the Theater Mönchengladbach in the coming season, a rather different and more conventional theatre space.

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[5] Agnes Absalom, "Uraufführung 'African Moon': Intensiver Trip in den afrikanischen Dschungel" (4 June 2012), *Westdeutsche Zeitung Newsline* (), http://www.wz-newsline .de/lokales/krefeld/kultur/urauffuehrung-african-moon-intensiver-trip-in-den-afrikanischen-dschungel-1.1004942 (accessed 12 June 2012); Guido Rademachers, "Urwaldtrip mit Seelenstrip," http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option =com_content& view=article&id=6998 :african-moon-gabriel-gbadamosi-versorgt-das-theater-krefeld-mit-einer-reise-ins-herz-der-finsternis&catid=38:die-nachtkritik& Itemid=40 (accessed 4 June 2012); Antje van Bürck, "Afrika – durch die westliche Brille gesehen" (3 June 2012), http://theaterpur.net/theater/schauspiel/2012/06/krefeld -african-moon .html (accessed 12 June 2012).

Clausen identifies the constitution of identity and autonomy through experiences of uncertainty and strangeness as the key motif of "heroic travelling" in literature.[6] Gbadamosi goes even further, linking the individual search to a communal quest for German identity. In his untitled contribution, he writes about the need for another 'Other' since reunification, after the loss of 'other' Germans across the border.[7] 'Africa' becomes the new 'Other' in his play, which precludes any genuine enquiry into the relationships between Africans and Germans:

> No wonder you'd lose sight of Africa, that "other" continent. When Africans become phantoms of one's own savage past. In this way they very well serve in a conceptual "gap" created by the loss of the "other." It is hard to conceive how to be humanitarian to ghosts who, from their side, sensing this problem, hardly ever put in an appearance.[8]

The following exchange was initiated in May 2012 and conducted in December 2012 between London and Bayreuth, largely in the form of a questionnaire. Regrettably, Matthias Gehrt had to pull out at very short notice owing to pressing commitments at the Theater Krefeld/Mönchengladbach.

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Gabriel, your collaboration with Matthias Gehrt goes back at least a couple of decades. Many of your plays were first produced by Matthias, many of them in German. Could you please share some of your working history with us?

Matthias approached me on the set of my play *Abolition* (1989, Paines Plough/Bristol Old Vic) at the Young Vic theatre in London. We played a game of me pretending not to be the writer and asking what he thought, having seen the production and him pretending he wasn't sure, either. We became collaborators when I asked him to direct *Eshu's Faust* (1992) when I was a writing Fellow at Cambridge. It went down astonishingly well. He returned the invitation by directing *Hotel Orpheu* (1994) in German with English at the Schaubühne in Berlin. That did not go well, but Matthias's international theatre career took off in Nigeria, Mexico and elsewhere, as well as in Germany, and we kept in touch. *African Moon* (2012) was Matthias's idea for revisiting our collaboration: a play about Africa for a German audience with actors from the Krefeld theatre ensemble.

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[6] Jens Clausen, "Vom Verlust des Selbst in der Fremde," in Anon., *African Moon: Uraufführung von Gabriel Gbadamosi*, Programme, Issue 54, Theater Krefeld/Mönchengladbach (Season 2011/12): 19.

[7] Gabriel Gbadamosi, "[16 May 2012]" in Anon., *African Moon,* 9. (Undated reply by email to a set of questions by the dramaturge Leona Benneker, forwarded 19 August 2012.)

[8] Gbadamosi, "[16 May 2012]." It should be noted that the last sentence quoted here was not translated in the programme.

Gabriel Gbadamosi (picture courtesy of the author)

I have had access to the second draft of the playscript, not the version that was eventually staged. In the process of rehearsing the play, Matthias Gehrt, the dramaturge, Leona Benneker, and the actors continued to work on it. When I first read the script, I found it somewhat overloaded; the final production was much more reduced. Could you please let me in on the production process as far as your involvement was concerned?

The director in Germany, I was told, takes your text and breaks it down to see how it's made, then gives you the pieces and asks you to break it down some more. I wrote a cluttered play to give the director and actors plenty of material to throw about, but to consider whether they should reject it. Matthias prepares with close reading, but works with text primarily on the rehearsal floor to see what does and does not work for him. He asked me to take a plot-line out, which I did (many of the plot-lines and, indeed, characterizations and relationships work on a principle of doubling, which is itself unstable and destabilizing when the director and actors, and the audience, try to get the story straight); he then asked that he and the actors be allowed to make free with the text, to chop and change it: I was delighted that they made their own production out of the raw material of the script with its overabundance (or overloading) of mirroring structures and deliberate doubles. I was not present for rehearsals but communicated some strategic ideas I felt might be helpful in conversational feedback with the dramaturge, Leona Benneker.

When I first read the manuscript, and again when I'd seen the play, images of Joseph Conrad's colonial classic Heart of Darkness *came to my mind, as did scenes from George Orwell's* Burmese Days.

Conrad and Orwell are important English-language writers about the implicit violence of the colonial project from the perspective of the colonizer. Frantz Fanon gives a French-language account of the same from the perspective of the colonized. Heiner Müller, whom I met and with whom I exchanged an interesting dumb-show of mutual incomprehension, gave me my handle on a German equivalent in referring to Germans in the period of Soviet and Allied occupation as being like American Indians hiding out in their own country, pointing particularly to the rituals of violence in the western novel of Friedrich von Gagern, *Der Marterpfahl*. I was reminded of Brecht's use of Kipling's stories set in India under colonial rule. Conrad, of course, has his lush, filmic resurgence in Marlon Brando's portrayal of Mister Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* to bring him to most people's minds, and the actor playing Dr Paul [Joachim Henschke] did a marvellous pastiche of Marlon Brando in that part.

There also seem to be allusions to Ibsen in the play, in theme rather than content. The female protagonist is called Nora, and much of the happenings centre around her need to find out who she really is after her lover's death. She also grows, and grows up, during the course of the play. Secondly, there are 'ghosts' haunting the various characters; Nora is haunted by Amy after her death, as was Paul Koenig during her lifetime. For David, the African population are "Daylight ghosts. You see their shadows, walking. You turn to see them, you get blinded by the sun. But you have this feeling all the time, *they're watching you"* (21). *And, finally, after the concluding showdown with Amy, David notices that Paul Koenig doesn't look too good: "You look like you've seen a ghost"* (28). *Again, any comments?*

Ibsen, and the Strindberg of *The Ghost Sonata*, are European playwrights I still worry about, although objections to Ibsen in particular, working in bad faith with his audiences for much of his middle career, are deafening. James Joyce liked him, and though I was unable to deal on the page with the stilted melodrama of his Ibsen-inspired play *Exiles*, I have heard of a production involving Harold Pinter and my late father-in-law, the actor John Wood, that worked like a dream. These are some of the ghosts haunting this particular play because, as you rightly point out, I set myself to hunt down some of the spectres haunting a European imagination such as mine – insofar as I can make common cause with a German imaginary – and tie them into the haunting, doubling medium of a theatre which holds its actors, as 'ghosts' or mirrors, up to nature, society, the audience, us.

When I talked to the actors after the show, they agreed that a geographically distant setting helped the audience to empathize more with the characters in the play. One of them, however, mentioned that the play could have also been set in Vladivostok or anywhere else; it was just because of your personal connection to the African continent that the play was set there. What is your take on this?

I noticed that a publicity leaflet for *African Moon* in the theatre at Krefeld featured a photograph of black people in tribal (un)dress, with body and face paint, in startled encounter with the camera. I laughed immediately because, if I'm not mistaken, the people depicted are not African at all but more probably from Papua New Guinea, an Australasian outpost. I like all these suggestions of transposition from Timbuktu to Vladivostok via Port Moresby. It was my intention to re-route people from 'Africa' to a replay of the 'western' – to their own imaginary 'Other' place.

Your comments are very generous – they could also be read as racism or, at best, cultural disregard.[9] *Your idea of the 'western', however, intrigues me. When I first read your script, I did not quite understand the idea of the play's being a "cowboy western"* (1). *Is it the idea of Europeans going out to Africa to explore the 'Wild West' and to push the frontiers which, in the given case, seem personal rather than geographical? The character of David certainly*

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[9] The images Gbadamosi refers to were not reprinted in the programme I purchased in July 2012.

has something of a lone-wolf adventurer about him, but I miss the usual assortment of clear-cut heroes and desperadoes to recognize the play as a western. But maybe that's the point – they are all implicated in the action; there is no easy 'good' and 'bad', no one is without blame. For me it is a western more in the sense that the play is about Heimat*. (Aren't westerns really American* Heimat *films?) Characters either look for social and emotional mooring, or they have tried to cut them, and all is projected onto the vast canvas of 'Africa'. The play is a* Heimat *film also in the sense that you play a lot with filmic images which become part of the projection.*

I think my worry was – and perhaps still is – that 'Africa as projection' won't be recognized by your average German theatregoer, but that it falls into the usual 'Africa stereotypes' that you are trying to undermine. There are a lot of clichés in the play that you can also find on German television; an Albert Schweitzer figure – a "Livingstone," as one of the actors mentioned in the post-performance discussion – the lone adventurer, the 'loser' who finds meaning in life in Africa, fantasies of heat, disease, and discomfort contrasted with safari-like images of stunning natural surroundings, etc., a pharmaceutical scandal that people get away with – but no 'Africans' in sight. It's all very much into the (neo-) colonial 'heart of darkness' as mentioned above. 'Africa' is imaginary, a European fantasy, but it is not actually located anywhere specific. It is in the characters' (the audience's) mind, it is the foil for their 'jungle' of feelings and unresolved issues. Perhaps I don't give local audiences enough credit, but I was under the impression that many spectators did not necessarily get that 'African moon' (in the literal and proverbial sense of the term) plays with their expectations of 'Africa'. Instead, there was this sense of 'this is how it is'.

I like your analysis of the play. You have difficulties with the text, but I'm not sure these are very different from the difficulties I propose for the audience. First, about the African western 'projection': yes, *Heimat* films they are, in America, and *Heimat* film is what I give to Krefeld – I'm writing about the Germans, after all, as the Germans might write about the 'Wild West' (e.g., *Marterpfahl*). Literally, I substitute a motorbike for a horse, a journalist for a hired gun, a medical director of a bush hospital for a ranch-owner, a nursing officer for a morally squeamish, weak underling, but what you miss (I wonder at it!) is that Nora combines 'civilized' and 'fancy' woman from off the train (plane) with strong, moral challenger (i.e. good guy) to the bad boss. This is exactly the form of the western as I know it – but the woman is the hero?!

Anyway, that's not so important. After so many clues, so many explicit and implicit signals to the audience to 're-read' what they are seeing, it is only right that they should see and engage with the world in this play in their own way. (I'm happy, anyway, to distract them from their issues with race by saying nothing about their issues with sexuality).

Talking of which, the way sexuality is explored in the play seems to mirror the issue of race – very clear power-hierarchies. Sexual encounters always seem unequal; there are distinct power gaps between Europeans and Africans, but also between the Europeans themselves. You can make "arrangements with the house girl or house boy"; Koenig seems to have been a notorious womanizer throughout his life, David immediately assumes that Nora is making a pass at him when they first meet, etc. The only genuine relationship seems to have been between Nora and Amy – even if Nora's love for her partner has something unhealthily 'symbiotic' about it. She has to come to Africa to let go. (We do not get to know anything about the relationship Martin has with an African woman either, though he seems to be looking after her and his son.)

What do I think about pairing race as an issue with gender and sexuality? My motto in making the play was 'where one thing stands there another thing also stands' – so the play's full of pairings and doubles, structural imbalances I deploy to resist the issue-led logic of 'a play about…'; rather, what I want to do is play with echoes, resonances, ways to spark associations for, and even resistances from, the audiences. Even getting you to think about this (before you reject it) is a success for me.

What on earth can sexuality have to do with race? Or racial identity with gender as an identity? Or the performance of these things with a realization of their instability? (I can't resist the slight parody of the well-known argument; it's a weakness.)

You write that you started writing the play as an "African perspective on the Germans." To me it seems a rather European play, one that critically interrogates the neo-colonial presence of Europeans on the African continent as exemplified by some Germans. I noticed a certain Betroffenheit *– concern – before and after the performance (and the pre-performance introduction by the dramaturge Leona Benneker) among the audience in July which had to do with what one woman described as "the problems in Africa" rather than with the psychological drama involving the different characters, let alone the constitution of German identity. What was your impression when you attended*

the world premiere of your play? Is there a lack of awareness among the German public – or is your idea simply too complex to follow?
It is fair criticism of the play if it fails to meet its audience by being too complex or by misjudging levels of awareness or not recognizing an audience's consternation / anxiety / concern about being faced with insuperable 'problems in Africa'. I am not, however, persuaded that what you describe about the audience in July is very different from the 'unthinkability' of Africans and African problems from an ordinary German perspective that I set out to work on when I started. Audiences wouldn't expect to get inside a psychological drama that would anyway be unthinkable, being African; they'd expect a mask. I offer a series of masks which include (Marlon Brando?) white, European, German suffering. This collection of masks is let loose to wander the set; the masks encounter each other, asking questions but supplying no answers. It's up to people in the audience, in their own, undisclosed confessional space, to allow these conflicts of knowing and unknowing, self and other to work their way out. My impression was and is that you never can tell what can be released in an audience once they have gone home, but that's where I like to get to work. I'm quite sure that this isn't a peculiarly African way of working, so I'm happy for you to think of it as a European play.

Thank you very much for spending time on these questions, Gabriel.

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Von Jenseits des Meeres

Romantic and Revolutionary Visions of Caribbean History

Eckhard Breitinger

The Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, in his poem “Crusoe’s Island,” refers to Robinson Crusoe as “the second Adam since the Fall,” […] “the bearded hermit [who] built / His Eden” “upon this rock.”[1] And in his essay “The Figure of Crusoe” he further explains that “my Crusoe, then, is Adam, Christopher Columbus, God, a missionary […] he is Adam because he is the first inhabitant of the second paradise.”[2] Walcott refers here to one perception of the New World as it was propagated by some Renaissance humanists: that of a prelapsarian Eden that promises, even for the Old World, a second chance for salvation. The Swiss anthropologist Urs Bitterli published extensively on this image and the imagined ‘realities’ of the New World.[3] Derek Walcott also refers to the second aspect of Columbus’s ‘discovery’ and the ensuing rapacious urge to take full possession of this new world politically, geographically, but above all intellectually: the Second

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[1] Derek Walcott, *The Castaway and Other Poems* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965): 55.

[2] Derek Walcott, “The Figure of Crusoe,” paper read at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad, 27 October 1965, and included in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert Hamner (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1993): 35.

[3] Urs Bittleri, *Alte Welt, Neue Welt: Formen des europäisch-überseeischen Kulturkontakts vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1986); *Die Entdeckung Amerikas: von Kolumbus bis Alexander von Humboldt* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1991); *Die Wilden und die Zivilisierten: Grundzüge einer Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte der europäisch-überseeischen Begegnung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004).

Adam Crusoe, by naming the physical phenomena, appropriates this New World linguistically.

The Explorers

Leaders in this race for discoveries and conquest in the New World were the seafaring nations England, Holland, Spain, and Portugal. Germany provided the maps, the software. Martin Behaim from Nuremberg designed a globe in 1490 (though not the first, it is the oldest that has survived), of which one critic said that Columbus would never have set sail for his trip across the Atlantic if he had not seen Behaim's globe.

Martin Waldseemüller, a cartographer, published in 1507 the 'birth certificate' of America, the first world map to depict the New World as a separate continent, naming it 'America': *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespuccii aliorumque lustrationes*.[4] A slightly different version of Waldseemüller's 1507 wall map was discovered in the Library of the University of Munich in July 2012, this time a segment map that can fold onto a small globe.[5]

The zeal of the European discoverers/*conquistadores* quickly replaced the idealized version of the Second Eden: they drowned the Second Eden in blood, and excelled in greed for gold and in unspeakable brutality.

German explorers were mostly concerned with the mapping of the new territories, with the 'scientific' description following the fashionable narrative mode of the 'Chronicle'. The 1492 *Nuremberg Chronicle/ Schedelsche Weltchronik* – old world only – furnished the model for this new type of an encyclopaedic survey, based on 'empirical' data gathered on exploratory journeys – i.e. a proto-scientific methodology.

Several travelogues/chronicles resulted from the relatively short-lived engagement of the Welser family in Venezuela. The Welsers, merchants and finance wizards from Augsburg, figured as the Goldman Sachses of the sixteenth century. They funded the election of Charles V (Habsburg) as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and, as a reward, Charles V endowed the Welsers with the colony of 'Little Venice' (Venezuela) in 1528 to compensate for the money he owed them. Before this, the Welsers had already acquired large estates on the island of Hispaniola with the *asiento* privilege to import 40,000 slaves.

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[4] Martin Waldseemüller, *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespuccii aliorumque lustrationes* (1507; Strassburg: Freiherr von Wieser, facs. 1907).

[5] (http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/13138), a digital version of the map (accessed 20 October 2012). See also "Die Welt in Streifen," an article in the Munich daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (23 October 2012): 37. The discovery of this segment map in July 2012 was widely reported in the press and on the internet.

Bartholomäus Welser VI travelled to the colony in 1540 to accompany the governor, Georg Hohermuth von Speyer, on an exploratory expedition to the hinterland. Eventually, Bartholomäus joined Philipp von Hutten, acting governor after Hohermuth had died of fever, and their 'public relations manager' Nikolaus Federmann. The German members of the expedition fell out with the Spanish commander Juan de Carvajal, who ambushed their expedition and murdered von Hutten, Bartholomäus Welser, and two Spanish officers on 17 May 1546.

Bartholomäus Welser was said to have kept a record of their expedition which got lost; there only remained a letter back home to Augsburg. Philipp von Hutten, as official commander of the expedition, kept a diary, which also disappeared. Meanwhile, eleven letters von Hutten wrote from Venezuela have been discovered and edited by Eberhard Schmitt.[6]

The murder of Bartholomäus Welser and Philipp von Hutten was investigated by the Council of the Indies in Seville, but Juan de Carvajal was found not guilty. Obviously, the Welser system of running the colony through extreme brutality and extortion had become so notorious by the time that the Welser family lost their governorship in 1548. There is an interesting court testimony by Cristobal de Aguirre, a participant in the expedition in search of the 'Golden Kazike',[7] who, together with Aguirre and von Hutten's servants

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[6] *Das Gold der Neuen Welt: Die Papiere des Welser Konquistadors und Generalkapitäns von Venezuela, Philipp von Hutten 1534–1541*, ed. Eberhard Schmitt & Friedrich von Hutten (Berlin: Wissenschaftsverlag, 1999).

[7] The conquistadores were much taken by the popular stories of 'El Dorado', originally referring to a person, the 'Golden Man', then specified as the 'Golden Kazike': i.e. the local chief, and only then was El Dorado taken as a location, the town of that Kazike (cacique), where gold is found in abundance. A specific legend speaks about a cleansing ritual where the Kazike's body is painted with gold dust; he is then taken on a raft for a trip down river, where he dives into the water and reappears cleansed. The Museo de Oro in Bogotá has a model of the raft of the Golden Kazike on exhibit, in pure gold, of course. El Dorado inspired writers from early traveller reports to Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), V.S. Naipaul's *The Loss of Eldorado: A History* (London:

Magdalena and Perico, confirmed the excessive brutality of the Welser expedition, which was obviously much worse than the Pizarro expedition against the Incas.[8] This testimonial provided the basic inspiration for Werner Herzog's award-winning film *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), which also refers to Bartholomäus Welser's murderer, Juan de Carvajal.

The most substantial information about the Welser expedition and the population in the colony can be found in the reports of Nikolaus Federmann, who joined the 'Welser Kompanie' (the firm in charge of the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the colony) in 1529. Federmann obviously supplied the necessary information for the preparation of the Welser expedition. Nikolaus Federmann's *Indianische Historia* is considered one of the most reliable eyewitness reports of the earliest phase of the *conquista* of the Caribbean coast.[9] Tobias Greiff questions Federmann's eyewitness testimony mainly on the basis of his reports about cannibalism among the Indian population – one of the earliest stereotypes about the 'savage Others' in the New World, and quite contrary to the Second Adam trope.[10]

Pietro Martire d'Aghiera cites the accusation of the Dominican monk Tomas Ortiz about the degenerate character of the Amerindian people – also the exact opposite of the Second Adam trope and obviously the much more sustainable stereotype of the racial Other.

> The mainland Indians are cannibals. They are sexually extravagant, more than any other nation. They know no justice. They walk about naked, do not respect true love and virginity; they are stupid and irresponsible. God never created another nation/people that was haunted

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André Deutsch, 1969), and, more recently, Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *Auf der Suche nach dem Goldenen Mann* (Rowohlt: Hamburg, 1979).

[8] Konrad Haebler, *Die Überseeischen Unternehmungen der Welser und ihrer Gesellschafter* (Leipzig: Goldmann, 1903): 88–97 and 97–99.

[9] Nikolaus Federmann, *Indianische Historia: Ein schöne kurtzweilige Historia Niclaus Federmanns des Jüngern von Ulm erster Reise so er von Hispania und Andolosia ausz in Indias des Occeanischen Mörs gethan hat/ und was ihm allda ist begegnet biss auf seine widerkunfft inn Hispaniam, auffs kurtzest beschriben, gantz lustig zu lesen* (1557; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1969).

[10] Tobias Greiff, "Die Neue Welt in deutschsprachigen Reiseberichten des 16. Jahrhunderts: Identitätsfindung und Selbstpositionierung über die Konstruktion der Fremdartigkeit," *aventinus varia* 31 (28 February 2012), http://aventinus-online.de/no_cache /persistent/ artikel/9265/ (accessed 15 October 2012) provides an up-to-date survey of both the research and a comprehensive bibliography.

> so much by the most revolting vices without the slightest relief of benevolence or decency.[11]

Pietro Martire d'Aghiera had been appointed chronicler of Emperor Charles V's Council of the Indies and as such was familiar with all the rumours and realistic reports about the New World from the very beginning. We will see later, when dealing with literary representations of the West Indies, how persistent these concepts of otherness remained over centuries. In these days of nascent finance capitalism-cum-colonization, we find that the business model of public/private sponsorship had one of its first applications in the Caribbean. To outsource duties, tasks, and services rightfully belonging to the official public authorities into the hands of private entrepreneurs for profit-making is obviously not a new invention of twenty-first-century capitalism.

The Scientists

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Maria Sibylla Merian travelled to Surinam and opened a new era of visitors to the New World, the era of the scientific researchers. Maria Sibylla Merian was the daughter of the famous engraver Matthias Merian from Frankfurt, whose *Topographia Germaniae* (1642) with its 2,142 engravings of towns, villages, and castles was the most comprehensive visual documentation of Central Europe. From childhood on, Maria Sibylla thus became familiar with the various printing and engraving techniques, oriented towards a realistic representation of her physical environment. Her stepfather, Jacob Marwell, introduced her to the Dutch tradition of still-life and flower painting and ensured that she obtained adequate training. Maria Sibylla Merian early developed an interest in scientific research, in particular in plants, flowers, and insects, which she collected and documented in her three-volume *Blumenbuch* (1677–80) and three volumes on caterpillars (*Der Raupen wunderbare Verwandlung,* 1679–83). After her eldest daughter married the Dutch merchant Jacob Herold, who had business interests in Surinam, Maria Sibylla Merian first moved to Holland, lived in the house of the governor of Surinam, and then decided to follow her daughter to the

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[11] Cited by Greiff (2012: 1) from Pietro Martire d'Aghiera, *Acht Dekaden über die Neue Welt…2: Dekade V–VIII. Gesamtregister und Bibliographie*, ed. Hans Klingelhöfer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973): 199–200. Unless otherwise stated, this and all other translations from the German are by Eckhard Breitinger.

Caribbean. She managed to obtain a travel grant from the City Council of Amsterdam in 1699 to support her research in Surinam.

At the time, scientific explorations and field work were practically unknown. Research trips for commercial exploration – yes, but for scientific or merely botanical exploration – no, certainly not for a woman. Nor was Maria Sibylla Merian's specialization in entomology recognized as a serious scientific topic at the time. And Maria Sibylla Merian did not write in Latin, the only accepted language in the sciences. Insects, spiders, even amphibia were considered unclean vermin, created by the devil, certainly not worth studying. Maria Sibylla Merian for the first time established the metamorphosis of insects from caterpillar to butterfly, and she also related the various insects to specific plants on which they feed and thrive. She established entomology as a serious discipline in the natural sciences. And she developed a specific documentary style of visual representation, a kind of narrative illustration that placed the caterpillar, the pupa, the butterfly or beetle and their favourite diet plant side by side in one single picture, thus highlighting the process of insect metamorphosis.

In Surinam, Maria Sibylla Merian and her younger daughter undertook extensive field-trips into the hinterland, and came back to Holland with an overwhelming wealth of material – sketches, drafts, drawings – but also specimens of insects and plants which she had collected and then classified. The result of Maria Sibylla Merian's field-work led to the publication of *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* (1705), a landmark of research, but also of artistically high-class illustrations in a scientific context.[12] Ages before systematic classification was firmly established by scientists like Linnaeus or Darwin, Maria Sibylla Merian had broken the ground for further scientific exploration. But she also put Surinam with its flora and fauna on the agenda of scientific endeavours for the eighteenth century.[13]

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[12] Merian's *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* was shown at an exhibition, "Merians Krönungswerk: Die Wunderwelt der Tropen," in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg from 28 February 2012 to 4 February 2013. See also Maria Sibylla Merian, *Das Insektenbuch: Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, tr. Gerhard Worgt, commentary by Helmut Deckert (Amsterdam 1707; Frankfurt am Main: Insel, facs. 2002).

[13] Kurt Wettengl, *Maria Sibylla Merian, 1647–1717: Künstlerin und Naturforscherin* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 2004); Kim Todd: *Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the Secrets of Metamorphosis* (Orlando FL: Harcourt, 2007).

Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius assembled an inventory of the botanical gardens of his home university, Erlangen. In 1817, together with his colleague Johann Baptist Spix, he was commissioned to undertake a research journey to Brazil. Spix and Martius actually accompanied the Archduchess Leopoldina of Austria and her fiancé Dom Pedro de Alcantara (later Emperor of Brazil) on their journey to their wedding ceremony. Once in Brazil, Spix and Martius engaged in an extended tour (1817–20) to explore the Amazon river basin. Collecting botanical specimens was the main concern of Martius, but he also engaged in anthropological research, collecting *Cantigas populares Brasileiras e indigenas* (folksongs with notations). Martius brought a rich collection of botanical specimens for the botanical gardens in Munich (where he became director), and he published a survey of unknown plants of Brazil – *Nova Genera et Species Plantarum Brasiliensium* (1823–32), followed by *Flora Brasiliensis* (1840) – the national flora inventory, quite in line with the nationalist thinking of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. But his lasting reputation rests on the fundamental inventory of the various species of palm trees: *Historia naturalis palmarum* (1823–50).[14]

Alexander von Humboldt's Latin-American expedition (1799–1804) opened new insights and methodological avenues for scientific research. Humboldt explored the river systems of the Orinoco, the Magdalene River, the sources of the Amazonas; he climbed the Chimborazo and investigated vulcanism in the Andes. Well-equipped with the most modern instruments for geographical research and studies in climatic changes according to elevation, he laid the foundation for plant ecology studies. But he also wrote a study of the inefficiency of the silver and gold mining industries in Columbia for the Spanish Viceroy (he had been inspector of mines in the Markgrafschaft Kulmbach–Bayreuth / Franconia/Germany before he set out for Latin America as an independent scholar), and he undertook a rudimentary census of New Spain. On the return trip through the USA, Humboldt stayed with President Thomas Jefferson. Cuba became a kind of base camp to which he returned regularly to write up his findings. Here, he was befriended by one of the great landowners, Francisco de Arango y Parreño, who ran the sugar mills in the valley of Trinidad. For him, hewrote a feasibility study on the improvement and potential of the sugar industry in the Matanzas province. Humboldt combined an infatuation with basic research with a talent for applied research, for strategic and economic planning. In Cuba he was venerated as the 'second discoverer of Cuba'.

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[14] Sylk Schneider, "Brasilianische Reise und Botanik mit Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius," in *Goethes Reise nach Brasilien: Gedankenreise eines Genies* (Weimar: WTV, 2008): 114–30; Bernd Schmelz, *Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1794–1868): "Vater der brasilianischen Völkerkunde": Eine biographische Einführung* (Hamburg: privately published, 2000). See also Maria Sibylla Merian, *Flora Brasiliensis* (http://florabrasiliensis.cria.or.br.)

His first publication, *Views of Nature* (1808), became a classic, as did *Kosmos* (5 vols., 1845–52). Humboldt's writings displayed a richness of detailed findings for the region of the Caribbean basin specifically, but they also designed new approaches to the methodology of geographical research, from population studies, statistics, economics, mineral, and agricultural resources, to meteorological research and volcanic geology (he put an end to the mythological explanation of 'Neptunism').

The scientifically motivated travellers of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries painted the image of the New World anew; they departed from the wild fantasies that had pervaded the travelogues of the first explorers.[15]

The Storytellers

The authenticity of the explorers' and researchers' reports rested on their eyewitness quality. With the incoming Romantic period, creative writers showed their fascination with exotic scenery, but also with the political turbulence of the times – the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars on the European continent, but also the conflicts in the American and Caribbean colonies. They dreamed up the New World settings in their studies and replaced the authenticity of the (possibly deceived) eyewitnesses with the verisimilitude of the writers' literary imagination. The two German writers of the nineteenth century that took up Caribbean topics, Heinrich von Kleist and Theodor Storm, did not write from firsthand experience. Kleist, an officer in the Prussian army that was defeated and demoralized by Napoleon's army, was a prisoner of war in Fort de Joux (in the French Jura Mountains) shortly after Toussaint L'Ouverture was imprisoned there; this is allegedly the reason why he set his tragic novella *Die Verlobung in*

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[15] Ottmar Ette, *Alexander von Humboldt und die Globalisierung: das Mobile des Wissens* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2009): 137.

Santo Domingo (1811) in revolutionary Haiti.[16] Storm was a sedate civil servant, located in Husum, at the time under Danish rule. This is how he came to write *Von Jenseits des Meeres*, about Jennie, daughter of a plantation owner on St Croix, then the Danish Virgin Islands, who tries to pass for white.

Heinrich von Kleist opens his novella with a revealing statement, strictly observing all the rules of short-story theory.

> At Port au Prince, on the French part of the Island of Santo Domingo, at the beginning of this century, when the Blacks murdered the Whites, there lived on the plantation of Monsieur Guillaume de Villeneuve, a terrifying old negro by the name of Congo Hoango […][17]

According to short-story theory, this opening sentence states in a factual manner time, place, social setting, and political background of the protagonist of the narrative.[18] Kleist summarizes how Congo Hoango saved the life of his master, Villeneuve, how Villeneuve in gratitude set Congo Hoango free and endowed him with a substantial legacy, and how Congo Hoango during the revolution forgot about the generosity he had experienced from Villeneuve. Instead, he killed the planter with his entire family, set the Great House on fire, and launched a merciless vendetta against the white settlers who had captured him on the Gold Coast. Together with his concubine, the "mulatto Babekan" and her light-skinned daughter, the "Mestizin Toni," he set up a perfect trap for white settlers on the run from Dessaline's revolutionary army. He offered shelter to white refugees and promised them protection, but murdered the unsuspecting victims in their sleep. In this situation, a Swiss mercenary, Gustav von der Ried, in the service of the French, tries to guide the Swiss jeweller and financial agent Uncle Strömli with wife and children to the port of the Cap (today Cap Haïtien), where the French navy is waiting to evacuate refugees.[19] Gustav asks Babekan for help. Over a long evening conversation, Gustav and Toni fall in love, but according to Congo Hoango's plan it is Toni who has to set the trap for Gustav and the Strömli family. She can save Gustav and his party only by pretending to follow Congo Hoango's instructions and chaining Gustav to his bed. While Congo Hoango stages a trial over Gustav, Toni brings the Strömli party to the Great House, where they overwhelm Congo Hoango. Gustav, who first trusted Toni wholeheartedly, now suspects Toni of betrayal, and kills her in a final showdown. Toni's dying sentence sums up the dilemma of the novella: "You should not have distrusted me."

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[16] Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner (Munich: DTV, 2001): 778. Letter to his sister.

[17] Heinrich von Kleist, *Werke in einem Band* (Munich: Hanser, 1966): 699.

[18] Jimena Torres Galarza, *Eine Verlobung, zwei Hochzeiten und eine Insel in der Karibik: Deutsch–haitianische Literaturbeziehungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005): 11.

[19] A Swiss jeweller served Toussaint L'Ouverture as quasi-minister of finance.

The plot outline shows the milieu from which Kleist derived his inspiration in writing this piece. He draws on the melodramatic sensationalism of gothic drama, as in his *Familie Schroffenstein* and *Die Hermannsschlacht*. *Familie Schroffenstein* had also played on a Romeo and Juliet plotline, where betrayal and distrust furnish the main components for plot development: the "star-crossed lovers"[20] caught in the *emotio–ratio*, the seeming and being, the trust–distrust antagonism.

Racial prejudice dominates the character portrayal. Congo Hoango appears as purely black and therefore excessively bad, while his common-law wife, "the Mulatto Babekan," represents the ethnically and moral 'in-between', half-good, half-bad. Babekan's daughter, the "Mestizin Toni," is on the verge of passing for white, racially and ethically. The whites are exempt from racial moral classification. It is understood that they are good, honest, and faithful. With Toni, however, Kleist speculates about the moral outcome of mongrelization: Will the good white portion in her blood gain the upper hand over her mischievous black inheritance?

Pietro Martire d'Aghiera's depreciation of the moral qualities of "natives" as being without decency and totally degenerate obviously persists in Kleist's view of the racial Other, independently of whether it refers to Amerindian/ First Nation people (d'Aghiera) or to the neo-indigenous people of African descent.

We find that Kleist obliterated the political context of the Haitian revolution. He ignores the historical dimension of the foundation of the first black republic. He seems to be unaware of Wilberforce's British anti-slavery movement, and he definitely does not appreciate the black Jacobins of Haiti.[21] But he claims to adhere to the humanism of Kant's ethics. Anna Seghers (herself a winner of the literary ‘Kleist Prize’) holds that Kleist understood little about the Negro revolution. His portrayal of blacks is “coloured too much by his own fantasies and an inclination towards the exotic.”[22]

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[20] Hilda Meldrum Brown, *Heinrich von Kleist: The Ambiguity of Art and the Necessity of Form* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998): 179.

[21] See C.L.R. James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938).

Theodor Storm’s *Von Jenseits des Meeres* solidly centres on a concept of whiteness as norm. Alfred, the first-person narrator, unfolds his various preoccupations with race at different stages of his life. Recalling his childhood days and the innocent pre-puberty friendship with Jennie, the planter’s (illegitimate) daughter, who figures as the non-white Other or the girl despairingly “aspiring” to whiteness, he engages enthusiastically in fantasies of exotic otherness, thinking of Jennie’s mother, “the ebony black Negress with strings of pearls in her hair.”[23] He seems obsessed with the slightest physical vestiges of racial mix and hybridization. He therefore notes with curiosity the dark lobes on Jennie’s fingernails, which testifies to the racial mix of “the beautiful pariahs in whose veins runs a single drop of black slave blood” (241).

This obsession with racial mixing reminds us strongly of American novels of passing, or the South African novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren*, which warns of the illusion that the single drop of black blood could ever be obliterated. Jennie herself confesses how she internalized racial prejudice with accompanying moral depreciation: in the most crucial scene of Jennie’s and Arthur’s relationship, when Arthur very hesitantly proposes to Jennie, she refers to herself as “a product of sin” (257). In her view, the relationship of her father and mother was obviously something out of the ordinary, beyond the morally tolerable. It appears as the quasi-original sin of lusting for the wives of other races. Consequently, Jennie sees herself also as the temptress, a kind of living sin that lures the innocent and unsuspecting white male into the “morass of mongrelisation,” into sexual extravagance and debauchery. Eva Ulrike Pirker holds that

> Alfred’s struggle between societal norm and emotional response, his struggle between the ideals of chastity and Venus, between ratio and desire […] are overarchingly universal and make the novella a remarkable literary piece. By contrast, the vehicle used to transport his theme, i.e. the debate surrounding racial difference, makes it a piece that is all

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[22] Anna Seghers, “Die Entstehung der Antillen-Novellen,” in Seghers, *Über Kunstwerk und Wirklichkeit II: Erlebnis und Gestaltung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971): 32.

[23] Theodor Storm, *Von Jenseits des Meeres*, in Storm, *Werke in zwei Bänden*, II (Salzburg: Bergland Buch, 1984): 237. All quotations are from this edition.

> too blatantly hinged on the discursive conventions of the time at which Storm was writing.[24]

Storm seems to be mostly concerned with respectability within a strictly bourgeois society in mid-nineteenth-century provincial Holstein.

Anna Seghers, a prominent East German writer, drew on the impact of the French Revolution in the Caribbean area for her novellas “Die Hochzeit von Haiti” (1948; Marriage in Haiti), “Die Wiedereinführung des Sklaverei in Guadeloupe” (1948; Restitution of Slavery in Guadeloupe), and “Das Licht auf dem Galgen” (1961; The Light on the Gallows).[25] Quite understandably, she clad the historical facts in a plot that illustrates Marxist theories of revolution and decolonization. Descended from a well-established, middle-class family, Seghers won a literary reputation with her tale *The Revolt of the Fishermen of St Barbara* [*Der Aufstand der Fischer von Santa Barbara*] (1928), which describes the unsuccessful attempt of Atlantic-coast fishermen to resist exploitation by ship owners. In the same year, Seghers joined the Communist Party. Together with Bertolt Brecht and Johannes Becher she formed a circle of “proletarian authors”; she also engaged in a long theoretical debate on the nature of socialist realism with the Hungarian Marxist philosopher and critic Georg Lukács.

In 1933 she fled to Paris, and, just in time to escape the invading German troops, she moved on, via Santo Domingo, to Mexico, which was then a centre for socialist intellectuals exiled from the fascist countries in Europe. She mixed with the intellectual/artistic circles around Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, who had also been close to Leo Trotsky before he was murdered by Stalin’s KGB agents. During those years in exile she first touched upon Mexican and Caribbean themes, though her literary output at the time concentrated on the intellectual campaign against German Fascism. Her anti-fascist novels won her worldwide recognition with the critics, independent of political outlook. In 1944, Fred Zinnemann directed the Oscar-nominated film version of her novel *The Seventh Cross* with Spencer Tracy in the lead role, a major contribution to the intellectual battle against Nazism. The Caribbean themes, however, only found literary expression after Seghers had settled in East Germany in 1947. In "Die Entstehung der Antillen-Novellen"[26] she discussed the historical sources she consulted.

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[24] Eva Ulrike Pirker, “White Bertha – Black Jennie? Fantasies of Race in Theodor Storm’s Novella *Von Jenseits des Meeres*,” unpublished paper presented at the German Historical Institute Conference “Black Diaspora and Germany across the Centuries,” Washington DC, 20 March 2009, 11.

[25] Only some of Seghers’s works have been translated into English (the novels *Transit*, *The Seventh Cross*, *The Dead Stay Young*, and *The Excursion of the Dead Young Girls*, and a very few of the stories). A bilingual secondary-school textbook edition of the Caribbean Tales was edited by Witold F. Tulasiewicz under the title *Die Hochzeit von Haiti* (Twentieth Century Texts series London: Macmillan, 1970).

As late as 1961, Seghers published the third of her Caribbean stories, "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," which deals with the case of two French secret agents, Sasportas and Debuisson, who were caught in Jamaica in 1799. Seghers herself cites a German translation of R.C. Dallas's *History of the Maroons* as her main source of information.[27] Scant as Dallas's information is on the Sasportas–Debuisson affair proper, the author amplified her material with details from the two Maroon wars and, for the rest, she handled historical facts rather freely. Here she deviates from her normal documentary technique, which she based on a thorough investigation of the factual background. For a number of her works she actually went to the place of action to get first-hand information on the spot. For "Restitution of Slavery in Guadeloupe," she consulted Aimé Césaire and used his library. This personal experience, combined with her sense for detail and visual effect (after all, she was an art historian by profession), lends her novels the lively quality and realistic richness that were so much appreciated by the critics.[28]

The most fundamental deviation from the historical background is that Seghers sets her heroes to the task of instigating an island-wide slave uprising, thus installing general emancipation of the slaves solely from humanitarian and ideological motives. She presents us with missionaries supportive of the equality ideal of the French Revolution, while the report of the British agent to the governor of Jamaica, which eventually led to the detection of the two agents, makes it quite clear that the aim of the mission undertaken by Sasportas and Debuisson was primarily to prepare the ground for a French invasion. Another important alteration is the roles of the two protagonists.

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[26] Anna Seghers, "Die Entstehung der Antillen-Novellen," in Seghers, *Über Kunstwerk und Wirklichkeit II: Erlebnis und Gestaltung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971): 31–33.

[27] Siegfried Streller, "Geschichte und Aktualität in Anna Seghers' Erzählung *Das Licht auf dem Galgen*," *Weimarer Beiträge* 8.4 (1962): 746.

[28] Jörg Bernhard Bilke, "Anna Seghers: Vom Klassenkampf zur Staatsliteratur," *Deutsche Studien* 32 (1970): 359.

Seghers's Debuisson is of mixed Jamaican-English and French descent; having spent his early life in Jamaica, he deserted to the French in Guadeloupe and, as an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution, he became a secret agent in the service of the Republic. In him she focuses all the conspiratorial activities; he only turns traitor later on, when he finds that the political situation in France and his personal interests have changed. Sasportas, on the other hand, is described as the young idealist revolutionary, who devotes his life to the cause of the emancipation of the slaves. In consequence of this devotion, he has to die for his conviction. According to the British agent Douglas, Sasportas was the hard-boiled head of the conspiracy, while Debuisson seemed to have been pressed by the French to serve as an agent. Seghers even takes over the character of Douglas, who informed the authorities about the two agents. But her Douglas is not the British agent who detected the conspiracy by counter-espionage; he is a house slave who occasionally carried letters for the two agents. He informed the police from a childish urge to show off what he knew and with what terrible secrets he had been entrusted.

To provide wider scope for conspiratorial activities, Seghers brings into the story a certain Cuffee, a runaway slave, who had collected a gang of supporters, mainly to pillage the plantations. That Cuffee and his men should become an instrument for the emancipation of the slaves is what Sasportas hopes for rather than what Cuffee himself conceives of as convenient. He becomes quite uncooperative as soon as a white person appears on the scene. The author here had recourse to events of the first Maroon war, when Quao and Cuffee were in command of the Windward Maroons. She even reports that Cuffee and his men were wiped out by regular troops, who had clandestinely placed swivel guns high up in the mountains.[29] This is obviously based on Captain Stoddard's attack on Nanny Town in 1734.[30] Cuffee, described as short and hunch-backed, is modelled on the historical Cudjoe.

Seghers had never been to Jamaica and therefore concentrates in her narrative on the actions and the motives of the various characters. She did not render the Maroons' relations to Spanish Town (the seat of government) correctly. In their peace treaty, the Maroons guaranteed that they would not host or protect runaway slaves. On the contrary, they handed them over to the authorities or their owner for a fixed fee, i.e. they profited from hunting runaway slaves. Here, Marxist revolutionary ideology did not allow for a psychologically based hatred between the slave population and the black Maroons. The ideology of revolution demanded a unity of action of all blacks against the imperialist white planter caste and their exploitative economic system.

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[29] Anna Seghers, "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," in Seghers, *Erzählungen II* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1964): 274.

[30] Clinton Vane de Brosse Black, *The History of Jamaica* (1958; London: Collins, 1965): 82–84.

Seghers's novel is meant as a didactic tale. She gives the reasons why the revolution failed under the historical circumstances recounted, wherein she deduces the necessity of a revolution for nations under colonial rule and induces her readers to learn from the mistakes of the past. In this she follows the rules of socialist realism, which prescribed the analysis of the historical facts from a socialist point of view, and the deduction of political relevance for the present as well as consequences for the future, according to the theory of the dialectical development of history.[31] The stylistic means adopted, such as interior monologue, association techniques, and shifting of point of view, go beyond strict socialist realism in the direction of "bourgeois formalism and aestheticism." In her dispute with Georg Lukács on the nature of socialist realism, she had defended the necessity of experimenting with various artistic forms.[32]

Seghers narrates her story as a tale within a tale, starting off in the Paris of 1802. After Napoleon's take-over, Antoine, a Jacobite, had been dismissed from his post with the republican secret service, which sponsored underground movements in enemy territory. Now, he himself is forced to live in the underground. Malbec, a sailor (proletarian), has sought out Antoine, to hand over the report of his friend Galloudec, who was one of the party sent to Jamaica with Debuisson and Sasportas. Galloudec's letter, delayed for more than two years, informs Antoine that their mission had failed: Debuisson had turned traitor and was deported to England; Sasportas was sentenced to death and hanged. Galloudec had died of yellow fever.

Seghers deliberately begins with this double disillusionment. She sets the scene at a time when the revolution in France, the motherland of revolutions up to 1917 (the year of 'the Great October Revolution'), had failed; when the revolutionary ideals – liberty, equality, fraternity – were put aside; when the reactionaries had gained the upper hand; when the bourgeois had won the day over the *citoyen*.[33] In that depressing situation the defeated learn that their missionary zeal to spread the achievements of their revolution to other nations had failed as well. The capitalist bourgeoisie had won on the national and international level. However hopeless the revolutionists' situation may appear at the moment, it still harbours hope. For Antoine and Malbec, the exemplary struggle and the martyrdom of Sasportas prove that the idea of the revolution still lives on, even when the person of the revolutionary has been put to death. This is exactly what Fidel Castro meant when, in the trial after his abortive attempt to capture the arsenal at Moncada in 1953, he said that "people follow ideas, not persons." Thus the sacrifice of the revolutionary Sasportas is meant to teach sympathizers to take courage rather than to despair. His martyrdom promotes on a purely emotional level a strong belief in, even the absolute certainty of, the ultimate victory of the revolutionary cause. But what Antoine and Malbec grasp only intuitively in quasi-metaphysical terms can easily be rationalized to the dialectical development of history: namely, that a reactionary regime with its mechanism of suppression will only enhance the development of revolutionary consciousness and thus accelerate the emergence of a genuine revolutionary situation.[34] This, as Seghers sees it, is the light that shines from the gallows on Sasportas's life and on the future revolutionary movement.

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[31] *Marxismus und Literatur*, vol. 1, ed. Fritz Joachim Raddatz (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969): 10–12. Wolfgang Joho, "Vertrauen in die Entscheidung: Anna Seghers: 'Das Vertrauen'," *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 17.2 (1969): 160.

[32] *Marxismus und Literatur*, vol. 2, ed. Raddatz, 110–38. Marcel Reich–Ranicki, *Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost: Prosa seit 1945* (Munich: Piper, 1963): 363.

It should be mentioned that socialist writers have always shown a strong interest in themes of the French Revolution, for two reasons. On the one hand, the French Revolution proved to be an unsuspected example of glory in the revolutionary struggle. On the other, it also conveyed the warning not to overestimate bourgeois revolutions. The French Revolution, seen in the light of socialist theory, was an incomplete revolution, because it only strove for legal equality, while it left economic and social inequality untouched. The revolution of 1789–99 was, therefore, bound to entail a reaction by the economically powerful bourgeoisie, which aspired to the position formerly held by the aristocracy.

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[33] Streller, "Geschichte und Aktualität," 743.

[34] A.E. Furness, "The Maroon War of 1795," *Jamaican Historical Review* 5 (May 1965): 34. Cf. also extracts from A.D. Dridzo, "Jamaican Maroons" (1971), tr. Alex Gradussor, *Jamaica Journal* 6.1 (March 1972): 21–25.

In this ambiguous atmosphere, hovering between hope and despair, the actual story begins. Debuisson, Sasportas, and the sailor Galloudec set out for the West Indies. During their passage and their brief stay in Haiti, they tell us a lot about the revolution in Haiti, the merits of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and the possible consequences for the slave societies in the English and Spanish territories. The revolution in Haiti assumes the character of a model in the geographical and historical context. We hear, however, nothing about the slave rebellions in St Lucia, Grenada, or St Vincent, organized by the French agent Victor Hugues, which embarrassed the Jamaican planters considerably.[35]

Posing as a French prisoner of war in Haiti, Debuisson manages to return to Jamaica with the rest of the British expeditionary forces, together with Sasportas as an assistant in his medical profession and Galloudec as a servant. Aboard ship they learn that the Maroons with whom they hoped to come into contact have been deported to Nova Scotia. On arrival in Kingston, Debuisson and Sasportas are accommodated at Debuisson's grandfather's plantation; Galloudec lodges with a mulatto carpenter. Three short scenes strike the keynote of the situation in Jamaican society: a runaway slave is left to die of heat and starvation in a cage hung up in the marketplace; in the bustling market, the slaves sell for their masters the products of the plantations, and the planters collect the cash and spend it in the "Admiral Penn," which epitomizes the boisterous milieu of the planter class.

In the following chapter, contact is established with the local sympathizers, with the mulatto Crocroft, a ship's carpenter in Annotto Bay; with the blacksmith Bedford, a slave on a neighbouring estate; with Swaby, a tenant of Irish descent; and, though indirectly, with Cuffee, the leader of a gang of runaway slaves. Meanwhile Galloudec keeps in touch with headquarters in Haiti. Preparations for an island-wide conspiracy, comprising mulattoes, slaves, runaways, and underprivileged whites, are well on their way when the decisive crisis arises in the personality of the ringleader, Debuisson.

The first part of the novel deals mainly with the building-up of a revolutionary momentum. Only occasionally do we find flashbacks to Debuisson's childhood in Jamaica or interior monologues commenting on social or political conditions.

In the very middle of the novel the revolutionary movement enters a critical stage when the news of Napoleon's coup d'état become known. The change in the political situation in France provokes an objective crisis of the undertaking, to which is added the subjective crisis arising from Debuisson's reaction to that event. With this crisis, the emphasis of the narration switches over from the external events to the motives and inner struggles of the characters themselves. The narrative technique is adapted to the new situation. In the second part of the novel, Seghers operates mainly with parallel montages. Apart from Debuisson's reflections on how to adjust to the new situation, more space is given to the interior monologues and dialogues of Sasportas, Galloudec, and Bedford, illuminating simultaneously Debuisson's motives from a different point of view. The planter society was prepared without hesitation to reabsorb Debuisson among their number, particularly since he functioned as a medical doctor in lieu of his grandfather. Debuisson himself, though unconsciously, arrived at an ever-increasing identification with the conceptions and interests of this class, for whose overthrow he had returned to Jamaica.[36] Debuisson, realizing that he now lacks political backing from France, decides to leave the entire project, and informs Sasportas to that effect.

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[35] Seghers, "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," 235.

Sasportas reacts violently. He argues that they have now managed to build up a powerful underground movement which cannot simply be left to itself. They would carry on even without French support. But Sasportas is also aware that the revolutionary's chief virtues are discipline and obedience, and he therefore advises Bedford to abstain from any rash actions, but to no effect. Sasportas's sudden reserve aroused Bedford's suspicions as to the loyalty of the whites, and Cuffee, with his anti-white prejudice, confirms these suspicions. They decide to strike on their own. Bedford and his men set fire to the cane fields and the Great Houses of various estates.[37] Cuffee attacks a military post to capture weapons and ammunition. Their actions, however, are incompetently planned: they are not coordinated, and, most important of all, they fail to spark off the island-wide slave revolt they have hoped for. The troops have no difficulty in finishing them off separately. Debuisson and Sasportas are arrested; Debuisson gives a full confession, while Sasportas refuses to reveal the names of his associates. Galloudec escapes to Cuba to tell his tale, Crocroft flees to the mountains, and Swaby and others remain undetected.

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[36] Paul Rilla, "Die Erzählerin Anna Seghers" (1950), in *Vom bürgerlichen zum sozialistischen Realismus: Aufsätze* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1967): 140; Bilke, "Anna Seghers," 364.

[37] Seghers does not pursue the ritualistic quality of the '*cannes brûlées*' – the 'Camboulaye' rituals of slave resistance.

There lies a certain irony in the fact that the tale achieves its aim when the revolutionaries fail to attain their aims. The story speaks for itself, and thus the main interest lies with the characters. And here lies one of the main weaknesses of the literature of socialist realism. The didactic purpose, together with the certainty about the "ultimate victory of the cause of the Proletariat" create a literature that has much in common with the medieval morality plays, particularly as far as character portrayal is concerned. Some of the characters never really come to life as human beings, as individuals. For the socialist author, every individual represents, above all, his class.[38] This, however, should not prevent characters being more than flat personifications of ideas or prejudices drawn from an oversimplified conception of the class structure of society. At an East-German writers' conference, Seghers had warned against reducing characters to one-dimensional types that can be classified by labels like 'renegade', 'popular hero', etc., though in her earlier critical writings she stressed that characters can only be understood as representatives of their class and the economic structure underlying the class hierarchy.[39] This becomes evident with the planters as they are described in our tale.

The planters show excessive cruelty in punishing their slaves for the slightest offence; the most cruel of these practices is to hang up slaves in the marketplace in a cage to die of hunger, thirst, and heat. We find this practice mentioned in two passages that carry special weight because they are placed prominently within the structure of the tale, at the beginning and at the end. Seghers illustrates the planters' utter disrespect for human dignity in describing how they consider their slaves not as human beings but as means of production, as capital investment, even as objects for speculation. Rumours about the abolition of the slave trade induce planters to buy slaves on stock to resell them again when prices have gone up. They handle the Negroes like any other commercial commodity.

This inhumanity, on which any slave society is based, extends to the rest of society with its brutalizing effects, in particular to those on the fringes of society, the poor whites and the Maroons. Seghers insists on this point, time and again, by denouncing the suppression of the Maroons with the aid of bloodhounds. Of the entire planter class it is only Debuisson's grandfather, Dr

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[38] Bilke, "Anna Seghers," 361.

[39] Seghers, "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," 215.

Bering, who receives much of the author's attention. Even so, he never becomes more than a mere type. His career discloses the perfidious methods of the planters. Bitter as Seghers's criticism is, she never touches on the most dubious phenomenon of the plantation system: absenteeism.

At the opposite end of the scale we find the popular heroes from the ranks of the underprivileged. Again, we do not come across any differentiated personality. Cuffee is modelled on the lines of the 'noble outlaw'. Ann, a house slave with the Raleighs, takes the side of the revolution for love of Sasportas, but not on rational grounds. Swaby, the white tenant, is an interesting figure, as he epitomizes the exploitative character of the proto-capitalist plantation system, right to its foundation in religion. Descended from a family of Irish indentured labourers – that is, a victim of Cromwell's Puritan profit-orientated forced labour system for Irish Catholics – he became a small tenant. As such, he is hardly less exposed to the caprice of the land-owners than the slaves. Swaby fully realizes his situation, develops a marked class consciousness, and consequently sides with his black fellow sufferers.

Bedford, the blacksmith, figures prominently among the slaves. He is one of the masses; he is not the professional revolutionary with an intelligentsia background, but he has developed a keen awareness of the disgrace of his present situation. His father and grandfather told him about the freedom they enjoyed in Africa. Bedford himself never conceives of slavery as other than a temporary affair.[40] Unlike heroes in bourgeois novels of social criticism, he does not leave it to history to right his wrongs; he decides to take his fate into his own hands. He takes action to right his own wrongs and those of his fellow sufferers. He unites all the properties of the "socialist popular hero."[41] Bedford instinctively feels that Sasportas and Debuisson hesitate to strike, so he decides to strike on his own account. Though he excels in zeal and prowess, he fails because of lack of discipline. He kills an overseer in a fit of anger but he has not sufficiently prepared the grounds for a general uprising, which he hoped to spark off with his deed.

Local slave unrest crystallizes in the person of Bedford and Cuffee. They stand for the mass movement. The professional revolutionaries, Sasportas and Debuisson, succeeded in triggering off the movement. They could even channel it for a while, but they failed to communicate openly with the popular revolutionaries, with the result that the popular movement overtook the professionals who were supposed to remain at the head of it.

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[40] Heinz Neugebauer, *Anna Seghers: Leben und Werk: Schriftsteller der Gegenwart* 4 (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1980): 17.

[41] Neugebauer, *Anna Seghers*, 6.

Sasportas represents the ideal revolutionary hero. Throughout the novel we never hear that he concerns himself with anything else except his mission. Compared with the cause of the slaves he values his own life very little; on the other hand, he does not irresponsibly put the lives of his helpers at stake. If, however, the common cause demands that he risk his life, he is prepared to do so, and he does not hesitate to ask the same from his comrades. He subordinates individual interest to general interests. This still involves a deep respect for human dignity, as is shown in his way of dealing with the slaves as his equals.

In the first half of the tale, Sasportas functions as second in command to Debuisson. He does not question Debuisson's authority, and only when Debuisson steps down, for tactical reasons, does he carry on on his own. This decisive change is presented in a scene of symbolic value. On a ride to one of their patients, Debuisson and Sasportas argue about the impact of Napoleon's coup d'état on their mission. When Debuisson pleads that they should leave the slaves to themselves, Sasportas suddenly gallops ahead, while Debuisson is left behind to contemplate the beauty of the scenery and the yield of the harvest.

Seghers attempts to monopolize the reader's sympathies for Sasportas. The analysis of her technique of characterization makes this quite clear. While most of the information on Debuisson comes to us through the critical reflections of Sasportas, Galloudec, and, indirectly, Bedford, or through Debuisson's own thoughts, which are immediately contrasted with views of others on the same topic, our information about Sasportas remains strictly one-sided, not to say biased. He is presented to us in his own interior monologues, which place him in an advantageous contrast to Debuisson; in his actions – notably his demonstrations of the equality ideal when dealing with slaves; and in a long monologue of Galloudec, who looks back on his earlier suspicions of Sasportas's calibre as a revolutionary, only to make his light shine even more brightly by his certain conviction of Sasportas's trustworthiness.

Certainly, Sasportas's character is also to be seen against the background of Nazi antisemitism. While the Nazis denounced the Jews as being profit-orientated, unsociable, and cowardly, Seghers describes a Jew who is not only entirely unaffected by personal interests, always placing the general welfare first, but also heroic and courageous to the extreme.[42]

All this adds up to making Sasportas an absolutely faultless hero. He becomes a symbol, a martyr and saint of the revolutionary creed, although he is never put to the test of internal conflicts: he never doubts his mission. He sacrifices his life on the altar of the revolution as if this were the most natural thing a man would do. He is the revolutionary superman. As such he adds to the internal logic of the tale, but he also helps to make the end appear to happen mechanically, that is, he helps to strip the story of its tragic potential.

There is only one situation where a real conflict could have arisen: when the police arrest him and seek to press a confession from him. In this crucial moment he is told that Debuisson has turned traitor. While the police officer hoped to make it easier for him to confess, he only made it easier for him to summon up his courage not to betray the revolutionary cause. With the example of the renegade before him, Sasportas can more easily assume the stature of the revolutionary hero that counterpoints the bourgeois Debuisson. He sums up his antagonistic position in the words "I am not Debuisson!"[43]

It may appear as if the conflict in the novel evolved as a personal conflict between the protagonists. If, however, the characters are considered as representatives of their class, the personal conflict widens to a class conflict. As such, it enforces the theory of the incompleteness of the bourgeois revolution. In the first half of the novel the conflict between the planters' profit interests and the humane cause of emancipation is vested in the personality of Debuisson. His character even seems to develop in the course of the novel. Closer examination, however, shows that differences in Debuisson's behaviour are not due to a development of his character but, rather, to Seghers's technique of drawing on different aspects of Debuisson's personality in the first and the second half of the novel. The first part shows the bourgeois turned revolutionary. It appears significant that his commitment to the revolution, in particular slave emancipation, is grounded on humanitarian reasons. In the second part, the revolutionary has turned bourgeois again after realizing that the political, social, and economic consequences of emancipation would interfere with his personal interests. Humanitarianism has to give way to profiteering. Both aspects are present in Debuisson's character all through the novel. It is only that Seghers abruptly switches over from one to the other with the news of Napoleon's coup d'état.

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[42] Seghers, "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," 284.

[43] "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," 284.

From the very beginning, Seghers furnishes him with such properties as are most likely to enhance his ambiguity. While Sasportas as an orphaned Jew – i.e. he is ethnically and socially homeless – can only be one of the 'damned of the earth', Debuisson descends from a well-to-do family. His mixed ancestry foreshadows his role within the novel; the French part stands for revolutionary zeal, the English for the reactionary forces that continue to practise colonialism. At first, Debuisson sees no difficulties in deserting the interests of his class and embracing the cause of the revolution. Debuisson shows no less revolutionary qualities than Sasportas, but he realizes that to carry out his mission means destroying his personal property – a large part of his grandfather's estate belongs rightfully to him; but the property of his future wife – his marriage with the eldest Raleigh daughter is practically agreed upon – means risking the lives of his future wife, his grandfather, and his friends. Herein lies the main difference between Debuisson and Sasportas. For Sasportas there is no personal property, no family at stake. So it is easy for him to sacrifice all – even what is dear to others – on the altar of the revolution.

Critics' opinions on Anna Seghers's West Indian novels vary. The West Germans Reich–Ranicki and Bilke[44] see them in connection with her other literary productions, particularly with her trilogy on the early history of the German Democratic Republic, in which she glories in the socialist resistance against Nazism and the achievements in forming a new and humane society – *Die Toten bleiben Jung* (1949) [*The Dead Stay young*, Boston 1950]; she promulgates the official verdicts on the "counterrevolutionary insurrections" in East Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956 in *Die Entscheidung* (1959); and she celebrates everyday socialist life in *Das Vetrauen* (1968). Artistically the trilogy was a failure, and, to follow the argument of Reich–Ranicki and Bilke, the author realized that an ideologically affirmative literature is liable to fail. She therefore tried to escape to topics in distant times and countries. They understood the West Indian stories as an escape from the trite East German reality, implying that evading reality is the arch-sin for a Marxist author. Although this proposition may be correct as far as the author's motives are concerned, it is certainly misleading in its implication that the exotic theme principally evades reality. East German critics, on the other hand, emphasized the truthfulness of the theme. They see the historical events as a parable for the decolonization movement.

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[44] Reich–Ranicki, *Literatur in West und Ost*, 215. Bilke, "Anna Seghers," 35–75.

At the time she was inspired to write the Antillean tales, Anna Seghers was preoccupied with her fight against Nazism; in the 1940s/1950s, the German Democratic Republic was building up the ‘new society’, engaging in the socialist project after the disaster of Nazism, and as such was in need of role models in the revolutionary struggle. At the time of publication in 1961, the East German socialist project had already lost its innocence, as seen in a violent uprising in 1953 and in the building of the Berlin Wall in 1960, shutting the German Democratic Republic completely off from the other part of Germany.

Twenty years later, Heiner Müller, the closest follower of Bertolt Brecht and an experimental dramatist and director with a strong inclination towards montage and patchwork rewrites of classical plays (e.g., *Die Hamletmaschine*), produced in 1980 his play *Der Auftrag: Erinnerung an eine Revolution* (The Commission: Memory of a Revolution) which “used motives from the narrative *Das Licht auf dem Galgen* by Anna Seghers.”[45] By that time, the communist camp had fallen into a political coma thanks to the intellectual stagnation under Leonid Brezhnev. Exportation of revolutionary ideals à la Che Guevara or the resistance movements in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, or the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, had long ceased. Müller had obviously “lost trust in the political potential of ‘actually existing socialism’ in the GDR and therefore considered the various liberation movements in the Third World as the only feasible option for the future.”[46]

Müller followed Anna Seghers by using her frame for the story: Malbec, a sailor, delivers the letter written by Galloudec on his deathbed in Cuba about the failure of their mission to Antoine in Paris. Antoine, formerly chief officer in the secret service of the Directory, had commissioned Debuisson, Sasportas, and Galloudec to organize a slave uprising in Jamaica. Galloudec’s letter contains the “Memory of a Revolution” that never took off the ground. Heiner Müller uses this frame to introduce three epic prose texts that mediate the happenings in Jamaica – Müller thus presents the plot-line in non-dramatic form, but the motivations of the three revolutionary agents, their doubts or convictions, are presented in dialogue form. Müller once more makes use of the play-within-a-play to create both impact and emotional distance from the recorded events, in true Brechtian fashion. Motives from Anna Seghers furnish one part of the 'dramatic/epic' material, while other elements are retrieved from the traditions of revolutionary drama, from Büchner's *Dantons Tod* [*Danton's Death*], but also from Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* play. Müller also restructures the constellation of characters: on the one hand, he associates the Caribbean revolutionaries with the original French revolutionaries: Sasportas and Robespierre; Debuisson as Danton. On the other hand, Müller categorizes the three characters according to their class specifics: Galloudec represents the peasant class, Debuisson the slave owner and theoretical revolutionary, Sasportas, as a former slave, the true revolutionary. According to Arlene Teraoka, Sasportas moves into the centre of the play: "In the works of Heiner Müller, the Third World finds itself for the first time in the figure of Sasportas, who speaks in the spirit of Fanon."[47]

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[45] Helmut Fuhrmann, *Warten auf “Geschichte”: der Dramatiker Heiner Müller* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997): 107. I happened to listen to a radio drama version of *Der Auftrag*, broadcast by Deutschlandradio / Stimme der DDR in 1982, one of the few advantages of living close to the Iron Curtain at the time.

[46] Thomas Eckhardt, *Der Herold der Toten: Geschichte und Politik bei Heiner Müller* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992): 192. (My tr.)

Helmut Fuhrmann, on the other hand, sees Sasportas's long monologue about the nature and the failure of their mission as "an amalgamation of Marx and Nietzsche, typical of Heiner Müller: the birth of the coloured revolution from the spirit of Dionysos."[48]

In his infatuation with the revolutionary potential of the Third World, Müller validates the Caribbean locality in a much stronger manner than Kleist, Storm, and even Seghers. For Müller, Jamaica stands not merely as scenery, as an exotic location where European characters interact in a First-World fashion. In Müller, location and plot engage in a function of mutual relationship.

Joachim Fiebach, a leading theatre arts scholar in Berlin ('East' at the time), was suspicious of Müller's Third World revolutionary romanticism;[49] the political developments since 1980 have more than overtaken Müller's political expectations, but one incident shows that Müller did make an impact on Third World agents. In 1988, for the 200th anniversary of European settlement in Australia, one year before the 200th anniversary of the French

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[47] Arlene Akiko Teraoka, *The Silence of Entropy or the Universal Discourse: The Postmodern Poetics of Heiner Müller* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1985): 162.

[48] Fuhrmann, *Warten auf Geschichte*, 192.

[49] Very informal private conversation with Joachim Fiebach.

Revolution, the black Australian dramatist, activist, and novelist Mudrooroo and a group of Aboriginal artists planned to perform Müller's *Der Auftrag* as an Aboriginal response to the anniversary celebrations. Müller's play about French intrusion in the Caribbean and the historical British mission to dump convicts and military guards on the shores of Port Jackson demonstrated, in Mudrooroo's view, a

> context of ideas and the simultaneity of two decisive historical events and a reflection on their contemporary political, socio-cultural relevance and their relationship that bind Australia and Europe together, which became the focus of a dramaturgical concept with the aim of producing Müller's text in Sydney as a kind of anti-Bicentennial event.[50]

Mudrooroo changed the name of the play to *Betrayal* and decided not to perform it as part of the Aboriginal Anti-Bicentennial. Eventually, Mudrooroo's rewrite of Heiner Müller's rewrite of Anna Seghers's version of R.C. Dallas's report of the abortive attempt to make slaves in Jamaica stand up and fight for their freedom was performed in Sydney in January 1996.

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[50] Gerhard Fischer, "'Twoccing' *Der Auftrag* to Black Australia: Heiner Müller Aboriginalised by Mudrooroo," in *Heiner Müller: ConTEXTS and History*, ed. Gerhard Fischer (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1995), 140, and *The Mudrooroo/Müller Project: A Theatrical Casebook*, ed. Gerhard Fischer et al. (Kensington: New South Wales UP, 1993).

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“But it will have to be a new English”

A Comparative Discussion of the ‘Nativization’ of English among Afro- and Indo-English authors

LEIF LORENTZON

When Chinua Achebe wrote, in 1964, that the English he and other Afro-English writers use “will have to be a new English […] altered to suit its new African surroundings,”[1] he did so in order to defend his use of English. The language debate, which never seems to abate, is, however, not the issue here, but how anglophone African writers have responded to Achebe’s appeal for an africanization of English. Here I shall use the linguistic term ‘nativization’, as anglophone writers from India also shall be discussed. My use of the term will not correspond to the most common definition, which has to do with the process of how a language gains native speakers. Instead, it has to do with the “import of language material from indigenous languages” into English.[2]

An appeal like Achebe’s is also found in India. In a celebrated foreword to his first novel, *Kanthapura,* in 1938, Raja Rao wrote:

> We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. […] Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.[3]

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[1] Chinua Achebe, “The African Writer and the English Language” (1975), in Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1976): 83.

[2] Hans–Georg Wolf, *English in Cameroon* (Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001): 245.

[3] Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (1938; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989): v.

Rao is more cautious than his Nigerian colleague. The thirty-odd years that separate the statements may, of course, have something to do with this difference. India was still a British colony, and perhaps Rao felt he had to be on his guard for that reason. Achebe certainly did not have to consider this, as Nigeria had been independent for four years when he first spoke these words at a conference in 1964. However, it is more likely that the global politico-cultural climate was altered, also in the Commonwealth, by the middle of the 1960s.

It is, of course, not only the difference in these appeals that has made Afro-English writers more prone to radically nativize their English than their Indo-English colleagues. In the following, it is this varying degree of nativization that shall be examined. The novel is the prime focus, as the linguistic differences are more apparent and exciting here. Why is it that anglophone writers in Africa nativize the English language more than Indian writers? Why do not Indo-English writers experiment linguistically with their mother tongues as the Africans do? In the following I will speculate on possible reasons, as well as establishing the difference by way of illustration.

I begin with Rao and Achebe. In his first novel, Rao has a female raconteur telling about the struggle for independence in her village, Kanthapura. Her voice is clearly oral; her narration is direct address of a fictive listener. This is how the novel begins:

> Our village – I don't think you have ever heard about it – Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara. High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it.[4]

Even if the pronominal address rarely returns, the oral style is intended to create an oral storytelling situation. Nativization of the English is found chiefly in the imagery, where Rao allows the Kannada language and Kanthapura to colour the English. Meenakshi Mukherjee is one critic who has paid attention to how Rao translates expressions literally from Kannada into English[5]: "Postman Subbayya, who had no fire in his stomach and was red with red and blue with blue, comes running…"[6]

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[4] Rao, *Kanthapura*, 1.

[5] Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* (New Delhi & London: Heinemann, 1971): 182.

[6] Rao, *Kanthapura*, 118.

If we compare this with Achebe, it is clear that the Nigerian has gone further. In his third novel, *Arrow of God* (1964), it reads like this when the village priest decides to send one of his sons to the white people’s church:

> I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place.[7]

The priest closes with a proverb, particularly common in oral traditions all over Africa, something this Achebe novel is so rich in that it is sometimes referred to as a collection of proverbs. More remarkable, however, is that when scholars have translated the English of his early novels into Achebe’s mother tongue, Igbo, it is done with little effort, as he has written linguistically from an Igbo perspective. Yet it is clear that he, as Emmanuel Obiechina points out, has adhered to English syntax, whereas the rhythm is African.[8]

A Nigerian who has taken africanization further is the Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara, in his only novel, *The Voice* (1964), which sometimes even is referred to as bilingual, in a transliterary sense, since two languages participate, albeit not on equal terms.[9] This is how it looks when Okala, the protagonist in search of *it*, the meaning of life,

> lay still in the darkness enclosed by darkness, and his thoughts picked in his inside. Then his picked thoughts his eyes opened but his vision only met a rock-like darkness. The picked thoughts then drew his legs but his legs did not come.

Or when, on the same page, he is spoken to in the darkness: “I have not the big thing between us forgotten. You will of my doings hear concerning it.”[10] In an interview, Okara revealed that his ambition was to africanize his prose, and he did this by first writing in Ijaw, and then in English.[11] It is clearly a deliberate effort to nativize English from his mother tongue.

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[7] Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (1964; London: Heinemann, 1986): 45.

[8] Emmanuel Obiechina, *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature* (Washington DC: Howard UP, 1990): 57–60.

[9] Ebi Yeibo, “Nativization of English in African Literary Texts: A Lexico-Semantic Study of Transliteration in Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1/13 (September 2011): 203.

[10] Gabriel Okara, *The Voice* (1964; London: Heinemann, 1979): 76.

An even earlier example, and probably Africa's most celebrated africanization, is the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola's first novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). Here it is not so intentional, as Tutuola did not have many years in school, and his English was full of flaws. However, this did result in an exciting, acrobatic English: he wrote poor English, but he did it well! The novel is a mixture of elementary-school English and Yorùbá storytelling, as the story is based on a Yorùbá folktale. Its first two sentences are "I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life."[12] Of the three Nigerian writers mentioned, Tutuola is the one who, due to or thanks to – depending on how one appreciates the novel – poor schooling, has taken the nativization of English to its furthest extreme.

Very little of this quality is found among Indo-English writers. There are, of course, linguistic experiments, but traces of indigenous languages appear mainly in dialogue. This is seen in works by Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. In a novel by the latter it can look like this: "'Well then go and do so! Why do you eat my head?' snapped Lakha peevishly."[13] Mukherjee points to several such literal translations from Hindi in dialogue, also in Rao.[14] It is, however, rather difficult to find it among later anglophone writers in India. Not that there are no linguistic somersaults in later novels in English, but it is from another position, not a vernacular one, and Mukherjee is often very critical of the result. She is rather alone in this, particularly with regard to G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), which is generally considered a comic masterpiece. H. Hatterr himself is the narrator and his particular language permeates the novel, as well as characterizing him. In the so-called "Mutual Introduction" on the first page, the tone is set in a monologue meant to introduce Hatterr:

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[11] Okara, "Interview," in *Wanasema: Conversations with African Writers*, ed. Don Burness & Mary–Lou Burness (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Africa Studies Program, 1985): 4.

[12] Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard; and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (New York: Grove, 1994): 191.

[13] Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1933; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986): 32.

[14] Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction*, 176.

> Who art thou, fellow?
> Thou, with the folio?
> How now, out in the Street o' Scribes, this hour o' the night,
> disquietening the graves o' the Great.
> Be gone, I say!
> Avaunt, be gone!
> Vanish like hailstones!
> Go, trudge!
> By the Bard o' Avon, this sword hath a sharp edge, fellow; trudge, I
> say, seek shelter, pack! Go!
> (*The figure of the feller speaks*)
> *All's well, friend Master Keeper o' Literary Conscience!*
> *The name is H. Hatterr, how d' you do!*
> *What of that!*
> *– Well, thereby hangs a tale…*
> *List!*[15]

Here it is clearly not, as in the Nigerian novels so far discussed, a local language that alters the English. Instead, it is a conscious and elaborate linguistic experiment in a seemingly modernistic mode, where language itself pleads for attention. That Shakespeare is present here is evident even to a blind reader and traces of him are found on almost every page. But such linguistic wizards as Laurence Sterne, Lewis Carroll, and James Joyce also echo in the novel. Desani himself has called his language a "rigmarole English."[16]

When later Indo-English writers experiment with their language, it is rarely a matter of nativization, but seems more to be in an effervescent modernistic tradition. It is found, for instance in *The God of Small Things*, where Arundhati Roy often plays with the language; a small sample: "Margaret Kochama told her to Stoppit. So she Stoppited."[17] The novel abounds with such charming word-games. There is no Indian vernacular disguised behind these, but a pronounced linguistic play with English.

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[15] G.V. Desani*, All About H. Hatterr* (1948; New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970): 29.

[16] Desani, *All About H. Hatterr*, 37.

[17] Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1988; London: HarperCollins, 1997): 141.

Salman Rushdie is the one who set the tone, made this possible, according to Anuradha Dingwaney.[18] Jon Mee shows how *Midnight's Children* initiated a renaissance among anglophone Indian novelists. This has produced such an extraordinary 'novel' as Vikram Seth's *Golden Gate* from 1986, in verse. Before Rushdie's debut, Indo-English writers, according to Mee, mostly wanted to show how Indian they could be in English, while today they allow all Indian languages and cultures to collide happily with Oxbridge English. He illustrates this largely with Upamanya Chatterjee's novel *English, August* (1988).[19] The same, however, is also present in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, where, for instance, there are many phrases and verses in Malayalam, the language prevalent in Kerala. These are often translated for the benefit of non-Malayalam speakers. One example is found in the eleventh chapter:

> "*Pandoru mukkuvan muthini poyi*,
> (Once a fisherman went to sea,)
> *Padinjaran kattathu mungi poyi*,
> (The west wind blew and swallowed his boat.)."[20]

Here Roy does something that Afro-English authors often do: draw on an oral tradition and translate into English. Achebe does both, and, at the end of *Things Fall Apart*, was the first to offer a glossary of the indigenous terms he uses in the novel. It would be quite easy here to compile a list of Afro-English novels that are full of vernacular words and phrases and include a wordlist on the closing pages – e.g., Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (1965), Ken Saro-Wiva, *Sozaboy* (1985), B. Kojo Laing, *Search Sweet Country* (1986), and Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not* (2006). Chatterjee, by contrast, seems to be rather alone among Indo-English novelists with this practice in *English, August*. This, I believe, indicates a closer affinity to indigenous languages and oral traditions among Afro-English writers. The same is true with regard to Achebe's and Roy's method of spicing their prose with vernacular verses, a style more common in African novels.

The closeness to an oral tradition seems far more common among anglophone writers in Africa than in India and it allows them to utilize it. The manner of having an oral raconteur telling the story in *Kanthapura* is very often found in African prose. It is often more striking in Africa, as can be seen in a short story by Efua Sutherland, "New Life at Kyerefaso," which begins thus: "Shall we say / Shall we put it this way / Shall we say that the maid of Kyerefaso, Furowa, daughter of the Queen mother, was a young deer, graceful in limb?"[21] The repetitive beginning has an obvious oral origin and quality, just like the storyteller's query about how to commence, which also points to the communal ownership of the orature.

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[18] Anuradha Dingwaney, "Salman Rushdie," in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (London: Hurst, 2003): 308–17.

[19] Jon Mee, "After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s," in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Mehrotra, 320.

[20] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 219.

A commanding example of this is the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973). A traditional West African bard, a griot, narrates the whole novel. He refers to the fictive storytelling situation and he even breaks with the fiction of the story he narrates:

> Soon we shall end this remembrance, the sound of it. It is the substance that continues. Soon it will end. Yet still, what a scene of carnage the white destroyers have brought here.[22]

Armah uses throughout the first-person-plural pronoun for the narrative voice. This is undoubtedly an effort to associate with, and point to, collective storytelling, the communal ownership of oral traditions in Africa. He uses the same technique in his next and fifth novel, *The Healers*, minus the we-perspective: "This tongue of the story-teller, descendant of the master in the art of eloquence, this tongue flies too fast for the listeners."[23] When Armah made his debut in 1968 with *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, it was in a decidedly modernistic mode, and he was criticized for this by Achebe and his compatriot Ama Ata Aidoo: he was too modernistic and not African enough. But, as seen in his fourth novel and thereafter, he turned to Africa's history and orature.

That African novelists exploit the oral traditions of the continent is very common. Next to linguistic features and an oral narrative voice, it is often the metaphysical that finds its way into otherwise realistic narratives. A famous example is Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, where the supernatural is a natural part of a socio-realistic story. This is also found in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's lengthy political satire *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), where the hero of the novel enters flying in the shape of a crow.

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[21] Efua Sutherland, "New Life at Kyerefaso," in *Voices of Ghana: Literary Contributions to the Ghana Broadcasting System, 1955–57*, ed. Henry Swanzy (Accra: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958): 314.

[22] Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978): 206.

[23] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers: An Historical Novel* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978): 2.

Ngũgĩ is also interesting from another perspective. He wrote his first four novels in English, but since 1978 he has used his mother tongue, Gikuyu. In a famous article, he claimed that African literature can be written only in African languages.[24] Since then he has translated his novels into English himself, even *Wizard of the Crow's* seven hundred pages. These novels are, however, meant to be read aloud, rather than quietly alone as most other novels are, and in Kenya this is done. It makes them less successful as novels in English, but it is apparent that other priorities are important for the political Ngũgĩ. In English they lose linguistic traces of Gikuyu or Swahili, but they are rich in songs and verses, especially in Gikuyu. Even if this has little to do with the nativization of English, it does indicate the anglophone African writer's strong links to oral narrating in Africa.

There is plenty of evidence of the close relation between modern novel writing and orature in Africa. Nuruddin Farah has often been accused of being too modernistic in his novels, something he answers by referring to the oral narrating he grew up with and that he utilizes in his modern novels. Even if there probably are fewer African authors who grow up in predominantly oral cultures today, most still find it useful to turn to orality, particularly as it remains a relatively formidable tradition. I remember that Alain Mabanckou from Zaire, during the Gothenburg Book fair in 2010, claimed that he cannot fathom a writer from Africa who does not have strong links to the orature of the continent. There was a time when a novel from Africa was judged on how authentically African it was by how much oral narrating could be traced in its pages. Fortunately those days are gone, and *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is today considered just as 'African' as his later 'oral' novels.

One remarkable novel in this respect, already mentioned, is Ken Saro–Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. It is a very oral novel, but it is not the traditional narrating of the village or a vernacular that has influenced the English, but a Nigerian pidgin. In the sub-title of the novel, the author declares that this is "a novel written in rotten English." Witness the beginning of chapter "Lomber eleven":

> When we wake up next morning, the rain was falling bad bad. The roof of the school was leaking plenty plenty and everywhere na sosa

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[24] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Language of African Literature," in Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986): 4–33.

> water water. I was thinking to myself how are the pits that we dig last night. Water go don fill all well well. I was laughing small for my belly.[25]

This is how the whole book reads. *Sozaboy* is extreme even for Africa, being rather strenuous reading, but well worth the effort, as it is an important novel, about a boy soldier who also is the one who narrates the story; which in its linguistic experimentation is much like Okara’s *The Voice*.

In francophone Africa it is not until Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les soleils des Indépendances* (1970) that we find any linguistic africanization in a novel in French. Alain Ricard argues that it paved the way for later francophone authors in Africa, and tells how difficult it was for Kourouma to find a publisher. In Paris there was no interest, but in Quebec he was luckier, and the rest is history.[26] Before Kourouma’s debut there was not the same nativization among Afro-French writers as we find among Afro-English authors.

The different attitude toward the colonial language among anglophone and francophone novelists is largely due to the two colonial powers’ dissimilar policies in Africa; the French wanted to assimilate the elite in their colonies and largely disregarded local African languages, while the English often supported vernaculars with their system of Indirect Rule. Chantal Zabus writes that “the French policy of centralism and assimilation in West Africa repressed” local languages, and the classroom became “the seat of linguistic imperialism,” whereas in the British colonies Indirect Rule “allowed the African languages to blossom.”[27]

There are also various signs of a stronger relation to French among francophone authors than to English among anglophone authors in Africa. The first literature that was published in French in Africa was rather unrestrained homage to France and its language – for instance, Bakary Diallo’s *Force-Bonté* (1926), often considered the first francophone novel in Africa. It can be compared to Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka*, which had appeared the year before in Sesotho, South Africa. The latter is a novel about the Zulu king Chaka, portrayed as a despot, yet the novel shows a sympathetic understanding of indigenous religions – something that hindered its publication for fifteen years at the mission press. It is nevertheless far from Diallo's praise of the colonial masters. Missionaries, predominantly in anglophone Africa, taught in local languages, translated religious texts into vernaculars, and set up printing presses. The chief purpose was, of course, to spread the gospel, but, as Mofolo's example shows, there was room for other texts and books, even if these were not allowed to clash with the Christian doctrine too much.

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[25] Ken Saro–Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985; Harlow: Longman, 1994): 86.

[26] Alain Ricard, *The Languages and Literatures of Africa: The Sands of Babel* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004): 199.

[27] Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (Cross/Cultures 4; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1991): 19, 22.

The administrators or missionaries in francophone Africa were not that interested in indigenous languages or cultures. Instead, they wanted to make their subjects French. In this they were quite successful; Léopold Sédar Senghor is a brilliant example of 'metropolitan' influence, something Zabus also discusses.[28] In spite of being Senegal's first president and the leading poet of the *Négritude* movement, Senghor loved the French language – even calling it "a language of the gods"[29] – and was a member of the French Academy. While *Négritude* represented the francophone intellectual's ideological and literary rebellion against Europe at the time, it was not a linguistic protest against French. Christopher Miller has discussed this in *Theories of Africans*, pointing to the Afro-French writers' close link to French, articulated in the term *francité*, which could mean 'French without France'. *Négritud*e in Africa was primarily a form of cultural protest, not a linguistic phenomenon; it was an attack on European culture (not French) and in its stead traditional Africa was promoted. The imagery of its poetry was decidedly African; the poems were to be recited, sung to traditional African instruments, but expressed in French from Paris.[30]

Négritude was chiefly a cultural revolt, at least in Senghor's African variant; his brother-in-arms Aimé Césaire from Martinique was far more political. The Afro-English writers did not have the same need for such cultural protest and criticized *Négritude* for idealizing pre-colonial Africa. Of course, there was protest and rebellion among Afro-English intellectuals, but it was more political than cultural and included a pan-African perspective – which in many ways was quite comparable to *Négritude*. Anglophone Africa also still had access to its indigenous languages, which the English often encouraged. This resulted in literature written in a number of African languages in the English colonies. It also led to linguistic experiments in English, as we have seen, while one had to wait for Kourouma's début in 1970 for anything similar in French from Africa.

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[28] Zabus, *The African Palimpsest*, 20.

[29] Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, tr. John Reed & Clive Wake (London: Oxford UP, 1965): 95.

[30] Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990). 183–93.

I believe that the linguistic difference between Afro-English and Afro-French writers is quite comparable to that between Afro-English and Indo-English writers. The latter were far more anglicized than the former. And once again it had to do with politics. The English were more successful in India than in Africa, and more determined to anglicize their subjects. As early as 1817, the Hindu College in Calcutta was opened for members of the Indian middle class to be educated in English. And in 1835 Lord Macaulay stated in his notorious "Minute on Education":

> we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.[31]

The British had no such ambitions in Africa – perhaps with the exception of Achimota School in the Gold Coast (Ghana). They opened that school in 1927 in order to produce, as at Hindu College, an English-speaking elite for the local administration. And it did result in a local literate middle class, consisting, of course, solely of men; it took a century before women were offered education in Africa. Stephanie Newell has written about the reading clubs that were set up in the Gold Coast during the nineteenth century by educated middle-class men.[32] Next to Achimota it was, however, missionary schools, as in most of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, that were responsible for primary and secondary education.

In several novels from India we read about the middle class, certainly in works by Salman Rushdie as well as in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, but the perspective is rather different; in the latter, Europe and Western perceptions represent destructive forces, while Rushdie is more favourable towards Western influences in his fictive worlds. Postcolonial critics have shown how the middle class in the colonies and later the Commonwealth is often more

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[31] Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, "Introduction" to *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Mehrotra, 5.

[32] Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: How to Play the Game of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002).

British than the English: they have become “mimic men.”[33] This phenomenon is more common in India, and in the West Indies, than in anglophone Africa. The elite and the middle class came to admire England after literary studies became central to education. Gauri Viswanathan has written that the British found “an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education.”[34] If you admire Shakespeare, Dickens, and Austen, it is possibly more difficult to revolt against the teachers and representatives of their literatures.

In their high regard for the British, the Indian middle class is comparable to the Afro-French elite’s relation to France, or at least to *francité*. And neither group is as eager to nativize the colonial language in their writings as the Afro-English writers are. This educational success of the British in India is, I believe, a key explanation for the lack of nativization of the colonial language in Indo-English literature. That so much more of this is found among Afro-English writers has to do with the close affinity between orature and literature, and the vitality of indigenous languages in Africa. Oral traditions are still, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, very much alive in Africa, even if they have also become urban and have moved into recording studios.

Another reason for Afro-English writers’ larger desire to nativize their English may have to do with their earliest years in school, which usually took place in missionary schools. Before 1960, missionaries had a near-monopoly on primary and secondary education in most of sub-Saharan Africa. An indication of this is the importance accorded to John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* by many African writers in colonial British Africa. Thomas Mofolo’s first novel, for instance, was a pastiche of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Mission schools are still important, at least in rural areas, as is evident in the many different kinds of churches found all over the sub-Saharan Africa. Particularly in anglophone Africa, elementary education at these mission schools is often conducted in the local language. Later, when moving to a secondary school, perhaps in a city, pupils encounter education in English together with pupils from other language groups. As a consequence, anglophone students in Africa are not as removed from their mother tongue as perhaps the Indo-English and Franco-African students are. And if they later become writers, their native language and its orature are a natural part of the creative process, and the result is a linguistic nativization of the English novel.

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[33] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 86.

[34] Gauri Viswanathan, “The Beginnings of English Literary Studies in British India,” *Oxford Literary Review* 9.1–2 (July 1987): 17.

Anglophone Indian writers’ relation to indigenous literatures may, of course, be oral, but it is more likely to be shaped at least as much by written literature, as India, unlike most sub-Saharan Africa, has a very old and rich written literary tradition. This is a decisive difference between black Africa and India, and it certainly has something to do with the lack of nativization among Indo-English writers. India has had written literature for many thousands of years; the Vedic literature in Sanskrit is most likely more than three thousand years old. The language has survived as one of India’s fourteen official languages and remains an important cultural vehicle, especially in northern India. In the south, it is Dravidian Tamil that possesses a long written literary tradition going back at least some centuries before Christ. It is an official language in Sri Lanka and in several states of southern India: in other words, it also represents a fairly unbroken written literary tradition, much like Sanskrit. Along with these languages there are several others that, since at least the Middle Ages, have had an unbroken literary tradition, such as Hindi, Gujarati, and Bengali. In the latter tradition we find in Rabindranath Tagore an excellent example of a writer with one foot in an English and another in an Indian literary tradition: he combines a Bengali lyricism with an English romantic tradition – in spite of apparently having hated his English lessons as a student.[35]

When Indo-English novelists do not turn to orature for linguistic inspiration, one should not be surprised. They have a long written tradition to utilize, unlike their Afro-English colleagues. That they also reject linguistic experimentation with their indigenous languages when writing English is, I believe, a result of their immersion in a successful British educational system. Africa’s writers, particularly the anglophone ones, allow oral tradition and various indigenous languages to influence their narratives, so that, when they write, they tend to africanize their novels stylistically. Afro-English novelists and Indo-English novelists have provided the world with many fascinating new works of fiction, but the Africans have been linguistically more daring, creating new varieties of English in the process. If in the future there is a risk of

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[35] Amit Chaudhuri, “The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore,” in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Mehrotra, 104.

"world literature becoming world literature in English,"[36] it seems to me that it is likely to be written in various Englishes, and this largely thanks to Afro-English writers.

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[36] Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (London: Continuum, 2008): 10.

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African Literature Today and *African Theatre*

The James Gibbs Connection

JAMES CURREY AND LYNN TAYLOR

African Literature Today, in a series of thirty thematic collections edited by Eldred Durosimi Jones and now Ernest Emenyonu, has charted for almost half a century the growth of writing of novels, plays, and poetry in Africa. For a third of those issues, James Gibbs has used his editorship of the book-review pages to introduce titles from the numerous publishers within Africa to an international audience, as well as submitting books published across the world to critical attention. In 1998, James Gibbs, with Martin Banham, Femi Osofisan, and Jane Plastow, founded *African Theatre* to concentrate on performance as much as on writing. These two thematic series provide discussion, debate, and critical evaluation of outstanding African achievement in literature and drama.

African Literature Today

In a 1989 lecture at the University of Guelph, Chinua Achebe said:

> In 1962 we saw the gathering together of a remarkable generation of young African men and women who were to create within the next decade a corpus of writing which is today seriously read and critically evaluated in many parts of the world. It was an enormously important moment, and year, in the history of modern African literature. The gathering took place at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.
>
> The other event of 1962 was not as widely publicized as the Makerere Conference but it was to prove at least as portentous. It was the decision by one farsighted London publisher to launch the African

> Writers Series on the basis of no more than three or four published titles. Conventional wisdom in the book business at the time was inclined to dismiss the whole enterprise as a little harebrained. But in the next twenty-five years this series was to publish more than three hundred titles and establish itself without any doubt as the largest and best library of African literature in existence. […]
>
> As for the African Writers Series in that same eventful year of 1962, I was invited to be its founding editor and I was to spend a considerable part of my literary energy in the following ten years wading through a torrent of good, bad, and indifferent writing that seemed in some miraculous way to have been waiting behind the sluice gates for the trap to be released.[1]

This was some twenty-five years after the start of the African Writers Series. He was at a conference organized by Professor Douglas Killam. Thanks to the calm persuasion of Chinua Achebe, Heinemann had plunged into this torrent. The paperback African Writers Series took off half a century ago in 1962 because there were so few hardback novels to publish in paperback. Aspiring writers in Africa saw the photographs of Africans on the back of the orange covers and got the idea that they, too, might get published. The 1960s were alive with newly published African writers. Mbari led the way with seventeen founding titles. Heinemann was far from alone in its search for unpublished scripts by unknown writers. Oxford, Longman, Collins Fontana, and André Deutsch began to find a responsive market in Africa in the new campus and school bookshops. Everything seemed possible as the countries of Africa became independent. The market for these books was first and foremost in Africa and was based on educational institutions, schools, colleges, and the increasing number of universities.

How should serious readers critically evaluate the books published from Achebe's "torrent" of writing? Eldred Durosimi Jones at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone saw the need for the encouragement of critical standards and in 1968 persuaded Heinemann to start the critical journal *African Literature Today*.

There had been passionate debates among the writers at the Makerere conference in June–July 1962 about what African criteria should apply. The question of language led to ferocious interchanges among this new crop of writers. Obi Nwakanma wrote:

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[1] Chinua Achebe, "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature," in Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009): 97–99.

> On the Monday morning […] the conference took off in earnest, with Okigbo leading the discussions on the conference theme: 'What is African literature?' By the end of the day Okigbo had succeeded in stirring up one of the most enduring controversies in African Literature. […] Was there any such thing as 'African writing?' Okigbo had declared, 'There is no such thing as African writing. There is only good or bad writing.' Obi Wali argued in his seminal paper, 'Dead End of African Literature?' that African writing would remain inauthentic if African writers continued to produce in foreign colonial languages. […] [Okigbo] had thrown many of the writers into guffaws when he wondered aloud about the kind of Pidgin English Nigerian prostitutes spoke in Lagos.[2]

Ezekiel Mphahlele, a *Drum* journalist in Johannesburg, went into exile in Ibadan. In 1961, the Mbari Club was convened by Wole Soyinka and Ulli Beier, with leading artists and writers as its foundation members. Mphahlele took the chair. The Makerere meeting was associated with Mbari and its journal *Black Orpheus* from Ibadan and with *Transition*, the Kampala-based magazine edited by Rajat Neogy. It was attended by representatives from *The New African* from Cape Town and *Classic* magazine in Johannesburg. And the voices of the new writers and artists were heard on the new radio stations of Africa, thanks to Dennis Duerden's Transcription Centre in London. At that time, the cold war had become hot in Africa, and later it emerged that these organizations were all supported by the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom, through which the CIA laundered funds to support the free flow of information in the West. Congress funds at this time played a vital role in the establishment of African literature.[3] Heinemann and the other British educational publishers were accused of being just plain money-grabbing capitalists.

Ezekiel Mphahlele went on to get the Congress to sponsor, six months later from 26 March to 9 April 1963, two rather more sober conferences of academics in West Africa to discuss the integration of African literature in the university curriculum and pre-university teaching syllabuses. These conferences were sponsored by the Continuation Committee for Inter-University Co-operation, which had been set up in a seminar at Freetown in 1961 under the chairmanship of Dr Davidson Nicol, then Principal of Fourah Bay College. The conference at Dakar University discussing African literature in French took the decision to place the study of African literature outside the course on French literature, chiefly because there was a feeling, as Mphahlele wrote in *Transition*,

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[2] Obi Nwakanma, *Christopher Okigbo 1930–67: Thirsting for Sunlight* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010): 181–82.

[3] See Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1989).

> that African literature should be studied under a chair of comparative literature or African studies and that it would be premature to award a *Certificat de littérature* or *Certificat d'histoire littéraire africaine.* One felt that the tendency throughout was to place an emphasis on what one might call the sociology of African writing rather than talk about it as *literature*.[4]

At the same time, a far more radical conference on the integration of African literature in English was being held at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the oldest institution of higher learning in Africa south of the Sahara (it was founded in 1827 – two years before the University of Cape Town). A powerful lobby was emerging in East and West Africa for adventurous change. In particular, support was given by David Cook and Gerald Moore at Makerere in Uganda, Eldred Jones and Peter Edwards at Fourah Bay, and Kofi Senanu from Ghana. But Ibadan, though steeped in the English literature tradition, had advanced further than anywhere else, under Professor Molly Mahood.

Obi Nwakanma has given vivid insights into this period:

> By 1963, the West Indian Oscar R. Dathorne and the Nigerian, Ben Obumselu, alongside scholars like John Ramasaran were beginning to establish the early theoretical framework for the systematic study of African literature at the University of Ibadan.

Professor Molly Mahood had got Obumselu to investigate the emerging literature, and Nwakanma continues:

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[4] Ezekiel Mphahlele, "African Literature and Universities: A Report on Two Conferences to Discuss African Literature and the University Curriculum," *Transition* 10 (1963): 16.

> Much of his pioneering work in this period with Ibadan colleagues and the Sierra Leonean Eldred Durosimi Jones helped to establish a critical direction and a discursive idiom for the post-colonial literature.

In an interview with Nwakanma in 1992, Obumselu said, "Many people actually didn't think much of it. African literature, especially the new writing did not exist by any stretch of most imaginations."[5]

One immediate and practical result of the Fourah Bay conference was the establishment of the *Bulletin of African Literature in English*, edited from the second number by Eldred Durosimi Jones, who was teaching literature at Fourah Bay College and was soon to become the first African professor in English-speaking Africa. For four issues it was typed, cyclostyled, stapled, and mailed by Marjorie Jones. Eldred Jones referred to it as the house magazine of African universities, born of an attempt to provide an information sheet to report on activities and developments in creative writing and teaching in universities. There was also a short-lived Association for the Study of African Literature.

Eldred and Marjorie Jones went on a Commonwealth Fellowship to the University of Leeds in 1965. The Professor of English, Derry Jeffares, was Irish and thus had a teasing relationship with the British intellectual establishment, who only doubtfully acknowledged American literature as being worthy of study. In 1964, the University hosted the founding conference of Commonwealth Literature, and out of that emerged, with backing from the British Council, the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, which Keith Sambrook got Heinemann to publish. Eldred Jones says in his book *The Freetown Bond:*

> Derry was the leading spirit behind the Commonwealth Literature movement which brought together scholars and writers from across the world to establish a literary genre out of the diversity of writing produced in the British Commonwealth. I taught a postgraduate seminar which was itself a symbol of commonwealth diversity and included Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. […] He was however busy writing *A Grain of Wheat* so that I saw less of him at the seminar than at my wife's Saturday afternoons at [our apartment in] The Avenue – a far more valuable allocation of his time and talent.[6]

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[5] Nwakanma, *Christopher Okigbo*, 180–81.

[6] Eldred Durosimi Jones & Marjorie Jones, *The Freetown Bond: A Life under Two Flags* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012): 91.

Alan Hill and Keith Sambrook were fast expanding Heinemann's operations in Africa and needed a manager for their Nigerian office. During 1964, Derry Jeffares had recommended to Keith Sambrook that he interview Aig Higo, whom he described as outstanding among his recent MA students at the University of Leeds. Aig Higo was a poet himself and was involved in the Mbari club. He took over the Heinemann Nigeria office in January 1965 and joined Chinua Achebe in choosing new authors for the African Writers Series.

While at Leeds, Eldred Jones in 1965 showed a copy of the *Bulletin of African Literature* to Keith Sambrook, who proposed that Heinemann should publish an academic journal of African literary criticism. The idea was to make it rather less formal than the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. The aim was to attract all those people, teachers and professionals, who were buying these new African books in the campus and school bookshops. It was aimed at an audience which wanted to read what Africans were writing about themselves. As the first editorial stated,

> *African Literature Today* is intended to be a forum for the examination of the literature of Africa. Its language is English but it will publish criticism of literature no matter what its original language. The Editor wishes to encourage close analysis of individual works or the output of particular writers or groups of writers. Publishers publish what they decide to publish for a variety of reasons, not least among them that they are in business to make money. Readers also read books with a variety of expectations, not the least being their wish to be entertained.

Eldred Jones continued:

> It is the critic's business to read discerningly and demonstrate the qualities of a work and thus (a) to make it accessible to a larger readership than the absence of criticism might have opened to it, and (b) by an accumulation of such examinations to help establish literary standards. The more permissive the publisher's policy is, the more necessary becomes the function of the critic.[7]

The first four 64-page issues, which came out roughly every six months over two years (1968–70), are pioneering. They got off to a flying start with articles of singular and adventurous excellence. The very first article in the very first issue of *African Literature Today* still rates high on the citation index. It was by Bernth Lindfors and titled “The Palm Oil with which Achebe’s Words are Eaten.” Articles on the poetry of Okigbo and Clark were welcomed by Eldred Jones, as he felt that criticism of African literature had “not done much for poetry.”

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[7] Eldred Durosimi Jones, "*African Literature Today*," *African Literature Today* 1 (1968): 1-2.

It was explained to James Currey while he was training at the Oxford University Press at the end of the 1950s that the Press took on academic journals out of duty. These were the days before Captain Maxwell of Pergamon showed everybody how to wring the university libraries dry with high-priced peer-group review journals. Currey was hired in 1967 by Alan Hill at Heinemann to consolidate all these adventurous plans. Heinemann had not even thought of setting up a journals department, where the relentless demands of regular publication and the collection of subscriptions are completely different from the rhythms of publishing books. In 1960, Heinemann Educational Books had been established as a separate company from William Heinemann, but when Currey went to work with Keith Sambrook in April 1967, the firm had only just moved into new premises in Charles Street, Mayfair. Rugs were still rolled up in the corners of offices. There were not enough cupboards. Piles of boxes lurked in dusty corners. African publishing occupied the top floors. Currey likes to remember that he invented *African Literature Today* as the title for the new journal, just as he had persuaded all his South African colleagues in Cape Town to call the radical political and literary monthly *The New African*. In a fit of excited overambition, Currey tried to set up a means by which readers could pay subscriptions in the new currencies of their own countries, whether naira, shillings, kwachas, leones, or even the CFA of the French currency zone. The department even sold advertising space. It was a lesson, in every practical way, of how not to run a journal. An inordinate amount of the publishing department’s time was used in pursuing problems of distribution, subscription, and advertising. Was *African Literature Today* going to have to close?

Meanwhile, in those three years the African Writers Series had doubled in size to eighty titles, many of which were regularly reprinting. The Caribbean Writers Series was started, and school and university textbook publishing was building up. An Arab Authors series was also being planned. Doug Killam, perched on the corner of the pile of carpets in James Currey’s office and just in from an overnight flight from Canada, proposed that he write a helpful introduction for students to *The Novels of Chinua Achebe.* Would it not be better to spend our time on books such as this and give up the journal?

Someone, somehow, came up with the obvious answer for a book publisher – to make *African Literature Today* into a book! From *ALT* 5 on *The Novel*, each issue would appear annually on a theme in simultaneous hardback and paperback. It would be co-published in the USA by the Africana Publishing Company, which had recently been set up in New York by Hans Zell. He had been the outstanding manager of the Fourah Bay University Bookshop, where the choice of new literature from Africa was particularly appreciated by Eldred Jones as Professor of English. Zell was later to establish the Ife University Press, and the Ife Book Fair in Nigeria.

There is a quite grumpy editorial in *ALT* 5 by Eldred Jones lamenting the change from twice-yearly to once-yearly publication:

> This change, it must be admitted, threatens the liveliness of such dialogue as the journal may stimulate. To keep critical exchanges from going stale, the editor plans to invite comments, where these seem warranted, in good enough time for both an original view and the reactions to it to appear side by side.

(He put this into effect, with Jeannette Kamara responding to Mukotani Rugyendo's review of her review of the *The Old Man and the Medal* by Ferdinand Oyono, if you can follow that!) He continued:

> To make up for the longer gaps between numbers, *African Literature Today* will be larger. This number is devoted mainly, though not exclusively, to articles on the novel. The next number will be principally devoted to poetry. It is planned that future numbers will each feature some special aspect of African Literature.[8]

As evidence that this really was an independent journal, and not just a publicity medium for Heinemann's African books, there was a withering review of Killam's book on Achebe by Derek Elders, a Fourah Bay colleague of Eldred Jones: "Admittedly one could place this book in the hands of students without their coming to much harm."[9]

The use of themes proved to be inspired, as it meant that the collections retained their interest longer than conventional academic journals where the contents available are just lumped in together. Issues on Women, Language, Orature, and Childhood revealed both traditional attitudes to various aspects of life and the writers' own particular reactions to such attitudes, quite purposefully intending to influence or even change them. Themes transformed the whole enterprise, in that the individual volumes continued to sell and on occasions reprint, unlike an academic journal, where each issue more or less gets superseded by the next. As a result, a valuable resource was created which charts the changing concerns and interests among academics over fifty years. It is a much more demanding role than editing a conventional academic journal. This was in the day of airmail letters, when it took three weeks to get an answer. Communication by airmail within Africa and to countries outside meant that it was more or less impossible to keep to artificial timetables. A volume was produced when the editors and publishers were able to get it together. This proved to be suitable for Africa in a pre-electronic age. Many conventional journals started at that time and collapsed as the issues fell behind the advertised schedule for which people had paid subscriptions in advance.

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[8] Eldred Durosimi Jones, "Editorial," *African Literature Today* 5 (1971): iv.

[9] Derek Elders, "G.D. Killam: *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*," *African Literature Today* 5 (1971): 143.

In the very first number, Eldred Jones had welcomed articles on Okigbo and J.P. Clark, as there was so little criticism on poetry. By *ALT* 6, *Poetry in Africa* (1973), there was no problem filling 192 pages with criticism. All the books reviewed were collections of poetry. Eldred Jones kept Chinua Achebe's *Beware, Soul Brother* for himself. The last lines of his review at the end of the volume say: "The collection is an immense achievement. The Biafran War lost us a remarkable poet – Okigbo; it has given us a new assured poetic voice – Achebe."[10] In 2010, Chinua Achebe was to delight an overflowing audience at the University of Leeds with his reading of his poetry in both Igbo and English.

In *ALT* 10, *Retrospect and Prospect* (1979), Eldred Jones wryly reflected on the past decade of achievement:

> The last ten years in Africa have seen the settling of the various newly independent countries into the realities of their autonomy. The period of colonial protest and struggle gave way to the establishment of independent regimes, to a stock-taking and a preliminary assessment of the fruits of the new state of life. The writers of Africa looked about them, and applied to life under their own kind the same critical examination, through their art and conduct, which had been given to the earlier colonial regimes. The resulting examination produced less and less enthu-

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[10] Eldred Durosimi Jones, "Chinua Achebe, *Beware, Soul Brother*," *African Literature Today* 6 (1973): 182.

> siastic responses. Thus the trend over the last ten years or so has been a greater degree of alienation or dissidence of the principal writers from established regimes and a movement towards closer identification with what they see as the needs of the ordinary people. Writers increasingly found themselves in difficulties with their respective governments, with ensuing consequences of loss of favour, of exile – enforced or voluntary – or worse still of detention or imprisonment in their own countries.[11]

Eldred Jones took as examples Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ. Wole Soyinka had been detained for bravely attempting to broker a peace deal between the Biafrans and the Federal authorities. Ngũgĩ was detained without trial for almost the whole of 1978 by Kenyatta's government because they knew that his play in Gikuyu was so popular among the people. *ALT* 10 carried a STOP PRESS announcement that Ngũgĩ and all political prisoners had been released on 12 December 1978 by the incoming President Moi.

From *ALT* 12 in 1982 Eldred Jones brought in as Associate Editor Eustace Palmer, a colleague in his department at Fourah Bay. In 1972, Heinemann had published his study *An Introduction to the African Novel*, which was widely reviewed and much used. However, *African Literature Today,* keeping a proper critical independence, had given it a mixed review in which Palmer's handling of Achebe was compared unfavourably with Doug Killam's book on Achebe's writing; which had in its turn been criticized in *ALT*. From *ALT* 16 onwards, Marjorie Jones's essential role as Assistant Editor was acknowledged publicly, although she had been doing the job since *ALT* 12. Her role became doubly important as Eldred Jones lost his sight.

In April 1982, the Nigerian foreign exchanges closed, leaving Heinemann and other British publishers with container loads of books unpaid for. During the mid-1980s Heinemann was to have four owners in five years. The managing director put in by the new owners was slashing the publishing departments, which he reckoned were indulging themselves in spending the profits on publishing new books at the expense of the dividends for their owners.

James Currey wrote from Heinemann to Eustace Palmer on 22 August 1984 saying that he had had to agree to cut the review section as a last-ditch compromise to save the closure of *African Literature Today*. Within a few weeks it was made clear by the new management that Heinemann Educational Books would drop all academic publishing on Africa, "except perhaps a couple of new titles in the African Writers Series by somebody like Ngugi [...] and just finish the *UNESCO General History of Africa.*"

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[11] Eldred Durosimi Jones, "Ten Years of *African Literature Today*," *African Literature Today* 10 (1979): 1–2.

At the end of George Orwell's year 1984, Currey left Heinemann to set up with Clare Currey a publishing company to bring out academic work in paperback on Africa for the market in the rich world; they were equally determined, although there was no foreign exchange, to get their books into Africa by using every strategy such as barter and cooperative ventures with African publishers. Michael Crowder pointed out in 1986 that there was now an African Book Famine and with the cooperative ingenuity of our authors Currey managed to get shipments of their books into the hands of national publishers in Africa.

During the very first two weeks of the company in 1985, Currey wrote to Eldred Jones on 12 January 1985 offering, optimistically, to continue to publish *African Literature Today* as a series. Richard Gale, in charge of production at Heinemann, and one of only two of the ten directors to survive, rang up one day to offer all remaining stock of the series at five pence a copy. It helped him to clear the Heinemann warehouse shelves, and it helped the Curreys in starting a list to have a well-established series. (Several of those early titles have reprinted. Indeed, it is planned that James Currey Publishers, now an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, are to make the whole series, including titles which have long been out of stock, available again on paper and electronically.)

Heinemann were not alone in turning against African studies; Oxford, Longman, and Macmillan took similar decisions because of the debts built up on school textbooks in Africa. Only Cambridge University Press continued with a commitment to serious publishing on Africa. The losses on schoolbooks blinded big publishers to the growth of African studies in the rapidly expanding universities in the prosperous lands of Europe, the Commonwealth, and especially in North America. Indeed, a popular subject was now the study of African literature in the new African universities, especially in Nigeria.

In 1992 James Currey visited Ibadan for UNESCO to negotiate the Nigerian edition of the *UNESCO General History of Africa* with work by the first generation of renowned Nigerian historians and other African scholars writing in Arabic, Portuguese, French, as well as English. He was surprised to be welcomed at the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan, and Ife as, above all else, the publisher of *African Literature Today.* The Nigerian input into the journal has always been enthusiastic; it is now published in a Nigerian edition by Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria.

It was essential to make satisfactory arrangements for publishing *African Literature Today* in the USA, where novels, poetry, and plays by African writers were being adventurously prescribed on the reading lists of courses in history, politics, and anthropology, as well as in literature. As David William Cohen, who was teaching history at Johns Hopkins, explained to Currey,

> he, as a historian, used a dozen African novels with his first-year students who had opted for the course in African history. He said at the beginning of the year the students saw Africa as a single continent. By the end of the year and some 12 novels later his students understood the varieties of Africas and he could begin to teach them.[12]

African Literature Today gave lecturers help in coming to an understanding about teaching this new writing. Africana Publishing Company in New York had continued selling the series modestly for Heinemann, but Hans Zell had resigned after eighteen productive months and gone to Britain. The ever-adventurous Eritrean publisher Kassahun Checole had only just established Africa World Press in Trenton, New Jersey, and told us he could sell three times as many copies. A barter arrangement was struck whereby James Currey Publishers did all the editing, typesetting, and making up of the film, while Africa World Press 'paid' for offset rights with bulk copies printed at low run-on cost on top of the copies they needed for the US market. No money need change hands.

Hans Zell was now in Oxford developing the *African Book Publishing Record* and the African Books Collective; he and Currey had worked on that first essential reference book, *A Reader's Guide to African Literature* (1972), which Zell had compiled and written with Helene Silver. He generously offered James Currey Publishers free access to his incomparable mailing list, which included the new academies and bookshops in Africa and the rest of the world. That mailing list gave *African Literature Today* and the rest of the James Currey list a fighting chance of survival.

When Eldred Jones decided that he would have to step down from the editorship, he gave his reflections in his "Afterword" to *ALT* 23 about publishing the series from 1968 to 2001:

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[12] James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writer Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008): xxv.

> The purpose of *African Literature Today* was to provide a forum for the examination of African literature to open the literature to both academic and general readers particularly within Africa itself.[…] Over the last thirty-three years many Africa scholars have had their earliest critical work published in it and have gone on to higher things while the journal has gone some way to providing a body of critical opinion against which the literature can be studied. Fortunately non-African contributors have also brought new perspectives into the examination of the works of African writers, thus enriching the critical literature.[…]
>
> These thirty-three years have been for me an adventure which has brought me into contact with a wide variety of scholars, associates, advisers, many of whom became personal friends. […] I have also received valuable advice from my Associate Editors – Professor Emmanuel Ngara, Dr Nnadozie Inyama, Professor Simon Gikandi, Dr Ato Quayson, Professor Francis Imbuga and my Reviews Editor, James Gibbs. The warm associations with contributors were probably due to my preference for personal letters over reply cards in reacting to submissions. Even rejection letters often contained suggestions for improvement and resubmission either to me or to other journals. This, in turn, generated a volume of friendly correspondence which sometimes included details of family life, marriages, births and successes from correspondents whom I have never met or have run into only long years after our meeting on paper.[13]

Currey added a "Note" to *ALT* 23 about the editing of the series from 1968 to 2001:

> Eldred and Marjorie Jones managed to keep *African Literature Today* running for a third of a century. So many of the journals which were founded in the brave new sixties have not survived. *African Literature Today* has always had a majority of contributions from within Africa itself. Their meticulous editing ensured an international reputation in Africa, in Europe, in North America and throughout the rest of the world.[14]

Eldred and Marjorie Jones had to overcome the practical problems of working in a pre-electronic era:

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[13] Eldred Jones, "Afterword," *African Literature Today* 23 (2002): 123–24.

[14] James Currey, "Note," *African Literature Today* 23 (2002): 125.

> Editing a journal in Africa over periods of instability with breakdowns in postal services, with colleagues in colleges and universities suffering declining facilities, produced some almost paralysing situations. My publishers too, in seeking favourable conditions [,] sent manuscripts over vast distances in various stages of production. We had to get the manuscript to them for copy editing and queries, and they had to send them for typesetting to one corner of the world, for printing to another, back to us for proofreading and indexing, then back to the publisher for final production. Many are the slips that can occur in this process and more than once a whole edited manuscript [of *ALT* 5 and *ALT* 15] has just vanished. Oddly enough one such disappearance took place [in Freetown] within a distance of no more than a couple of miles as the crow flies. The effort of re-eliciting manuscripts from authors dispersed over vast areas was hair-raising.[15]

This particular story was expanded on in the Joneses' recent book *The Freetown Bond:*

> Marjorie had taken a packet containing one particular issue to airmail to the publishers in Oxford. Inflation meant that the packet had to be smothered in stamps and Marjorie stood over the clerk to make sure that every stamp was cancelled so that none could be stolen. The only copy of the edited manuscript was lodged in the Post Office in Freetown on a Saturday, only for a military coup to intervene on the Sunday, thus freezing the copy for several weeks until, through the diplomatic skills of my wife including a personal plea to the Postmaster-General, it was retrieved from the sealed Post Office. But then how could we get the manuscript to the publishers when all flights out of the country had been cancelled? A journalist friend promised to take the manuscript overland to a neighbouring country before he went onwards to London, where he promised to post the manuscript or arrange for its collection. He then got stuck en route waiting for a British visa, but after some weeks he made it and the manuscript arrived by English post in Oxford.[16]

Eldred's original "Afterword" to *ALT* 23 continues:

> Editors in technologically advanced countries enjoy the luxury of stipulating strict standards for the formatting of articles for publication,

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[15] Eldred Jones, "Afterword: Editing *African Literature Today*," *African Literature Today* 23 (2002): 124.

[16] Jones & Jones, *The Freetown Bond*, 142.

> failure to meet which results in almost automatic rejection. We too hopefully required such standards, but would have been doing a great disservice to reject potentially good articles whose authors had difficulty in meeting such standards, access to typewriters and even the right size of paper being sometimes problematic. We have even received manuscripts in handwriting! On the other hand, we have received not only perfectly computer typed manuscripts but some even accompanied by diskettes! Our aim has been to encourage criticism so that when a potentially good article had weaknesses either in the construction, or in the treatment of bibliographical references and notes, wholesale re-writing has been necessary and almost always with the grateful acknowledgement of the original authors. In this process, I have myself learnt a great deal about African literature, about criticism and about writing.
>
> When James Currey left Heinemann in 1984 to set up his own publishing company in Thornhill Square, London, *African Literature Today* moved with him. […] The warm personal association between editor and publisher blossomed even more. Friendly business lunches rustled up by Clare lubricated the meetings. Keith Sambrook later left Heinemann and added his experience to James Currey Publishers. These meetings moved in 1996 to Botley Road, Oxford where, with Lynn Taylor and Douglas Johnson, the family atmosphere continued. The relationship between editor and publisher enabled us to triumph over the problems of long-distance editing, and the severance of this relationship will be for us the saddest feature of my giving up the editorship.[17]

James Currey pointed out in *ALT* 23:

> Eldred Jones makes light of the personal dangers and difficulties which have resulted from life in Sierra Leone in recent years. At one stage their house was being fired through by the Nigerian peacekeepers on one side and the rebels on the other At another time Eldred and Marjorie Jones joined a delegation to Guinea to try and negotiate peace. On one occasion they had to return overland from Guinea. I said that it sounded like Graham Greene's 'Journey without Maps'. Eldred Jones replied that for much of the way it was a 'Journey without Roads.'[18]

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[17] Eldred Jones, "Afterword," *African Literature Today* 23 (2002): 124–25.

[18] James Currey, "Note," *African Literature Today* 23 (2002): 125.

In May 2000, it was settled that Ernest Emenyonu would take over as Editor of the series after the publication of *ALT* 23, *South & Southern Africa* (2002). The announcement was welcomed by Wole Soyinka as "A very good omen for African Literature" and Chinua Achebe's response to the choice of successor was that it was "a most appropriate and logical development." Aig Higo, the Chairman of Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria (HEBN), added his approval: "Eldred performed wonders for *African Literature Today* and literary scholarship with it [...] I cannot think of a better successor to him than Ernest Emenyonu. [...] Perhaps the time has come for us to do a Nigerian edition."

At this time, Emenyonu was teaching at St Augustine's College in North Carolina, and he later moved to the University of Michigan, Flint, as Professor in the Africana Studies Department. There were some concerns about the loss of an African editorial base for the series, but Emenyonu's regular visits to Nigeria as part of his active involvement with the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS), with the annual African Literature conference at Calabar, and also with the Association of Nigerian Authors, helped to allay these concerns. Announcements were made for the forthcoming new volumes, *ALT* 24, *New Women's Writing* (2004), and *ALT* 25, *New Directions* (2006).

Aig Higo's prompting came to fruition and in May 2006, when the African Literature Association held its 32nd annual conference in Accra, Ghana, the first Nigerian edition of the series was presented by Ernest Emenyonu during the awards ceremony at PAWA House (Publishers Association of West Africa). This arrangement with the independent HEBN continues for subsequent volumes in the series.

Co-publication of the series in the USA and Canada had, since the publication of *ALT* 15, been with Kassahun Checole of Africa World Press; but in 2006 this arrangement came to an end and discussions began at James Currey Publishers about ways of expanding the annual publication to a twice-yearly subscription-based journal. There were detailed discussions with University presses with African Studies journals on their list. A more radical change was in fact underway for the James Currey list as a whole, and when in July 2008 the company became an imprint of the publishers Boydell & Brewer, the series was given a new distribution in North America through Boydell's US office in Rochester, New York.

ALT 26, *War* (2008); *ALT* 27, *New Novels* (2009); *ALT* 28, *Film* (2010); and *ALT* 29, *Teaching* (2011) followed. *ALT* 30, *Reflections & Retrospectives*

(2012), is the first in the relaunch of the series to have input from the new Associate Editors in the team, who collectively teach African literature in the USA, the UK, the Caribbean, and Nigeria. Future volumes are already underway – the series lives on with *ALT* 31, *Writing Africa in the Short Story* (2013).

On taking up the editorship of *African Literature Today,* Ernest Emenyonu did press for the volumes to appear more frequently. Thirty issues in fifty years shows that the series has not been strictly annual. In the old days of airmail post it proved impossible to keep to a strict timetable. Contributors have been remarkably patient in being accepted for a volume with a particular theme and then having to wait, sometimes for years, for that volume to appear.

At various times, James Currey gave careful consideration to setting up as a publisher of journals as well as books. The advice from the publisher of journals at Cambridge University Press was that the overheads could only be spread by assembling a critical mass of four or five journals. It would be attractive in cash-flow terms, in that the money would be collected by subscription before the firm started investing and that by the time of printing you would know exactly how many copies to print. Book publishers have to put money down at printing, and then hope to sell the books and collect the cash later. Flirting with the idea that James Currey Publishers could start a whole cluster of social-science journals on Africa, Currey remembers encountering a former colleague who, in the great exodus from Heinemann, had gone off to run the London office of Sage, publishers of academic journals. He cheerfully said “It’s marvellous fun starting new journals and acquiring new journals. All the fun of the chase! After that it is a bore!” Currey was happier risking publishing books of originality. But the proposal for *African Theatre* from the University of Leeds again raised the question of publishing journals.

African Theatre

In November 1995, Wole Soyinka’s *The Beatification of Area Boy* was just about to open at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. The production, which achieved national notice in Britain, was to go on a continental tour in mainland Europe, starting in Berlin. It was a heady event of that autumn. It had been brought off thanks to Wole Soyinka’s friendship with Martin Banham, Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Leeds, who was, among much else, editor of the *Cambridge Guide to Theatre*. On 19

October 1995, Banham wrote to propose a journal of African theatre, saying that he had also mentioned it to Cambridge University Press. Currey's handwritten fax in response started, "I'm very receptive to the idea. [...] [It] pairs with *African Literature Today*." Currey asked for a draft proposal to show potential US co-publishers at the African-studies meeting early in November 1995 in Orlando, Florida. In the summer of 1996, as the James Currey 'publishing flat' in a basement of Thornhill Square in London was being packed up to set up in a 'publishing house' on the Botley Road in Oxford, discussions continued as to what shape *African Theatre* should take.

The initial hope of the editors was for a formal academic subscription journal appearing at least twice a year. They were told of the near-collapse of *African Literature Today* after just four subscription issues (as described earlier in this article). There were some false starts and some rethinking on all these fronts, but eventually it was decided to follow the hybrid model of *African Literature Today*. *African Theatre,* though it would have even more elements of a journal, would be published as a series of books on chosen themes.

Who would co-publish in the USA and in Africa? It was not proving easy to find a US co-publisher with whom to share the print run and the risks, but it was nevertheless decided after a meeting on 29 January 1997 between Martin Banham, James Gibbs, James Currey, and Lynn Taylor to go ahead with a public announcement, including the themes for the first three issues, while the search for co-publishers in Africa and North America continued. Currey wrote to Banham on 28 November 1997 after discussions at the African Studies Association with Indiana and Ohio University Presses and with the US Heinemann company. Africa World Press were also interested in handling it alongside *African Literature Today*. But they would make no contribution to the editorial fees, which were heavy in relation to the expected print run. Currey raised the question of whether the Editors could get a grant for fees and/or travelling expenses from the British Council or the Arts Council. In the end, Indiana University Press committed themselves to orders of five hundred for the first two titles. Lynn Taylor arranged at the African Literature Association for Witwatersrand University Press to co-publish two hundred copies of the first two numbers for South Africa. The annual African Literature leaflet for a spring mailing included the public statement of a "New Series: A Call for Papers." A succinct description was agreed:

> *African Theatre*, an annual publication, will offer a focus for research, critical discussion, information and creativity in the vigorous field of African theatre and performance. Each issue will concentrate on a

> specific theme, carry reviews of major publications and productions, and will also include the text of one previously unpublished play from an African writer.

From the beginning, James Gibbs, then Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Drama of the University of the West of England in Bristol, played a central role as an editor of *African Theatre*. He shared with Martin Banham a particular enthusiasm for the work of Wole Soyinka, on whom he has published extensively. James Gibbs also initiated the Notice Board of current news items on writing and performance in Africa and the rest of the world, a feature that continued for the first four volumes.

There was to be the inclusion of an unpublished playscript in each volume of *African Theatre*. The playwright Femi Osofisan in Ibadan agreed to be the editor of this exceptional feature. A review by Christine Matzke in *West Africa* magazine in April 1996 of a production of Femi Osofisan's *Esu & the Vagabond Minstrels*, staged at the Workshop Theatre Leeds, lamented the scarcity of productions of his plays outside Nigeria, where he is among the most performed playwrights in the country.

The Book Review section was to be edited initially by Jane Plastow, who was running the adventurous Theatre Workshop on the campus at Leeds and was well placed to draw on a formidable network, from Eritrea to Botswana. Lynn Taylor, sharing the energy and enthusiasm of the Editors, took responsibility at James Currey for editing, production, and promotion alongside her role in publishing the steady output of Studies in African Literature and *African Literature Today*. She was also developing the overlapping area of books on film and organizing the editing of the whole of the James Currey list of academic titles in the social sciences and economics.

The aim was to branch out from the initial Leeds, Bristol, and Ibadan networks to a wider team of African theatre critics, scholars, and practitioners, either in informal advisory roles or as Associate Editors, who could feed ideas into the series and provide a forum for peer review of articles. Editorial meetings have provided the creative input. They have taken place wherever the team could be most easily gathered, such as in Leeds or London. Once it was held in Edinburgh because Femi Osofisan was there on a brief visit. And the most exceptional meeting was at Llangynidr on the white waters of the River Usk, with children and grandchildren.

The manuscript of *African Theatre in Development* (1999) was completed at a time of shared concern for Eldred and Marjorie Jones, as the Sierra Leone civil war moved into Freetown itself. It was boom time for the growth of

NGOs, and this subject immediately drew attention among organizations with access to foreign currency who could respond to the range of exciting ideas; unfortunately Indiana found less interest in the theme among the 'not for profit' organizations in the USA. *Playwrights & Politics* (2001) carried a version of *Toufann* (*The Tempest*) in Mauritian Creole by Dev Virahsawmy and adapted by Nisha and Michael Walling.

Guest editors were an interesting development: *African Theatre: Women* (2002) was guest-edited by Jane Plastow, and the success of the volume has led to plans for another volume on the theme. The guest editor of *African Theatre: Southern Africa* (2004) was David Kerr, who has had a long personal experience of performance in Malawi and Botswana and who wrote *African Popular Theatre* (1995).

Martin Banham and James Gibbs, the two Soyinka experts, came up with an exceptional proposal for a special issue of *African Theatre*. Wole Soyinka had often written satirical revues and sketches for performance on special occasions. The unbelievable absurdities of apartheid, voting systems, and committees were a gift to the satirist. Many of these ephemera were generally unavailable and had dropped out of sight. Thanks to Banham's lifelong working relationship, Soyinka responded to the request for permission in an email in February 2000, stating succinctly: "You have my go-ahead." Informed sleuthing through the records by James Gibbs produced an entertaining Special Issue published under the title *African Theatre: Soyinka/Blackout, Blowout & Beyond* (2005).

Michael Etherton, who had established open-air theatres at the Universities of Zambia and Kaduna, guest-edited *African Theatre: Youth* (2006), on young people and performance in Africa. James Gibbs edited *African Theatre* 7: *Companies* (2007), which was the first book in the series to be numbered.

A concern from the beginning was to get copies into libraries in Africa. James Gibbs arranged for the Morel Trust to provide funding for this distribution, and this started what became an annual consignment of both *African Literature Today* and *African Theatre* being sent to libraries via Book Aid International – the first copy to arrive being acknowledged by the librarian at the University of Botswana in November 1999. With the appointment of Jane Plastow in 2006 to a chair in African Theatre in the Workshop Theatre/School of English, the distribution of copies to African libraries was re-examined and the possibility emerged of the Leeds University Centre for African Studies (LUCAS) acting as a new channel for distributing copies to what Jane Plastow called "the right place": i.e. the most accessible library shelves in African universities, especially those with strong departments of theatre and performance. This distribution, supported by the Morel Trust and carried out under the stewardship of Karen Celeso at LUCAS, continues for current volumes, relying on willing carriers with a bit of spare baggage allowance, and also the less reliable parcel post, to get copies to where they should be valued most.

At various times the possibility of *African Literature Today* and *African Theatre* becoming academic journals with more frequent and regular publication on a subscription basis was considered. Would the two series reach a wider audience as formal journals with subscriptions, or as themed volumes that might also be bought individually as books? Ernest Emenyonu wanted *African Literature Today* to appear twice a year, and we said that if he delivered two manuscripts a year, then we would set out to publish them. In the event, he found that busy schedules made it impossible to produce more than one manuscript a year. At this time (2007/8) Jane Plastow and Yvette Hutchison had joined the three existing series editors of *African Theatre*, and there was a renewed impetus for a twice-yearly journal, of alternating themed and more general volumes.

Detailed proposals were put forward to the University Presses of Edinburgh and Cambridge, whereby Lynn Taylor would prepare *African Theatre* for press and they would handle the promotion, subscription, and distribution of the completed copies. Currey was on the editorial board of the Royal African Society's *African Affairs*, which is distributed by the Oxford University Press. A visit was arranged for Banham, Plastow, Taylor, and Currey to the labyrinthine factory of the journals division of the Oxford University Press; this gave us a sight of the mass production of academic knowledge for the Research Assessment Exercise. It made us realize that, though we were being pressed by the editors for more frequent publication, the relentless timetable of journal publication would have to be accommodated in Lynn Taylor's already demanding book-publishing programme.

In 2006, the US co-publishing arrangement with Africa World Press had failed after twenty years, and so we needed to find a new co-publisher in the States. It made sense to offer world journal subscription and distribution rights to Indiana University Press, who had taken the first two volumes of *African Theatre* as books. They had a journals division which had several distinguished Africanist journals, including *Research in African Literatures.*

As the Thames flood waters rose in July 2007 to lap at the gate of the James Currey office, the debates continued. A year later, in July 2008, James

Currey Publishers became part of Boydell & Brewer Ltd with offices in Woodbridge, Suffolk, and in Rochester, New York. They shared our enthusiasm to keep the series going as books despite the seriously challenging economic climate. *African Theatre* 8: *Diasporas* (2008, guest-edited by Christine Matzke & Osita Okagbue), *African Theatre* 9: *Histories 1850–1950* (2009, edited by Yvette Hutchison), and *African Theatre* 10: *Media & Performance* (2010, guest-edited by David Kerr) have now been joined by *African Theatre* 11: *Festivals* (2012, edited by James Gibbs).

The Globe Theatre's 2012 'Globe to Globe' season in London – Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays performed by thirty-seven international companies in thirty-seven different languages – included productions by African theatre companies in Yorùbá, Kiswahili, Shona, Zulu, and Juba Arabic (from the newly independent nation of South Sudan). The impact of this season of adaptations will be among the topics analysed in the forthcoming *African Theatre: Shakespeare In & Out of Africa* (2013). Further volumes are planned to revisit the subject of *Women* in African Theatre, and another will address the influence and impact of Ngũgĩ and Soyinka as playwrights.

James Gibbs, in his steady work for both *African Theatre* and *African Literature Today*, has thus made a singular contribution to the serious evaluation of work from Africa, both published and performed.

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⌘

He Spoke Truth – Quietly[1]

KOFI ANYIDOHO

I:

He spoke Truth quietly

But he lived in a World of **THUNDER**
With Lightning Flash across our Mind

There are times the Heart
steps into Blind Alleys
groping in vain for Lost Love

We could have Measured our Word
with Fair and Careful Thought

But he spoke Truth quietly.
And he lived in a World of **THUNDER**.

II:

Apotro the Frog was always on his Knees
paying homage to Nana Brempong Nyame
praying and sobbing for welfare of his Clan

We mistook his Humble Posture
for a pre-natal Handicap

---

[1] A Poetic Tribute, written on request and performed on Ghana Television and live at the State House, Accra, during the state funeral for President John Evans Atta Mills.

We even threw alligator pepper
into his Eyes
And we laughed to see the Tears

Now that he Lies-in-State
we are Embarrassed
to Measure his Full Stature

We find in him a Warrior
With the Heart of a Dove

III:

We were born into a World of Musketry.
We survived the Age of Cannonades.

We fell in love with Lion Kings
who Planted Grenades in their Voice
Sharpened their Paws into Spears
Trampled the Land with Boots
Raised on Poisoned Spikes.

We Composed Praise Songs
for Leaders Full of Guile and Bile

We Carved Statues in Polished Bronze
for Preachers Filled with Screams and Lies.

But he came and spoke Truth quietly.
He Lived and Died in a World of **THUNDER**!!!

⌘

The Carwash, Clifton Moor, York

(For James & Patience)

JACK MAPANJE

When Mukisa shelved his post
as assistant chef at the students
cafeteria on Chirunga campus, he
told us and his mum up country
he was flying to Nairobi for an
advanced course in catering; five
years later, he walked into my
Leeds University office anxious
about the protests and riots for
multiparty politics back home;
stammering as he recounted how
he'd managed to enter Leeds for
a PhD degree in catering, after
Nairobi, he said he often became
a night cabby to survive; I stayed
put and recalled his lucrative career
as a young pioneer recruit nailing
his president's political rebels from
Nairobi, London, Toronto and other
world cities. But fifteen years on
yesterday, did I not chance upon
Mukisa at Tesco's Car Park: could
he wash and wax my filthy car;
his price was the most competitive
in town, he avowed. I took him on,

then asked what had become of his
gainful task as a night cabby hunting
his leader's enemies with his Leeds
PhD degree in catering; he gazed
at me past his goggles, kicked his
bucket and fixed my car with his
Polish mates fretting beside him.

⌘

Crosscut

Charles R. Larson

We were walking through clumps of thick, tussocky grass, traversing the soccer field, approaching a row of low ramshackle huts removed from the rest of the campus. Where the workers lived: the night watchmen, the cooks, the carpenter. I assumed that Frank knew where we were going, though I thought the trip was unnecessary, and I was annoyed by his impatience.

I could hear sawing even before we got there, the steady movement of the cutting blade. When we rounded the corner of the carpenter's shed, I was surprised to see him in action – sawing upwards, pushing from underneath the beam of wood, instead of downwards the way everyone sawed back home – steady, sure movements of the blade. The man had his back towards us, though he turned around after Frank cleared his throat.

"Morning, young masters," he greeted us, his toothless smile immediately belying his age. I cringed at his salutation, upset by his reference to our supposed differences. Most of the time I'd been in Oraukwu people called me "sir," which was bad enough, but this old master business could really get me in a funk. It had taken months to break my cook from using the expression, and still it slipped out when something excited him. But here was an old man from the colonial era who'd probably been brought up to look at every white man as his master. Age didn't seem to matter, the fact that he was old enough to be our grandfather. Nothing would be gained by pursuing the matter.

"Good morning, sir," Frank replied for us, a twinkle immediately coming to the carpenter's eye.

"Your friend be dead," he commented, before Frank could add anything.

"Yesterday," Frank replied.

The carpenter had stopped his vigorous sawing. “Bad time for death. Bad spirits catch ’em quick.”

I was surprised by the swiftness of Frank’s response: “Not this one. He was a good man.”

“He be that, too.”

“You knew him?”

“Like all young masters here. This one from India. Don’t know this one,” he added, looking directly at me.

Frank introduced us. The carpenter shook my hand in the fashion of many older Igbos, snapping his middle finger against mine. Then Frank told him that I was another Peace Corps volunteer.

The carpenter repeated the term, pronouncing it as I’d heard it mispronounced so many times: *peas corpse*. Given the situation, I couldn’t help noting the irony.

Then neither of us seemed to know what to say. I looked at my watch. In a few minutes, it would be two o’clock. A student would ring the bell, and classes would be over for the day. Frank sort of shuffled in place, looking a little sheepish because he’d doubted Orezu’s, his principal’s, assessment of the time it took to make a coffin.

“Got a cigarette, masters?” the old man asked us.

“No, sorry, neither of us smoke,” Frank replied.

“That be all right. Shouldn’t smoke anyway,” the carpenter replied. Then after a pause he added, “India man did.”

“Mr. Koshi?” Frank replied. “All the time.”

“Be smoking years and years – since the big war.”

“The big war?” Frank asked. “World War Two?”

“The first one.”

“You were there?”

“France. England, whole group of us.”

“You speak French?”

“*Un pugh* – from Cameroon in those day.”

“Is that where you learned carpentry?” Frank asked him.

The old wizard went into a lengthy exegesis of his apprenticeship as a carpenter at an English mission, followed by a description of all the important buildings he had constructed during the last forty years.

“Principal brought you here?” Frank interrupted him, impatient with the narrative.

"Every building," he replied, moving his head in a half circle and pointing at the campus. "I build 'em all."

After praising his work, Frank finally posed his question, pointing to the saw hanging down from the piece of wood: "Will the coffin be ready in time?"

"No right time for death, master. This kind of death."

Frank looked at me, wondering what he could say. Apparently everyone at the school knew that Koshi had taken his life.

"Did you measure him?"

"No need to measure a man like that. Size be right."

"You never measure anyone?"

"Hundreds of coffins I make. Never measure one man."

"And they all fit?" Frank asked.

"All everyone fit," and he continued, "made coffin for English, Irish, French, and German but never make coffin for India man before. First time. Made twenty-three coffin for English back one time."

"During the war?" Frank asked.

"In Onitsha, at C.M.S. Mission, between wars. Whole Englishmen die one rainy season. All die at one time. Twenty-three. All bury in C.M.S. Mission. No priest left for the ceremony, but we bury 'em all."

"Are you a Christian?" I asked him.

"Myself?" he replied, touching his chest with his right hand.

I nodded, amused by his use of English. "Yourself," I responded.

"Was a Anglican, Church of England once. A Catholic twice." Frank and I laughed.

Then Frank asked him, "What do you mean a Catholic twice?"

"Baptize Catholic once in Cameroon. Then work for C.M.S. Mission, so convert to Anglican Church. Second baptism. Then all missionaries die, so I become Catholic again."

"And what about now?" I questioned, barely able to contain my laughter.

"This be no church school. I return to ancestors."

"Your ancestors?"

"Worship. Talk to them. Soon become an ancestor," he replied, tapping his chest. "No need for coffin for me."

"What do you mean?" Frank asked him.

"Coffin keep you away from ancestors."

"How so?" I asked him.

"No way for spirit to get out. Lock inside coffin." Then he added, "Some Christian ask me to make coffin with small hole."

"You mean Africans?"

"Yes, master. Stay in touch with ancestors."

"Where are these ancestors?" I probed further.

"Everywhere." Again, he made a circular movement: "Grasses, rocks, trees, and water. Ancestors watch and protect us."

It sounded like a benevolent relationship, made me feel like becoming a convert.

"You want me to leave small window in India man's coffin?" he asked us.

I didn't know what Frank was thinking, but I found the idea appealing.

"Small opening so spirit fly home to India," the old man continued.

I was about to say yes, but Frank told him to finish the coffin.

"What wood do you use to make the coffins?" I asked him, trying to prolong the incident. I ran my hand over the board he had been cutting.

"Iroko tree," the carpenter replied. "That big tree behind school," and he pointed at one of the classroom buildings. "That be iroko." It was the kind of tree I could remember observing frequently: stately, almost majestic, dwarfing all others.

"Is that hard wood?" I continued, wondering how long it took to make a coffin.

"Hard medium," he replied. "Best for building house."

"Can the termites eat it?" I asked.

"Termites eat everything."

"But it's good for a coffin?"

"Termites finish it all up four, five year."

"So no coffin lasts very long in this land?"

"People ask for ebony sometime. Last maybe three six, eight year. Ebony expensive. Special request, in advance."

"People do that? Ask for coffins in advance?"

"Englishmen. Bad luck for African."

I wanted to talk to the old man longer, but Frank was in a hurry. He posed the question again and got the response he wanted. Then he thanked the craftsman for assuring us that his work would be ready by the middle of the afternoon. The old man shook hands with us again, snapping our fingers. When I looked back at him as we were about to round the corner of his hut, he had returned to his work, sawing upwards against gravity though not against hope.

⌘

Kariba’s Last Stand

ROBERT FRASER

THE POETRY EDITOR was at his usual perch, eating his usual meal. The meal was Italian meatballs and rice: all he could afford. The perch was a corner table in the window nook of the Napoli Snack Bar in Flower Street, conveniently placed for two purposes. The first was fast transit towards the rear of the Panafrica Centre, where the Poetry Editor sometimes performed his verse, and more often drank in the evenings with his friends and fellow authors, Kariba and Omoni. The second was for surreptitious observation of smart young women as they came and went, attired in lyotards or less, through the revolving doors of the Sanctum Dance Centre further down the street. The dressed or undressed young women were the recurrent stuff of the Editor’s fantasies, but his glances were habitually unreturned. He watched one of these unobtainable creatures through heavily lidded eyes, then he turned to the book open on the stained tablecloth before him, and read on:

> He lodged as much by Accident as he dined and passed the Night, sometimes in mean Houses, which are set open at Night to any casual Wanderers, sometimes in Cellars among the Riot and Filth of the meanest and most profligate of the Rabble; and sometimes, when he had no Money to support even the Expenses of these Receptacles, walked about the streets till he was weary, and lay down in summer upon a Bulk, or in winter with his Associates in poverty, among the ashes of a Glass-house.

The book was a facsimile of an eighteenth-century biography: Samuel Johnson’s *Life of Richard Savage*. The Poetry Editor often took this classic with him to his café. He was thinking of writing a play about Johnson and, besides, there was something about the low-life London described in these elegantly phrased paragraphs that reminded him of his own milieu, sometimes even his own predicament. He took another sip and gawped out of the window again. Vaguely, his eyes surveyed a willowy-looking young person as she struggled to maintain her balance on high heels along the pavement opposite. Behind him, in the oily atmosphere of the cafe, a sweaty face appeared round the corner of the tea urn and inquired, "The meatballs are good, yes?" The proprietor's Neapolitan wife was keen to maintain his custom and, besides, he sensed that she somehow felt sorry for him. The Editor spluttered agreement through a mouthful of over-sugared tea. Her face disappeared, and then it appeared again with a related question: "You like to wash the girls, yes?" This time the Editor did not respond, though his mind expressed a mixture of rueful assent and anxiety that his hidden desires were so easy to detect. He took a sip of strong sweet tea, and then he carried on reading:

> In this Manner were passed those Days and those Nights, which Nature had enabled him to have employed in elevated Speculation, useful Studies, or pleasing Conversation. On a Bulk, in a Cellar, or in the Glass-house among Thieves and Beggars, was to be found the author of the *Wanderer,* the man of exalted Sentiments, extensive Views and curious Observations, the man whose remarks upon Life might have assisted Statesmen, whose Ideas of Virtue might have enlightened the Moralist, whose Eloquence might have influenced Senates, and whose Delicacy might have polished Courts.

The Editor paused and looked up, this time not at the girls on the pavement opposite but at the menu board fixed to the wall to his right. Had the meatballs, he wondered, been beyond his means? Might he perhaps push the boat out a little more and risk his favourite desert: Bread and Butter Pudding with Custard? He decided: on the whole, he had better not.

Idly, as he closed his book, he asked himself how it had come about that someone of his educational advantages and early promise was obliged to make such a decision. A few months ago he had been a Junior Lecturer at the University of Coketown, spending his surplus income on expensive dinners and suits with fashionably flared trousers and generous lapels, ordered off the peg from the local branch of Burton's. His working hours, in his own mind as least, had been employed in "elevated Speculation, useful Studies, and pleasing Conversation." His live-in girlfriend had catered for these, and for several other needs. She was voluptuous if not exactly beautiful and had taken to luring him away from his left-wing politics, of which she disapproved, by removing items of her clothing one by one as the clock approached the starting time of the local branch meetings of the Labour Party, which she knew he should attend, since he was the Treasurer. As the months had gone on, he had attended fewer and fewer meetings until one night in desperation he had taken her along fully clothed, and she had ruined his chances forever by publicly denouncing Kier Hardie and all his works. Then disaster had struck. The university had not renewed his contract, and his right-wing girlfriend had deserted him for the married Professor of Systematic Theology before running away to the circus, where she had become a part-time knife thrower's assistant and full-time organist. Masochism was deep down there in her makeup somehow. He had come down to London, and he had been here ever since, making a precarious living from freelance literary hack-work and holed up in a bedsit in Peckham.

The Poetry Editor rose to his feet, retrieved his duffel bag from under the seat, and fumbled in the threadbare pockets of his leather jacket. There were two pounds in there, just sufficient to meet his bill. Tucking the Johnson facsimile under one arm, he walked over to the till, spooned a miscellaneous heap of coins into the proprietor's wife's upturned palm, and made his way into the street. On the whole, he had been wise to pass over the pudding. He had peered into his bank balance that morning, and the condition of it had not been healthy. Clearly it was time for another visit to his friend Charles Goulash, commissioning editor of the Tropical Writers Series of Heinekenn Academic Books, publishers to parts of the world other publishers would not touch. Goulash was a tolerant soul, and he seemed to trust the Poetry Editor's judgement. Every two weeks or so he would hand over to him a pile of poorly typed manuscipts in brown paper envelopes, each labelled with the name of an author from a country fairly new to the map. There were epic poets from Somalia, writers of limericks from Ethiopia, novelists from the Sudan, tragedians from Malawi. The general standard was uneven but once in a while he came across a pearl in this diverse dungheap. More importantly, he was paid £30 a go.

The Poetry Editor made his way through the newly fashionable backstreets of Covent Garden, considering as he went this new mode of life. He was walking through one of the most historic districts of London, once a vegetable market. Dr Johnson would have known it well in his earlier years in London when, having quitted rural Lichfield, he was slowly and painfully attempting to make a name and a position in the capital. Johnson had been an unprepossessing person in those days and, like Kariba, he had left Oxford without taking a degree. He had fallen in with a scapegrace and failed author called Richard Savage, who claimed to be the illegitimate son of a prominent countess who, however, failed to acknowledge him. Excluded by polite society, they had made common cause and walked the streets together, sometimes, it would appear, trudging all night through. Johnson's *Life of Savage,* written when his own circumstances were beginning to improve, was his tribute to his dead friend, but it was also a meditation on desperation, a disquisition on living on the edge of things, and an essay upon guilt. Perhaps it had also been a vehicle for Johnson's sense of remorse. He had survived, and Savage had not.

Was that, he wondered, how he would eventually come to think of Kariba? Thirty years hence, would he be writing stories about him, as Johnson had once composed a book about Savage? Who could tell? In thirty years time it would be 2009, an inconceivable date. In 2009 he would be sixty-two and looking like his dad. He arrested this train of thought fairly sharply. 1979 was enough to cope with, what with everything around him apparently breaking down. The winter he had just passed through was one of the worst he could remember in his relatively short life. And the politics were dire. There was one advantage or disadvantage about being a freelance writer and editor: there was no point in going on strike. Everybody seemed to have been on strike recently: first it had been the miners, then the print workers. Fleet Street was in turmoil, and the *Chimes Literary Supplement*, for which he sometimes reviewed books, had ceased publication for several months past, depriving him of one meagre source of remuneration. The Editor vaguely supported the strikers, but he could have done with that precious trickle of cheques. Savage would have understood all this, he consoled himself by thinking, firm in the fraternity of need.

And now, of all things, the Tories were back in charge. The Editor had been cohabiting with a Glaswegian communist during the election period. The following morning, when the result was announced, she had turned over in bed, switched the radio on, and sneered in her weary Gorbals accent, "Och, It's those voices again!"

The Poetry Editor passed northwards up Neal Street in the direction of St Giles Circus and negotiated the crossroads at the top of the street. As he waited for the lights to change, he thought about Johnson and Savage, and then he thought about Omoni, Kariba, and himself. They lived in different centuries, but it sometimes seemed to him as if all of them inhabited much the same imaginary terrain. It was called Grub Street, and it was the place where unsuccessful or would-be writers scavenged a living from the leftovers of publishing and journalism. Grub Street was a proud place, a passionate place, and it bred a kind of brotherhood of need. When Omoni, Kariba, and he drank the evenings away in the cellar bar in King Street they could fancy themselves members of that transhistorical, excluded company. It was meagre compensation, but it was some. After these drinking sessions, he well knew, Kariba would often spend the night on a park bench. There was nowhere else for him to go.

The Editor passed into Bedford Square, crossed to Number 22, and mounted the stairs towards Goulash's lair. When he reached the landing, he peered into the depths of the small office where Goulash himself sat at the far end near the window, behind a barricade of files.

Goulash was the son of the reputable South African poet Mark Reagan Goulash, whose neatly rhyming, darkly ruminative lyrics were reproduced in the *Penguin Anthology of Pretorian Verse.* The Editor had a tattered copy of it at home. He recalled some of its better lines:

Exiled Iguana
by M. R. Goulash

Forlorn in my foreign cage I stand,
Alone of all my mottled band.
I was not born to brave this cold.
My crest is looking rather old.

Goulash *fils* had a benign face, intelligent spectacles, and slightly tousled hair. In his own small way he was a legend. The story had gone the rounds as to how as a young publisher, during a period of secondment to South Africa, he had once rescued a radical journalist friend of his, Julius Grape, from the clutches of the thought police. He had, it was rumoured, lent Grape his passport, embarked on a transatlantic liner to see him off, then stayed on board until mid-ocean, where he had intrepidly dived over the side. Swimming the two thousand miles back to Cape Town, he had misjudged both distance and direction, and clambered ashore at Port Alfred. Eventually he had reached England, though not this time by swimming. The notoriety of this exploit had stayed with him, and in a minor way it had altered the world. Currently the noun 'Goulash' was forbidden in South Africa, and anyone who used it was instantly gaoled. Menus had been torn from restaurant windows, and every Hungarian chef in the country was held on Robben Island. By way of compensation, dishes of steaming goulash were regularly served at anti-apartheid rallies in London; there was a soup kitchen selling this subversive stew permanently parked outside the South African embassy in Trafalgar Square.

The Poetry Editor sat down and glanced across at his friend with wan affection. He tried to imagine him diving off the side of a transatlantic liner. He tried to imagine him diving off a diving board. He tried to imagine him diving off anything.

Goulash *fils* looked up from his work and smiled. “Well, old chap, what have you got to tell me?”

The Poetry Editor opened up his bag. He dug deep into its recesses and brought out a pile of tatty envelopes. He brandished one aloft: *Assegais of Hope* by Egregious Obunde. “Bit O.T.T., I thought,” he remarked sourly.

“Yes, I expected that,” remarked Goulash solemnly, removing his glasses and polishing them. “Full of sound and fury, old Egregious. Mostly pure rhetoric.”

“If only it *was* pure,” the Poetry Editor remarked as he retrieved another thinner envelope from his bag. “Exiguous Matabele?” inquired Goulash “What did you think of that?” “Not a lot.” “Pity,” said Goulash,. “I rather thought you reckoned on young Exiguous. You almost praised that epic he handed in last year. ‘An appealing economy of style,’ you said.”

The Poetry Editor looked up: “Well, it was only three words long. Kariba been in?”

There was a ghastly pause. “Oh!” gasped Goulash as his face hit the desk. “Kariba!” Goulash let out a wail. His head rested on the desk for several seconds. Was he, the Editor pondered, praying? There had been occasions in the recent past, as well he knew, when Goulash’s professional relationship with this wayward author had driven him to the edge of despair. He had tried Buddhism, he had tried yoga. He had now reverted to his youthful Anglo-Catholicism, and was toying with the idea of going on a devotional retreat. Indeed, his trials were many. Kariba called round several evenings a week, usually as the office was about to close. He kept a wardrobe of outlandish outfits in a filing cabinet in the corner of the room, and changed into a different one as soon as he arrived. There was a Scottish tartan oufit and a uniform of jodphurs and spurs in which he sometimes attended ethnic African occasions, denouncing independence in a loud Boer accent. One evening a month previously he had donned a twinset and pearls and made off into Bedford Square determined to enter Transport House and deliver a speech in the persona of the Prime Minister. Goulash had attempted to restrain him, and the two men had ended up wrestling in the middle of the pavement. An astonished police officer had stood there observing this ungainly pas de deux for some minutes until he had recognized the female pugilist as the incumbent Premier, and awkwardly doffed his helmet.

Goulash lifted his head and said, "You better go and see Geneviève." The Editor rose to his feet and opened a door to his right. There in the narrow softness of the outer office sat The Goulash Girls, whom he always thought of with some envy as the firm's secretarial harem. There was Geneviève, and there was Petal. Geneviève was petite and small-boned, and her job was to enter the names of manuscripts that had been read and reported on into a ledger. The Editor respected her intelligence, and he desired her person hopelessly. Three months previously he had squandered several weeks' worth of fees to take her to *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Royal Opera House in Convent Garden. They had sat through two acts of exquisite *psalmodie* until, over interval drinks, it had dawned on them both that they had almost nothing in common. The rest of the evening had passed in acute mutual embarrassment before they had parted by briskly shaking hands. Petal, who sat at the other desk, resembled a stalky English rose. Once the Editor has spotted her drifting round the London Book Fair, and had fallen into step with her, eagerly explaining the design and contents of the books on display as he went. After some minutes she had looked down at him and said, "Excuse me, but do you mind not following me around the room?"

The Editor entered the details of the manuscripts he had read into Geneviève's ledger, and then he clomped down the stairs. He was just crossing the square when he noticed a poorly attired black man speeding towards him. They were about to pass one another when the stranger stuttered a greeting. The Editor looked up. Surely it could not be? This individual had a full set of teeth. Then he realized that Kariba had recently been in prison after an embarrassing episode at the Panafrica Centre when he had smashed a front window. The authorities there must have provided him with some dentures. The dentures grinned, and continued their stuttering. The Editor said "Hello, Kariba, off to see Goulash?" He just prevented himself from saying "Off to plague Goulash?"

As they stared incredulously at one another, the Poetry Editor brought to mind some of Kariba's history. This was the boy from the slums whose mother had prostituted herself to keep him. This was the mission-school boy, whose exam results had recently been investigated by the inveterate Bristonian scholar James Cribbs, who had worked out that he had scored a B for his ‘O’ level exam in woodwork. (Was there, he wondered, an aspect of not entirely satisfactory carpentry about the structures of Kariba’s fiction?) Here was an Oxford undergraduate whose antics had diverted and appalled the Fellows of Old College. His theatrical delinquency had been the bane of his tutor, the saintly young Victorianist Seamus O’Flaherty, who had been obliged constantly to break off from his variorum edition of *The Water Babies* in order to attend to his wayward charge. Kariba had then attempted to burn down the place, and had been offered the alternatives of psychiatric treatment or permanent rustication. He had opted for the latter, and for the next few months had existed in a tent near Iffley composing the dozen-odd stories of *Shack of Shame.* Accepted by Goulash after a torrent of enthusiastic reports (which had not on this occasion included his own), the slender volume had gone on to be chosen as joint winner of the Custodian Fiction Award the following year. At the presentation ceremony, he had resorted to hurling champagne glasses at the guests, who had all fled into the night, with the exception of the radical postmodern fiction writer Seraphina Cowper, who had stayed to mother him for the remainder of the evening, cooing solicitious nothings into his ear and oozing leftish concern all over him.

“Wha-wha-what are you doing?” asked Kariba through his new teeth.

The Editor indicated the duffel bag on his back. “Been to see Goulash,” he said. He added, “He seemed a little despondent when I left,” without going into the reasons.

“Oh I’ll g-go-round later and cheer him up. In the m-m-meantime, you might buy me a coffee.”

The Editor rummaged through his pockets. There seemed to be a few coins left in there. “Oh, all right,” he said.

They settled into a coffee bar in nearby Great Russell Street, and the Editor went to the counter to order. It was a procedure fraught with misunderstanding, since in the afternoons the Editor always needed a cuppa tea, which Italian ears nearly always heard as cappuccino. This time, however, there would be no mistake. “Two cups of coffee,” he called as clearly as he could, in his best prep-school accent. He collected them, paid, and went back to the table balancing the cups.

The Poetry Editor looked across at Kariba, and Kariba looked across at the Poetry Editor. Kariba had a pile of hardbacks under his arm, which he now deposited on the table. On top was an American edition of Saul Bellow’s *Humboldt’s Gift*, a novel they both admired. It was a story, not unlike Johnson’s and Savage’s, of a promising young man overtaken by circumstances and sinking in the eyes of society and his own, until he had ended up on the scrap-heap, pitied but still envied by a former friend who had since flourished. The Editor opened it at random and read: “He was a wonderful talker, a hectic nonstop monologuist and improviser, a champion detractor. To be loused up by Humboldt was a kind of gift.” Kariba took a sip at his coffee. “I w-w-wonder whom he is talking about,” he asked. The Editor noted with approval the “whom.” “Sounds like a few people I could name,” he replied.

There was a difficult pause. The two friends knew one another quite slightly. Their real and abiding bond was literature. Both had read voraciously across European and American fiction, and Kariba also had a relish for the South Americans, about whom the Editor was less keen. Neither of them cared much for politics, or for any of the great causes of the day. In this one respect they recognized one another as being of the same tribe. Ideologically the Editor divided his friends into two great camps: the either/ors, and the both/ands. The either/ors, who, whether they knew it or not, had been influenced by the teachings of Kierkegaard concerning the necessity of choice, seemed to be in the ascendant these days, stressing decision and commitment. Either you were right-wing or you were left-wing, black or white, upper-class or lower-class, religious or not. The both/ands, by contrast, were people who lived by the old African maxim, often quoted by an up-and-coming bishop from Cape Town called Desmond Tutu: “Wherever there stands one thing, there is another thing to stand beside it.” The Editor knew which side he was on: secretly he distrusted many of the causes to which he apparently subscribed. Kariba, too, was a weaver between extremes. Opposites abounded, ideological and intellectual, and you slid from one to the other, as the mood took hold. They were both paradoxical people, encumbered and hemmed in by the literal-minded. For this reason their jokes were often misunderstood. Kariba opened a grubby packet and held it out: “Cigarette?”

“I don’t smoke,” said the Editor.

“You do,” said Kariba.

It was not true, but out of politeness the Editor lit up: he detested the taste of tobacco.

Kariba said “Is the *Chimes* coming out again?”

“Not yet. And nor is the *Chimes Literary Supplement*, worst luck.”

Kariba leant forward, his eyes widening and conspiratorial. “Look, you know that Scotsman at UCL, Max Fergusson. He’s started a rival rag. Fortnightly. It’s called *The London Survey of Books*. We should get some reviewing work.”

"You honestly feel like reviewing?"

"Not a lot. But I need the m-money. You need the money. The office is just along from here. It's in B-bloomsbury Square. Come on." The great gig-lamps of his eyes flashed defiance. They drank up and left.

Five minutes later they were loping side by side along Great Russell Street towards the Museum, where the Editor often spent his afternoons reading. They passed its wrought-iron gates, and made towards Southampton Row. Just before they reached the T-junction, Kariba lurched to the right into an institutional-looking doorway. "It's in here," he said.

Still smoking, they mounted the stairs."You do the talking," said the Editor unwisely. Kariba was ahead as they entered a large airy office. At the far end, at opposite ends of a large table, sat two girls typing. They looked as if they had just come down from university with low-class degrees and high-class boyfriends. They were both well dressed and almost offensively pretty. They resembled women from the Sanctum Dance Centre. They looked like the Goulash girls. They looked terrifying.

One of then looked up and regarded them as if they were exotic insects. "May we help you?" she asked, as English people occasionally do when they mean "Bugger off!"

The question seemed to be addressed to the Editor, who by prior agreement indicated his friend. Kariba looked alarmed. He looked sheepish, as if he was experiencing second thoughts and already wished to leave the room. He opened up, "W-w-we just wondered…"

"Yes?" said the other girl, looking up from her keys.

"He's Kariba," the Editor said sharply, hoping that this would help. Clearly it had not. The first girl was looking increasingly like Lady Bracknell, the patrician relative from Oscar Wilde's *Charley's Aunt.* Her look had a way of diminishing you. She clearly thought they were both tramps.

Kariba started again, but his stammer was getting worse. "I-I-I-I am from Zimbabwe," he began, not entirely helpfully. The girls both looked as if they would refer to it as Southern Rhodesia. "I am f-fr-from Zimbabwe, and I am a writer, you know. I wrote a book, quite a good book actually. It was r-r-re-viewed in the *N-N-New S-S-Stateman.* It w-w-won the C-C-Custodian F-Fiction prize."

There was an awesome silence in the room. The girls looked across at the two disreputable visitors, and then they looked at one another. Out of the corner of his eye the Editor could see one of them begin to lift the phone.

"You m-m-might have h-h-heard of it," Kariba was courageously continuing. "It was c-c-called *Sh-sh-skack of…Sh-sh-shack of….*" Suddenly paralysis, physical and verbal, seemed to have overwhelmed him. He had one more go at *Sha-sh-shack of…*" and then yelled out "SHIT!"

To his astonishment, the Editor saw Kariba lay hold of his smouldering cigarette, hurl it onto the richly piled carpet, and start leaping up and down on it like a demented cat. He started convulsively shouting, "Burn the place down, burn the place down." The girl was by now seriously phoning.

Then everything froze. Kariba looked at the Editor as if for a prompt. The Editor glanced back at Kariba, but he no longer saw a friend and literary ally. He saw a pyrotechnic terrorist and one-time arsonist who had just inadvertently invited him to participate in a crime. Panic seized him by the throat. He saw the headlines racing before his eyes, "Former University Lecturer Implicated In Vandalism," "Literary Career Founders In Shame," "Ten Years In Gaol For One-Time Choirboy."

Kariba had stopped leaping up and down on his cigarette, which had mercifully fizzled out. But the Editor was still holding ineptly onto his, and he did not know what to do with it. It felt increasingly like a weapon in his hands. Kariba had sprung into action again. He shouted, "Run for it!" Simultaneously they made for the door, rushing down the stairs abreast of one another, and out into the open street. When they reached the pavement, Kariba turned left, and the Editor right. They made off into the morning in opposite directions, Kariba towards posterity, and the Editor towards Peckham. They never saw one another again.

⁂

When the phone went, the Poetry Editor hardly heard it. He was busy packing. His pregnant wife was in the kitchen, and they were moving. "Phone, sweetheart," she intoned in her warm Welsh voice and then, louder, "Phone!"

He picked up the receiver with one clumsy hand. "Yes?"

A familar, voice emerged from the far end, deep-chested, like a cross between Boris Godunov and Wole Soyinka: "It's Omoni."

"Oh God," said the Editor, dropping his packing case. "Whatever happened to you?"

"Nothing happened to me. I'm still around. Not everybody is, though.… Kariba."

There was an awkward silence. "Well?"

"Dead. Kariba's dead."

The Editor did not quite know how to react, and so he asked stupidly "Where?"

"In Harare, of course. He's been there for years."

The Editor sat down and remarked, "Well, isn't that a surprise."

The Three Musketeers they used to call them round the bar, and now they were only two. He swallowed and asked pathetically, "What does one do?"

"Nothing," said Omoni sonorously. "Deaths are not supposed to make you do anything. And anything you say sounds pitiful. All the same, Jamie wants an obit for the *Daily Defiant*. Can you do it?"

The Editor thought hard. He said, "I thought maybe that you…"

Omoni repeated himself. He said, a lot more slowly, "Can you do it?"

"What do I say?"

"That's up to you. You can phone the copy through, though. They take dictation nowadays. It won't take long."

"You know," the Poetry Editor added, "The last time I saw him he tried to burn down the *London Survey of Books*."

There was a muffled laugh from the other end. "Pity he didn't. You stopped him, I suppose. Fool!"

"No," said the Poetry Editor, scratching an itching heel in his shoe. "We both ran away: he towards posterity, I towards Peckham."

"Well," said Omoni sagely. "You've got your last sentence then, haven't you? I shall look forward to reading it." He paused and said warmly, "Goodbye." Then he rang off.

The Poetry Editor explained the situation to his wife, and then he sat still for a few minutes, looking into the mote-laden middle distance. He was squatting near the phone when it sounded again, and he heard the ringing through his thoughts. When he picked up the receiver, there was the same voice, but the tone of it was subtly altered. Had Omoni, too, he wondered, been sitting gazing into the distance at the far end?

"Work," said the voice grimly.

"What?" asked the Editor, thinking he had misheard.

"Work," boomed Omoni, "while there is still light."

The Editor did not know how to react. Illogically, through the pious lobes of his brain, he heard the clanking echo of his father's favourite hymn:

> Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
> The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
> When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

He looked out of the window. It was late August, and the days were drawing in. He picked up his biro as if to scribble something. His wife was stirring in the kichen.

There was another pause, and Omoni said, "Goodnight."

⌘

Odùduwà, Don't Go!

A One-Act Play

For Col. Adékúnlé Fajuyi, who gave his life

Femi Osofisan

A Brief Introduction

This play was written, and performed for the first time, over forty years ago. At that time, in 1968, I was a sophomore at the University of Ibadan, and a civil war – the Biafra War – was raging in the east of our country. The war had been provoked by a bloody military coup, followed rapidly by an even bloodier counter-coup, in both of which many of our soldiers cruelly slaughtered one another, decimating in particular the officer ranks. All this was, of course, as they told us, in order to seize power from the admittedly corrupt and incompetent civilian government of our first Republic after our achieving Independence from the colonial overlordship of Britain.

In the gruesome counter-coup which marked the prelude to the outbreak of civil war, one of the casualties was one Colonel Adékúnlé Fajuyi, the governor of the then western state of Nigeria, my own home state. Colonel Fajuyi had been a very popular governor with the populace, and died in heroic circumstances, reportedly while he was trying to shield the self-imposed military President of the country from the putschists who had traced him to Fajuyi's residence.

I was one of those who mourned this gallant soldier, and regretted deeply the tragic events that plunged our country into all this senseless killing. It was this grief that eventually led to the writing of this play, in which the dominant tone, you will notice, is fear, a palpable sense of insecurity, and, perhaps, a high dose of pessimism.

As is only to be expected with a piece produced at the early stage of any artist's career, the play's jejuneness and naivety are only too obvious; sometimes even embarrassingly so! I am appalled at my feeble grasp of Yorùbá mythology and history – which makes me locate the Ṣàngó character, for instance, in Egba-land, and also make Mọ́remí his wife! And I am astonished to see the heavy dosage of the orthodox Christian world-view and mores in my consciousness at that stage of my development. However, with the example of elders like Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa before me, who am I not to laugh and exonerate myself?

I have decided, however, to leave the text as it was, with only minimal corrections here and there. No major emendation has been undertaken, despite the great temptation to do so. And the reasons for this are obvious – after all, this was one of my very first successful outings as a budding playwright and director at the famous Arts Theatre in Ibadan! And besides, I got a solid review of the production from one Biodun Jeyifo, then a budding critic in the English Department – a review which, although not wholly favourable, helped give birth to a friendship that has not only endured till today but has flourished as the strongest and most cherished of my attachments.

It is a delight for me personally to give this text, in its very first printed form ever, to a festschrift in honour of James Gibbs. I am hoping that it will please that side of him that loves the pursuit of archival research. (Of course, I have a sneaking feeling that, even if I didn't offer it here, James would sooner or later discover it anyway, and make it available to the wider world, as he is wont to do.) I am one of those who have benefitted immeasurably from the man's friendship, his painstaking zeal, his head for detail and data and dates, and his readiness always to give advice and help. Who can forget how, through the Morel Trust, James has found a means of aiding our collapsing academies in Africa?

Thank you, James. I hope you love the play.

FEMI OSOFISAN, September 2012

Characters (in order of appearance)

Dòsùnmú
Ṣàngó
Kòsọ́kọ́
Oníbodè
Ọbàtálá
Mọ́remí
People of the World
Drummers

PART ONE

(*A vague situation in the clouds; wan scenery. Left stage, a lifeless tree marking the last gatepost on the way to purgatory and hell. Right stage, a sort of platform and steps, symbolizing a moral elevation, leading to a vague unsuspected door. At the moment the huddled figures of* KÒSỌ́KỌ́ *and* DÒSÙNMÚ *lie just near the tree, poorly lit.* ONÍBODÈ *dressed like an evergreen tree is centre stage, hands raised in invocation.* ṢÀNGÓ *enters, a stranger from hell, dressed in black, limping slightly, unsure of his surroundings. There is some load tied to his back. Reaching* ONÍBODÈ, *whom he does not recognize, he sits down wearily and undoes the load on his back. Suddenly* ONÍBODÈ *shakes as if caught in a wind, uttering some complaints.* ṢÀNGÓ *at first pays no notice, until the action is repeated with a fearful cry from* ONÍBODÈ. *Startled, he rises hastily and moves away. Then he comes forward cautiously, intending to pick up his load, when the cry is repeated. He leaves the bag, moving backwards in consternation, till he trips and falls heavily on the sleeping figures by the tree. But he is up instantly.*)

DÒSÙNMÚ: (*Waking up*) Who is that?
ṢÀNGÓ: I am sorry.
KÒSỌ́KỌ́: (*Seeing his clothes*) Black!
DÒSÙNMÚ: Can’t you look where you’re going?
ṢÀNGÓ: I’m most sorry. Forgive me.

Dòsùnmú: (*Rubbing his head tenderly*) You're sure you didn't do it on purpose?

Ṣàngó: Why should I?

Dòsùnmú: I don't know. You look like one who would do such a thing out of spite.

Kòsọ̀kọ́: Look, he's dressed in black!

Ṣàngó: But of course…. (Onírbodè *grumbles again angrily uttering incantations*)

Dòsùnmú: (*After a pause*) Well, why don't you do what you're told instead of standing there gaping? You're annoying him.

Ṣàngó: Annoying who?

Dòsùnmú: Oníbodè, of course. Do you want him to make a report of you?

Kòsọ̀kọ́: He is dressed in black.

Dòsùnmú: We're tired of hearing that!

Kòsọ̀kọ́: He's a stranger.

Dòsùnmú: (*Surprised*) Stranger! (*Collecting himself*) Well, does being a stranger put him above the law?

Kòsọ̀kọ́: He doesn't understand. (*To* Ṣàngó) Your shoes! You are on holy ground.

Ṣàngó: Oh! (*He takes them off*)

Dòsùnmú: Stranger! Come, you were not trying to steal in behind our back, were you?

Ṣàngó: Of course not!

Dòsùnmú: Sir!

Ṣàngó: Sir! Are you satisfied?

Dòsùnmú: Quite. For though we're only gatemen here, don't forget we are still gods, and gods are entitled to their rights.

Kòsọ̀kọ́: (*Walking round* Ṣàngó*, sniffing*) Blood! In his veins! Ashes in his hair! Burning! Smell of burning!

Dòsùnmú: (*Shocked*) You don't mean he's from…

Kòsọ̀kọ́: (*Triumphant*) Hell! Ọ̀run àpâdì!

Dòsùnmú: No wonder he stinks. Who allowed him in here?

Ṣàngó: Can someone please tell me what this is all about?

Kòsọ̀kọ́: Simple. We two here as you see us are gods. You may not believe it, but so it is! And we are the gatemen here. We didn't see or hear you come.

Ṣàngó: You were asleep.

DÒSÙNMÚ: (*Indignant*) Sh! Gods asleep! Indeed! From where are you, fellow?

ṢÀNGÓ: I thought you heard your clever friend say it just now.

DÒSÙNMÚ: No, not that. Before you went to hell.

ṢÀNGÓ: Where else but the earth?

DÒSÙNMÚ: Yes, but where on earth?

ṢÀNGÓ: Why are you questioning me?

DÒSÙNMÚ: I ask the questions! From where are you, fellow? (ṢÀNGÓ *remains silent*) He won't talk! As they say on earth, No comment'. He's stubborn. (*Laughs*) But he doesn't know us. (*Laughs again, then gives a sudden sharp command in a voice unsuspected of him*) Oníbodè!

ṢÀNGÓ: You two are … (ONÍBODÈ *winds loudly, like a record player, and presently begins to sing. Against his own volition,* ṢÀNGÓ *is forced to sing along, thus disclosing his identity*)

DÒSÙNMÚ: Ha-ha!

ṢÀNGÓ: (*With a struggle*) Stop that!

DÒSÙNMÚ: Why do you need to hide your roots? You're from Olúmọ̀?

ṢÀNGÓ: Well, I don't see what use that is to you.

KÒSỌ̀KỌ́: For instance, it explains your ignorance.

DÒSÙNMÚ: But isn't he so daft! Fellow, we can read your mind: you are proud of that song.

ṢÀNGÓ: Yes, I am. Who is not proud of his roots? My earthly ancestors built one of the cornerstones of the world. But for those we left behind, this is a troubled time and they need to be united. Why keep emphasizing differences?

DÒSÙNMÚ: How slow he talks! We read all your mind and thoughts long before you come round to saying them, fellow. (*Spits*). Absolutely disgusting! You are not ill are you?

ṢÀNGÓ: (*With tired patience*) I'll be moving along, if you don't mind.

DÒSÙNMÚ: Stop! Did you hear what he said?

ṢÀNGÓ: I heard all you said, and it's nonsense.

D & K: What!

ṢÀNGÓ: Yes, nonsense! And I repeat it, I, Ṣàngó! You don't know what privilege you're enjoying, you know. On earth I would have held you both in one hand and squeezed you till blood oozed out from your eyes and your screams woke a thousand dead!

Dòsùnmú: Do you think he's boasting, Kòsọ́kọ́?

Kòsọ́kọ́: Sh! Read his thoughts. He's going to say more.

(Ṣàngó, *who was going to speak, shuts his mouth angrily*)

Kòsọ́kọ́: Ha! He changed his mind.

Ṣàngó: (*Bursting out angrily*) You're Kòsọ́kọ́, aren't you? (Kòsọ́kọ́ *bows*) And you are Dòsùnmú! The god who made you two –

Kòsọ́kọ́: Sh! Let that remain unspoken. Oníbodè might not be pleased. (*Whispers*) You're a very careless fellow. No one speaks blasphemy here. It's against the rules!

Ṣàngó: (*Annoyed at his playful tone*) And so what! Do you think I care a damn about your rules? Listen, from hell I came, from agony, the cruel whipping of guilt. Your large round eyes have never seen such suffering before. We cry there, and our tears are like molten lead. We yell, and our voices stick in our throat, or burst into flames in our flesh. You have never seen such torment before. But we get used to it in the end. The agony and screaming become part of us. And in defiance we raise our heads high and curse you. So what do your laws matter to me? After you finished with me, you would send me back into those flames. Nothing I do matters.

Dòsùnmú: He does seem to have a point, doesn't he, Kòsọ́kọ́? Come to think of it, he may be intelligent after all.

Kòsọ́kọ́: Were you once a lawyer fellow?

Ṣàngó: (*Exasperated*) Can I go my way?

Dòsùnmú: You can't. You're crossing a border, and you're being stopped for interrogation.

Ṣàngó: Well, you sent for me.

Kòsọ́kọ́: We?

Ṣàngó: Yes, you. One of you. What does it matter which? You're all the same (*Contemptuously*) Gods!

Kòsọ́kọ́: I see.

Dòsùnmú: Shall I teach him a lesson?

KÒSỌKỌ: (*Stopping* DÒSÙNMÚ *with a wave of the hand*) He wants to go back to hell, that's all.

ṢÀNGÓ: Yes, I want to go back! Why should I stay here? In the end, an eternity of dull hosannas is not much better than an eternity of pain.

DÒSÙNMÚ: The fellow is mad.

KÒSỌKỌ: (*Worried*) I wish you wouldn't speak in these tones, rock-dweller.

ṢÀNGÓ: I'm not a rock-dweller, Kòsọ́kọ́, even if I come from Olúmọ̀. And it isn't a traitor like you who should tell me that.

KÒSỌKỌ: Traitor! Now that's an interesting point.

ṢÀNGÓ: Maybe it is. But it certainly wasn't at that time you seized your brother's throne, and drove him into exile.

DÒSÙNMÚ: Well, what's wrong with the fellow? It was my throne, and I'm not complaining, am I?

ṢÀNGÓ: The world is, and the world knows about virtues.

KÒSỌKỌ: What do we gods care about all that? Beyond the grave all your vaunted virtues cease to have importance.

ṢÀNGÓ: And yet on the strength of those virtues which, you say, have ceased to have importance, some men are put in heaven and others in hell. There is a hole in your argument, don't you see? I have long suspected it. In heaven you live by a double standard!

DÒSÙNMÚ: Kòsọ́kọ́, he couldn't have been a lawyer.

KÒSỌKỌ: You mean?

DÒSÙNMÚ: It's obvious. A lawyer's too low. He must have been something higher. Maybe president of a debating club.

ṢÀNGÓ: Make what fun you like, but the earth remembers you, and time never alters truth. Those very eyes of yours, Kòsọ́kọ́, will never cease to shout: "I took my brother's crown! I drove him into exile! It was evil of me!"

KÒSỌKỌ: (*Frightened*) Let them shout on! The gods know no guilt.

ṢÀNGÓ: That's why you are only a gateman here!

KÒSỌKỌ: (*Angry*) Dòsùnmú!

(DÒSÙNMÚ *laughs, stretches out his arm in an unspoken command.* ṢÀNGÓ *fights madly as if against bees.* DÒSÙNMÚ *laughs*)

ṢÀNGÓ: (*Defiantly*) Dòsùnmú, you will always be a coward! On earth you couldn't hold your throne but with the help of foreigners. Now you attack me because I am weak. You will always be a coward!

(DÒSÙNMÚ *stretches out his other arm, slowly* ṢÀNGÓ *falls down, beating against the plank the flame in his head. But he jumps up again assailed by ants. He does a mad dance.* DÒSÙNMÚ *laughs*)

ṢÀNGÓ: Leave me alone!

KÒSỌKỌ: Enough, Dòsùnmú! The rock-dweller has learnt his lesson.

ṢÀNGÓ: Yes, pat yourselves on the back. But Ṣàngó will never forget. Ṣàngó will have his revenge.

DÒSÙNMÚ: Don't worry, rockman. You'll never have the chance.

ṢÀNGÓ: I am not a rockman! Or a rock-dweller. I am a descendant of Odùduwà!

KÒSỌKỌ: (*Alarmed*) Quiet!

(*They fall on their faces.* ONÍBODÈ *begins a sort of mumbled chant, whose words are indistinct.* ṢÀNGÓ *laughs contemptuously*)

ṢÀNGÓ: What is this? You gods are really teaching me a lot today. Because I called Odudu –

KÒSỌKỌ: Quiet, I say!

DÒSÙNMÚ: The fellow is mad!

(ṢÀNGÓ, *out of mischief, approaches* DÒSÙNMÚ *and deliberately shouts in his ear:* O-d-ù-d-u-w-à! DÒSÙNMÚ *leaps up in anger and holds his palm against* ṢÀNGÓ *'s mouth*)

DÒSÙNMÚ: Now he has done it! Odùduwà shall go!

KÒSỌKỌ: No! Odùduwà, don't go! Don't go! Don't go! Odùduwà, don't go!

(DÒSÙNMÚ *joins him. But it is already too late. There is a rapid change of lights. The set transforms at the call to Odùduwà's palace. That is – a throne lights up on the platform and* ONÍBODÈ *'s costume changes to a blood-red colour. He rises and stands beside the throne, his looks threatening and imposing. At the backs of* KÒSỌKỌ *and* DÒSÙNMÚ *appear some wing-like forms. The two take out their silvery head bands and wear them.* PART TWO *begins.*)

Part Two

(*In his excellence,* Ọbàtálá, *god of Art and Odùduwà's chief mouthpiece and officer in charge of discipline, appears, framed in the light. He is followed by* Mọremí, *dressed simply as if for war.* Oníbodè *raises his hands to begin the incantation.*)

Oníbodè: Ọbàtálá, god of inspiration and genius! You whom….

Ọbàtálá: (*Holding up his arm*) Save it for another time. Our ears only shortly were filled with noise from the borders. (Kòsọkọ *and* Dòsùnmú *again fall on their faces.* Dòsùnmú *rises again briefly and pulls* Ṣàngó *down, too*)

Ọbàtálá: Who are you whose unfeeling howls disturb the ears of heaven?

K & D: Forgive us our trespasses!

(Dòsùnmú *nudges* Ṣàngó *to say the same thing*)

Ọbàtálá: Who are you knocking our presence with these hoofs of blasphemy?

K & D: Forgive us our trespasses!

Ọbàtálá: Before the throne!

K & D: Pardon us!

Ọbàtálá: In a place of Holiness!

Mọremí: Enough, Ọbàtálá! They're sorry and have said so. What more do you want?

Ọbàtálá: Shall gods who are charged with catching offenders be found wading in sin, themselves unchecked?

Mọremí: Oh, check them by all means! I should even cane them if I were you.

Ọbàtálá: Really!

Mọremí: Rise up, you two, and act more like gods. (*They stay where they are*)

Dòsùnmú: Is he gone, Ọbàtálá? Is Odùduwà no longer with us?

Ọbàtálá: Who is to say? Edùmarè works in a mysterious way, through numerous disguises. Shall I dare to predict him? Perhaps he has left us, perhaps he has not and is here even now, at this moment, watching us… shall we not keep ourselves upright and graceful in his presence? Shall we – wait! (*He looks round, catches sight of* Ṣàngó) Burning?

Blood! Ashes! Ha! I smell a stranger among us. (ṢÀNGÓ *rises*) You! What are you doing here?

ṢÀNGÓ: That's exactly what I'd like to know myself. One of you sent for me.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Sent for you! From the depths of pain, from the flames of shame, the crushing teeth of guilt.

ṢÀNGÓ: (*Shrugs*) If you like to describe it in so many words. After all, hell is your own creation, Ọbàtálá. But I can tell you, it's a lot better than this terrible place.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: What!

DÒSÙNMÚ: The fellow is mad.

MỌ́REMÍ: I sent for him, Ọbàtálá.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: But I should have heard him come.

DÒSÙNMÚ: And we, too. We were guarding the entrance.

ṢÀNGÓ: You were asleep.

MỌ́REMÍ: I concealed his passage.

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: Ha!

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: But why?

DÒSÙNMÚ: Why else but to cause mischief?

MỌ́REMÍ: That's right, rail at me. But Odùduwà shall go! We'll see if he will not listen to argument.

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: I see, that's why you sent for him!

DÒSÙNMÚ: Disgusting! I might have guessed she'd be up to such tricks, the little schemer!

MỌ́REMÍ: How it pains you! Odùduwà shall listen to a witness. Who can talk more about pain and suffering than Ṣàngó?

DÒSÙNMÚ: Some men roam the world like gods. Pardon them. There are goddesses, worse than men, who roam heaven like the worst of mortals!

MỌ́REMÍ: Take your seat, Ọbàtálá, and we shall begin!

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Are you sure you're ready to begin?

MỌ́REMÍ: We have delayed decision long enough.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: (*To* KÒSỌ́KỌ́ *and* DÒSÙNMÚ) Are you ready to begin?

DÒSÙNMÚ: (*Angrily*) Of course we're not! We demand time to call our own witness.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: I am afraid I can't allow that. The place stinks enough without having the whole foul company of hell among us.

DÒSÙNMÚ: Then we shall go to earth –

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Not necessary. We have their testimony already in the daily groans that reach us.

DÒSÙNMÚ: But we can't…

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: Sh! No matter, Dòsùnmú. (*Whispers in his ear.* DÒSÙNMÚ *withdraws reluctantly*) The one witness shall do for all. (*Smiles*) Screen his mind, Oníbodè!

MỌ́REMÍ: No!

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: Do it, Oníbodè!

(ONÍBODÈ *stretches his arm in a circle*)

ṢÀNGÓ: I feel light. So light, I feel free and light and strong. I feel happy! It's so long I felt that. I hardly know how to welcome it.

DÒSÙNMÚ: It's all thanks to Oníbodè, rockman.

MỌ́REMÍ: Surely you shall not allow this, Ọbàtálá. Ṣàngó is my witness!

(ỌBÀTÁLÁ *sits down wearily on the throne.* ONÍBODÈ *takes the mask off his own face*)

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Oníbodè is my servant. My servant. Don't any of you forget that. He shall do only what I wish.

DÒSÙNMÚ: But you can't –

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: On this occasion, however, I think Kòsọ́kọ́ is right. Ṣàngó shall remain liberated; a free witness.

MỌ́REMÍ: All right, we shall see.

ṢÀNGÓ: Just a minute, Mọ́remí. (*She recoils in surprise*) Yes, I recognized you behind the mask. Mọ́remí, the woman who betrayed me to the Ifẹ̀s; whom I trusted with my life but who traded it to my enemies.

MỌ́REMÍ: (*Alarmed*) We were fighting a war then, Ṣàngó. All was fair to win. You can't still hold that against me!

DÒSÙNMÚ: Careful, Ṣàngó. She will soon start making eyes at you. Don't be deceived.

MỌ́REMÍ: Keep quiet, you! Making eyes, indeed! I should have thought I was above all that!

ṢÀNGÓ: There was a time you weren't, and I fell for it, and lost my home, my people, my salvation, everything!

MỌ́REMÍ: Please, forgive me!

ṢÀNGÓ: Forgive! A goddess asks me for forgiveness! Who am I? Who is Ṣàngó to forgive?

MỌREMÍ: You aren’t still bitter, Ṣàngó?

ṢÀNGÓ: Look at you there. Look at me. How do you like the contrast? If I had won that war, it would have been the reverse. You would be in my place, and I in yours. I would wrinkle up my nose at you, like your friends here, and I would say, “How you stink!”

MỌREMÍ: (*Meekly*) It was I who brought you back from hell, Ṣàngó.

ṢÀNGÓ: For a short time, yes! A brief respite. But what’s a thousand years to an eternity of pain? It would have been better you had let me stay, goddess… Oh, I don’t hold anything against you. You’re a goddess, eternal. I belong to flames, undying. Men would call that a tragedy. But we know better than that, don’t we? There shall be no rest for either of us, forever. No rest, but service or suffering. That’s the price of our meagre lives.

DÒSÙNMÚ: The fellow’s mad.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: You show no respect, Ṣàngó.

ṢÀNGÓ: Do you blame me? The punishment you devised leaves us no time to learn good manners.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: I am very sorry for you.

ṢÀNGÓ: (*Angry*) Be sorry for yourself! Why, you make me sick! Why should I repent? For every little sin I committed I am paying a thousand times over, a million times! Till the end of time… you who sit boldly there and dare to insult me, was your life without a single stain? Did you never hurt your fellow men, in thought, in word, in deed? No, you never did! Of course you were always pure and holy, and kind to your fellow men. Ah, you make me sick! Send me back to the flames!

KÒSỌKỌ: I’m sorry, Ṣàngó, that you’re so bitter. But none of us here had a hand in deciding these things…

ṢÀNGÓ: Save your sympathy, Kòsọkọ. What do you want of me?

MỌREMÍ: If you’re so bitter, Ṣàngó, you will not be able to help us.

ṢÀNGÓ: I do not wish to help you.

MỌREMÍ: But the world, Ṣàngó. The men we left behind on earth. Don’t we still owe them an obligation?

ṢÀNGÓ: Surely, you don't need me to decide that?

MỌ́REMÍ: It is they you have been brought to help. Their cries reach us from hour to hour. They are suffering. They are dying…

ṢÀNGÓ: Grief is nothing new to the world.

MỌ́REMÍ: They are calling on us to help them.

ṢÀNGÓ: I see. And you, of course, like the gods you are, don't want to help.

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: That is what you must help us decide, Ṣàngó, because you're an expert on pain. In what way can we help the world? Or, more correctly, shall we be helping them by hastening down to their call?

MỌ́REMÍ: I say we shall! How else can we help except by pulling them out of their pain?

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: We shall be helping the world more by helping it, forcing it, to learn to help itself through the experience of suffering.

MỌ́REMÍ: And before they learn, before they are grown enough to shoulder their own futures, how many would have perished? How many lives lost, souls condemned? …

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: I do not believe that evidence. In Lagos –

ṢÀNGÓ: (*Mocking him*) Kabiyesi, Oba Aláiyélúwà, the Oba of Lagos!

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: (*Ignoring him*) In Lagos, what did I find on inspection?

MỌ́REMÍ: You found no grief, I suppose.

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: Men are dying, yes, but others are wining and dining. True, danger stalks the streets for prey, and death descends daily like a hawk to devour. But I found only men getting drunk, with each man strong in the belief that even if everybody else perished, he alone would remain. People are dying and falling, but no one is interested unless he or his family is directly involved. Among such people…. if we suddenly reached down one day and plucked away their sorrows, would they ever have learnt a lesson? We would only have strengthened their belief in frivolity and self-interest. And then they would plunge themselves into an even greater disaster, one we have not foreseen…..

MỌ́REMÍ: But see, Ṣàngó, look up there. See for yourself. Are those men wining or dining in folly?

(*Figures leap on the further side of platform. Men, women, and children, naked to the waist, carrying heavy burdens on their stooping backs. They mime a struggle through a marsh, with frequent cries of agony and supplication: "Odùduwà! Help us!*)

See how desolation and sorrow cling like mud about their feet. How the future weighs them down with fear and uncertainty. Hear their groans! You cannot be deaf! They raise their eyes, they wail for pity, writhing in supreme agony. They call for Odùduwà. They call for help. What greater testimony do you want? Shall we fold our arms and refuse to listen, we who were human once and suffered like them? (*Wails of "Odùduwà, help us!"*) Have pity for sorrowing humanity! Have pity for men struggling valiantly in a world they did not make and against odds they cannot foresee. Help! Help! Help! Let Odùduwà go!

DÒSÙNMÚ: No! Odùduwà shall not go! Cut the scene, Oníbodè!

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: Wait, Oníbodè, wait!! Watch these people, Ṣàngó, and see why we must refuse them our help. Grief is a cloak they themselves put on, and they have the power to remove it. Why are they waiting for us? Yes, they fall in the mud and sorrow harries them. But watch them! Once fallen, do they make any effort to rise by themselves? No! No! They are waiting for gods to pull them up. Instead of getting up they open their minds to the mud and corruption, without a struggle, without a pulling-back, with only a shrug of the shoulders. Why should gods help men who are not willing to help themselves? Hopeless men, shapeless men, cowardly men!

MỌ́REMÍ: They are our kinsmen!

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: And look at the others, Ṣàngó, look at those still living, still unfallen. Do they spare even a glance for their fallen brothers? Do they stretch forth a hand to help them? No! Each one's for himself and herself only. The fate of their neighbours doesn't concern them. What obligation shall gods have for men who hold no obligation towards each other?

(*The cry rises, "Odùduwà! Come and help us! Save us!"*)

Kòsọ́kọ́: No! Odùduwà shall not come! Though you call for a thousand years! Though you were to fill your lungs with agony, your throats with a thousand wails! God is tired of your gutless, helpless cries! Raise your hands and help yourselves. Let each man touch his neighbour in warmth, in comradeship, in affection, in fidelity. Or you will all be wiped out, one by one. Unless you are prepared to help each other, a new race shall replace you. Join hands now! End your petty squabbles, fight together, members of one proud family, and you will be saved! Only show a willingness to stand together like men before disasters, and we gods shall descend in battalions to fight on your side. But until you do that, unless you do that, we shall not raise a single finger towards you? Odùduwà will not come!

(*Suddenly* Oníbodè *rises and stretches his arms, with a cry. The scene disappears, and gradually a faint light creeps back on the stage.*)

Part Three

Oníbodè: Sounds! (*Roll of drums, cymbals*) Sounds of grief invade us! From towns and battlefields! Cries of pain invoke us! We waste the time on endless wrangling!

Mọ́remí: Odùduwà must go! In spite of you! Because the world is suffering. And his children call! He shall descend at once to the world. Because of grief and sorrow. And his children’s call.

Ọbàtálá: (*Rising*) I’m afraid I must bring this to an end and hear the witness.

Kòsọ́kọ́: Just one thing more, Ṣàngó, listen to me. Gods like men must learn from experience. Mọ́remí wants Odùduwà to go to the world among his misguided children. But will it work? Would his presence turn his sons from sloth, from their muddy apathy? Oníbodè!

(*A huge image of the Cross falls on the back-drop.* Christ *appears, crowned with thorns. There are chattering men at his feet, waving their arms in violent gestures*)

Ṣàngó, God went once among their forefathers. And what a reception they gave him! Watch!

(*Cries of "Crucify him!" "Crucify him!" Funeral chant. Then* ONÍBODÈ *begins to intone. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his own begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. He said to them: 'It is LOVE that must unite you.' But they turned their backs on him. So he climbed the mountain and stripped himself bare, and offered his last gift – himself. 'Take my flesh' he said, 'Eat it. Take my blood. Drink. Let LOVE enter into your hearts. Let each man think of his neighbour. LOVE only will strengthen you.' But they wrapped false charges around him, and gave him to his enemies…"*)

(KÒSỌKỌ *falls down. The cry mounts as the bleeding* CHRIST *is raised to the cross*)

… and they laughed as they hailed him!

(*Then follows a long, trailing laughter, cut abruptly by* MỌREMÍ*'s cry from where she had fallen. As the memory scene disappears, the stage fills hastily with light.* ṢÀNGÓ *is on his knees, and* DÒSÙNMÚ, *the only one standing, has his hand across his eyes, and is trembling from head to foot. In the silence that follows, a drum wakes; clear, heavy tones.* MỌREMÍ *is carried up in its waves. She dances urgently across the stage, the DANCE of the DISTRESSED. The drum rises to a quick hysteria, then dies abruptly. But* MỌREMÍ *dances on, eyes closed, until she falls at last at* ṢÀNGÓ*'s feet, moaning, "Let Odùduwà go! Let Odùduwà go!"*)

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: What does the witness say?

ṢÀNGÓ: (*After an anxious silence*) Is my opinion really important?

(ỌBÀTÁLÁ *nods, slowly*)

ṢÀNGÓ: (*Looking at* MỌREMÍ: *full in the face*) Then…. Odùduwà shall NOT go! (KÒSỌKỌ *rises with a spring.* MỌREMÍ: *collapses.* ỌBÀTÁLÁ *stands hastily.* DÒSÙNMÚ *falls to his knees. Lights cut off abruptly.*)

EPILOGUE

(*Situation just near the gates.* MỌREMÍ: *and* ṢÀNGÓ *are seated on a stone.*)

ṢÀNGÓ: Goddess, I am going away. You don't say anything? Are you still angry with me?

MỌREMÍ: No.

ṢÀNGÓ: Then say something. I am going away.

MỌREMÍ: You want me to say something?

ṢÀNGÓ: Yes, it's going to be a long, bitter road. Say something to keep me company.

MỌREMÍ: What shall I say?

ṢÀNGÓ: Anything at all.

MỌREMÍ: Then don't go, Ṣàngó.

ṢÀNGÓ: Why?

MỌREMÍ: Stay with me.

ṢÀNGÓ: You know I can't. I belong to the other side.

MỌREMÍ: Oh, what does that matter?

ṢÀNGÓ: I can't stay. Some force compels me to go. (*He stands up*)

MỌREMÍ: (*Resignedly*) I know. I can feel it, too. (*Pause*) I shall go with you some of the way. Give me your hand.

(*They walk along for some time, hand in hand*)

Ṣàngó, when you go, the world will still be in pain.

ṢÀNGÓ: The world has always been in pain. It was made to be like that.

MỌREMÍ: Yes. But this time it will be different.

ṢÀNGÓ: How?

MỌREMÍ: The responsibility will now be on your shoulders!

ṢÀNGÓ: On my shoulders! (*He stops dead, as the truth strikes him*)

MỌREMÍ: There, I've revealed the secret. O what's the use? The guilt for all the agony of the world will now be on your shoulders. You made the decision.

ṢÀNGÓ: So that's why I was brought here!

MỌREMÍ: Yes, that's why you were brought here. The gods want to keep their hands clean. They had to shift the guilt from themselves onto another. That's why they sent for you.

ṢÀNGÓ: Good God! So you didn't need me after all to make a decision. It was already made. All you needed was for someone to take the responsibility!

MỌ́REMÍ: (*About to talk, sees* ỌBÀTÁLÁ) Ọbàtálá himself shall answer that.

(ỌBÀTÁLÁ *appears, attended by* ONÍBODÈ)

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: What was the question?

ṢÀNGÓ: I have found the answer, Ọbàtálá. Once again I have fallen your scapegoat.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Then you know?

MỌ́REMÍ: I warned you, Ọbàtálá. I appealed to you but you would go on.

ṢÀNGÓ: Long before I came, you had made up your mind. Odùduwà was not to go to earth. But having taken the decision, you were afraid of it, because you knew what such a cruel step would mean to the suffering world. So you sent for a dupe from hell. So you sent for me and arranged a comedy. And did I fall for the trick! Now pat yourselves on the back and laugh.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Ṣàngó, you don't understand.

ṢÀNGÓ: What's there to understand? (*Bitterly*) Ṣàngó is a sinner. One guilt more or less on his head wouldn't mean a thing. He is used to sin. Goodbye, all of you. And thank you, all of you. I shall remember.

MỌ́REMÍ: Ṣàngó, what of me? Don't leave me with hate in your heart. Believe me, I did try for you. I tried.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Look, Ṣàngó, I'll tell you something. It's the gods who make things worse for the world, by too much compassion. (*To* MỌ́REMÍ:) How much have you seen that your heart expands already, and your eyes scream with terror? From the beginning of time to the endless tomorrow, Odùduwà has foreseen all, has fore-suffered all. Among the splendours of light which fall pattering at his feet, mingle darker shadows, splinters of glass, teardrops in clusters, little brittle beads of human grief. Does that not teach you patience?

ṢÀNGÓ: Mọ́remí, you're crying!

MỌREMÍ: I wish I could cry. Then I would have showered volumes to wash the world of its grief. I wish I could cry, so the world would know it is not alone in its grief. But tears are forbidden to the gods, and our sorrow must be dry-eyed….

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Look at me, Ṣàngó. Look at me squarely. Let your eyes fill into mine.

(ṢÀNGÓ *looks, then quickly drops his eyes*)

ṢÀNGÓ: No, I will not look! Let me go my way.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: You must try to understand, Ṣàngó. (*He comes down from the platform, his face suddenly old and weary, his voice hoarse*) We gods are not a strong as the world believes. I wish we were, but we are not. Men expect everything from us, but we are not large enough. They want ease, comfort, but nothing is ever easy or comfortable. Not even heaven, as you see yourself. They howl every hour for Odùduwà, and their groans reach us and pierce our hearts like arrows. But Odùduwà cannot answer them. And do you know why, Ṣàngó?

ṢÀNGÓ: Why?

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Because men were created free. Free! Within the circle of that liberty, no alien power, however good his or her intentions, can penetrate. True, liberty breeds loneliness, but it need not bring despair. Men are not forsaken. In order that they shall not be frightened by their loneliness, God has created men with limbs, with fingers to mould their own lives, with feet to walk their own road to happiness. Only men prefer not to use those limbs. They prefer to remain immobile, helpless, beckoning to us. But in this we, too, are helpless, helpless…..

(*Ente*r KÒSỌKỌ, DÒSÙNMÚ)

DÒSÙNMÚ: I say, aren't you gone?

ṢÀNGÓ: No, not yet, as you can see.

DÒSÙNMÚ: What are you waiting for?

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: He has found out the truth.

KÒSỌKỌ: Oh!

DÒSÙNMÚ: I am sure someone told him, someone with large eyes whose name I won't mention.

MỌREMÍ: Yes, I am the someone with large eyes, Dòsùnmú. Don't be afraid to say it. I told him.

DÒSÙNMÚ: Why should you?

KÒSỌKỌ: She was right. He should know what burden has been heaped on his shoulders.

ṢÀNGÓ: Ọbàtálá, I think I understand all you said. I was in the world once, and I know how desperately lonely life can be. I know what is wrong with the children of Odùduwà, why their world is falling apart.

MỌREMÍ: They need help. Before everything crumbles to dust at their feet. Filled with petty rifts, they do not see the danger which has stolen within their walls, under their roof. They need help.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Only we are helpless to give it.

ṢÀNGÓ: Perhaps it's not help they need. Perhaps it's a leader.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Perhaps…

ṢÀNGÓ: Ọbàtálá, I am ready to go back into the world instead of Odùduwà.

D & K: What!

ṢÀNGÓ: Perhaps I can be that leader they need. Allow me.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: How do you know you will not fail?

ṢÀNGÓ: I will succeed.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: But if you fail?

ṢÀNGÓ: I will not fail. You know my records. Will you let me go?

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: (*After a pause*) All right, Ṣàngó. You shall go!

(*Roll of drums*)

ṢÀNGÓ: O thank you. Thank you, Ọbàtálá. Mọremí, do not fear for me now. I have been purged of my hate. I have all I wantı

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Before you go… Oníbodè!

(*He goes up the platform, as* ONÍBODÈ *performs a gesture with his hands*)

ṢÀNGÓ: Ah, a burden comes upon me suddenly, fills into my veins. What is it? Mọremí, come….

(*As he gestures with his hand, there is a rapid flash of light, and a rumble of drums. He drops his hand quickly, amazed. Then, cautiously,* *he raises it again. There is the same consequence, and he again drops his hand quickly. He is bewildered*).

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: Ṣàngó, Odùduwà has invested you with power over lightning and thunder. As from this moment, you rise to the rank of the gods. (DÒSÙNMÚ *and* KÒSỌ́KỌ́ *link hands and dance round* ṢÀNGÓ. *Music rises from the background. Then* ṢÀNGÓ *picks up the dance, too, with* MỌ́REMÍ. ỌBÀTÁLÁ *completes his speech*) Your voice shall be like the rumble of guns, and your anger a deadly flash of light. (ṢÀNGÓ *falls to his knees before him*) On earth you will be born of lovely parents, in a humble village. Your name shall be Adékúnlé.

M, K & D: Adékúnlé!

ṢÀNGÓ: Adékúnlé! How I love the name.

ỌBÀTÁLÁ: So rise now, Adékúnlé, and go into the world. (*A hymn rises in the background and the lights begin to fade.* ṢÀNGÓ *slowly goes out*) Be of good courage. Render unto no man evil for evil. Teach the world to be proud and still be kind. Teach them to care for their neighbours, for one another, and end their petty squabbles. Teach them the world can be a beautiful and happy place, if only they are prepared to make it so by joining hands and working together. Above all, Adékúnlé, teach them LOVE. Goodbye.

(ỌBÀTÁLÁ *and* ONÍBODÈ *go out. Pause*)

DÒSÙNMÚ: Will he succeed?

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: He must succeed. He's the last hope for Odùduwà's children.

DÒSÙNMÚ: But will he succeed?

MỌ́REMÍ: (*Sorrowfully*) He will not. Look at the future yourselves. Don't you see it?

K & D: (*They look*) Good God!

MỌ́REMÍ: Yes, that's what will happen to him.

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: They will kill him!

DÒSÙNMÚ: Just like that!

MỌ́REMÍ: Early one dawn, they will come for him with their guns, and take him, with his work still uncompleted.

KÒSỌ́KỌ́: And what will happen then?

Dòsùnmú: Yes, what will happen then?
Mọremí: Oh, what will happen then?
Kòsọkọ: Poor children of Odùduwà.
Mọremí: Poor Adékúnlé.
K & D: Alas, poor Adékúnlé.

(*Lights*. End of Play)

⌘

Mosquito!

Or, Addition, Vernacular, or Rat?
A Railway for Freetown

Martin Banham

The play *Mosquito!*, about the building of the Hill Station Railway in Freetown, was devised and presented during the course of a drama workshop at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, in March and April 1972. The original idea for the documentary play came from an article by Dr Leo Spitzer.[1] Further research for suitable material took place by the director in the UK in preparation for the workshop. In Freetown, members of the workshop then researched additional material and here enjoyed the skilled guidance of Professors John Peterson and Eldred Jones. Newspapers and journals were consulted in the Fourah Bay College Library, and these are given their references elsewhere in the text. Personal recollections of the railway were sought from the older residents of Freetown, and the relics of the railway – now reduced to a few bridges overgrown by the bush, the station at Wilberforce, and a sign at Hill Station – were noted, photographed, or recorded, and included in the final presentation.

Mosquito!, therefore, deals in fact. The director and the company gave theatrical shape and cohesion to the facts by the introduction of some original material, but the basic purpose of the presentation – to tell a piece of Freetown's history in a vivid way – relied on the material being accurate.

The presentation of the documentary was in the Mary Kingsley Theatre of the African Studies Centre at Fourah Bay College. The production was designed by Trevor Faulkner, and incorporated a large ground-cloth 'map' of

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[1] Leo Spitzer, "The Mosquito and Segregation in Sierra Leone," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 2.1 (Spring 1968): 49–61.

Freetown so that the actors could show the audience the various routes projected for the railway, and the location of action. The play was directed by Martin Banham.

HILL STATION

SCENE ONE

(*The stage is dark. Slowly music begins to rise that is evocative of a journey across the sea, with sound effects of a ship in voyage built in the music. On a large screen hanging over the stage is a sea and sky scene appropriate to the music and the sound. Gradually this fades and in its place is a print of old Freetown, along which the film camera has slowly panned, showing a scene from the late-nineteenth century. The music has faded, too, and behind the view of Freetown there is now the sound of crickets, night sounds, and finally a cock-crow. From behind the stage, upon which the light is gradually dawning, the sound of a song can be heard. During the four verses of the song, the whole* COMPANY *of actors come onto the stage from right and left, creating through mime the activities of a busy morning. The stage can now be seen to have the floor covered with a 'map' of Freetown, and the upstage area consists of two levels, with a large staircase rising stage right to a raised platform. The platform is decorated with palm fronds, with a bamboo-and-*

rope replica of a railway track, a large sign (at the top, stage left) saying HILL STATION, *and a variety of hats hanging on the palm fronds.*)

THE COMPANY (*while entering and engaged in mime activities, sing*):

Mosquito! Mosquito!
One of the curses of this area
Was the dreaded disease malaria!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
When he bites the man he give
A very nasty fever!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
When the mosquito he go bite 'em
The White Men all go 'fraid am
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The Mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
One of the things about him
We couldn't have done without him!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The mosquito in bite done pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!

(*At the end of the song, the* NARRATOR *climbs to the top of the staircase s.l. and reviews the scene. The company meanwhile have moved out of their mimes and put on various of the hats arranged on the set. They then move into groups preparing for the scene following the* NARRATOR*'s commentary.*)

NARRATOR: This is Freetown at the end of the last century. Everyone, Africans and Europeans, lived in the town. Apart from the mountain villages such as Leicester, Regent, and Gloucester, and the settlements along the peninsula, there was no real exploitation of the hills for residences. In the town a good social life existed, and segregation was out of order. Afternoon teas, 'Conversazione', 'at homes', balls, and entertainments in which persons belonging to the upper reaches of Creole society mingled freely with European officials and their wives, frequently highlighted the Freetown scene,[2] or so it appeared to this witty newspaper reporter who, inexplicably uninvited to a big social gathering, chose to eavesdrop in verse…..

SCENE TWO

(*Scenes run continuously from one to another, and are separated in the text only for convenience. No conscious division of the scenes should be attempted.*)

REPORTER: (*walks round the company as he speaks, indicating the characters to whom he is making reference. Their hats relate to their description by the* REPORTER)

You nor sabby de Govner look am dey
The Lion beard man? Marcy! who sweh
S'pose Govner yehry, way you tink he go say
He write boood ner voucher he cut we pay.
Cut month pay? We nor 'gree for dat!
Look nar whiteman you nor see ehn hat,
He big man Parson past all dem orders
He nor like trosses but say we all ner broders.
Fo men come togeder dem look jolly fellows
Nor kere for rain nor want ambranda.
De mannah wah officer, nor see am land
Dah big ship dem yone, de Cappin call Hand,
Tre come from the Barrack, red coats, look fine,
En spurs kin make hors wakha one tem
S'pose they catch hors you talk for true,
But hors nor lib yah – Heigh massa! ar do!
Beg pardon. Your Worship – not member we

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[2] Adapted from Spitzer.

You make we go goal when we say not gilte.
Nex time get judgment – but look am day pass
Dah lawyer sabby book when he look thro in glass.
Dem Lawyer pickin dem nebber grow big.
Dah Chief Justice who say he get wig,
Dah the QA he make plenty new rules,
Dem person behind he ’spector of schools
Ah Colonial Surgeon, medicine man for true,
He off leg one time – Tanker massa ar do!
Nor sab order doctor who write book plenty,
He favour dem Mahomed people, entie
De Cammarsery Cappin, look am, by jim!
He make plabber with Secretary, see now dem gree
Den two get plenty money den nor lek wee![3]

(*At the end of the poem, everybody, except the* NARRATOR, *leaves the stage.*)

NARRATOR: (*Still at the top of the steps*) But not all views of the state of society were so light-hearted. On January 19th, 1901 the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, that chronicler of so much activity, sadly reported….

SCENE THREE

(*Enter, to downstage right, an* ACTOR. *The light concentrates upon him.*)

ACTOR: Today the social life of the Colony is in a pitiable and lamentable condition. The descendants of the fathers do not manifest in their character and constitution the robust energy, tact, resoluteness, and spirit of self-sacrifice which enabled their ancestors to perform great deeds. The men who ought to be the leaders of the people are too much self-engrossed and self-contained. There is a disposition for insidious and excessive luxury, a passion for wealth, its influence, and the worship it receives, which is destroying the humanity and benevolence in the hearts of the rich and prosperous.

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[3] *Sierra Leone Weekly News* (21 April 1888).

(*The* ACTOR *leaves the stage.*)

NARRATOR: Elsewhere there were clear signs that medical opinion would soon be insisting that the European should segregate himself from the African if he was to live healthily in the tropics and continue to manage his Empire. A sketchy but real integration was about to be disturbed, and one of the villains of the piece was that most annoying of creatures, that gnat of the genus Anopheles – THE MOSQUITO! On Monday, June 25th, 1900, a meeting was held at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. A large number of gentlemen attended.[4]

(*A* CHAIRMAN *and a group of about eight actors come onto the stage to depict the Liverpool meeting.*)

CHAIRMAN: (*quietening the noise*) Gentlemen! Order! Order! We have met to discuss health and sanitation as it affects the tropics. Any resolutions?

GENTLEMAN FROM THE FLOOR: Mr. Chairman. I wish to urge the Government to take immediate steps to improve the conditions of life of Europeans in the tropics by the segregation of Europeans, improved sanitation, better water supply and other measures such as Science might direct.

CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen! How do you vote?

MEETING: (*resoundingly*) Aye!

CHAIRMAN: Fixed!

(*They all leave the stage.*)

NARRATOR: There was other dramatic news of the hunt for the source of the sinister malaria. Reuters man talked to Dr Patrick Manson, Medical Adviser to the Colonial Office about his scheme for a great and dramatic

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[4] *Sierra Leone Weekly News* (14 July 1900).

Malaria Mosquito Expedition……The date, June 9th, 1900.[5]

(*Enter* DR MANSON: *and* REUTERS MAN.)

REUTERS MAN: Dr Manson. Can you tell us about this great malaria expedition?

DR MANSON: (*as he talks, the reporter writes it all down. Something between a routine press interview and a television interview style should be attempted, with much of the speech projected at the audience, as if they were a camera*) This expedition has not been undertaken for the purpose of proving the truth of the theory that mosquitoes are the carrying agent of malaria – this has already been proved to the satisfaction of scientific men – but, rather, to convince the public at large and those in the tropical colonies that this is the case. If we can succeed – and of that I have no doubt or I should scarcely encourage men to expose themselves to grave risk – the effect will be far-reaching for not only will the housing of our colonial staff be changed but THE TYPE OF MEN WILL TEND TO CHANGE ALSO, BETTER MEN OFFERING FOR LESS DANGEROUS SERVICE.

REUTERS MAN: This scheme is dramatic in its details as two men who have never suffered from malaria have volunteered to live in a specially constructed hut in what Dr Manson describes as “one of the deadliest places on earth.” Dr Manson. Where is this deadly place?

DR MANSON: Italy!

(*They leave the stage*).

NARRATOR: But the most important evidence came from the report of the Ross Committee to Major Nathan, C.M.G., R.E., Acting Governor of Sierra Leone, in September 1899. Its leader, the future Nobel Prize Winner, Dr. Ronald Ross, states

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[5] *Sierra Leone Weekly News* (9 June 1900).

(*As the* Narrator *speaks, enter Dr Ronald* Ross, *Dr* Annett, *Mr* Austen, *and Dr* Fielding–Ould. *They arrange themselves in a pattern facing the audience, with Dr* Ross *at the head. The* Narrator, *from the beginning of the play, can move to any convenient but theatrically powerful point on the stage.*)

Ross: Your Excellency. Recent investigations carried out in India, Italy, and Germany have shown incontestably that malaria fever is communicated from man to man by the bites of the gnats belonging to the genus Anopheles. Extending these researches to Sierra Leone we have determined that the larvae of these species live mostly in small pools of water.

Annett: On the whole, as regards Freetown, we think that direct communication of the disease by the bites of the Anopheles will certainly account for the very many fresh infections occurring in this place and may even account for them all.

Austen: In view of these facts the most satisfactory preventive of gnat-fever would be obliteration by drainage of the breeding pools of the Anopheles. Most of the pools in Freetown are to be found in the artificial ditches by the side of the level roads.

Fielding–Ould: It has been found that a few drops of kerosene oil sprinkled on the surface of the puddle destroy all the Anopheles larvae within a few hours.

Austen: We also recommend wire gauze screens to windows in houses.

Fielding–Ould: And, of course (*slaps his arm as if to kill a mosquito*), the destruction of Anopheles by hand.

Austen: And mosquito nets!

Fielding–Ould: Indeed, in India, where gnat-fever is comparatively common among natives and the poorer Europeans, it is exceptional among the more well-to-do Europeans. We are inclined to attribute this to the general use among the latter of mosquito nets or punkahs during sleep. We are struck by the fact that in this Colony these comforts are not employed as generally as they should be, and we are disposed to ascribe the great mortality among Europeans here largely to this cause.

Ross: Again in India, where long experience has taught Europeans how best to live in tropical climates, we observe that houses are generally surrounded by a large open space and are placed on as high ground as possible. Here Europeans live in structures which are frequently ill-built, crowded together, separated from adjacent buildings only by evil-looking yards, and are situated on the very lowest, hottest, and dampest part of the town. This is surprising, since excellent sites are to be found on the slopes and summits of the adjacent hills.

Fielding–Ould: Therefore, we recommend draining the breeding pools of the Anopheles.

Annett: Or using some agent such as kerosene to do the same job.

Austen: Using wire screens and mosquito nets.

Ross: And building houses for Europeans on elevated sites. And we have the honour to be, Your Excellency, your obedient servants Ronald Ross, D.P.H., M.R.C.S. Major, Indian Medical Service (Retired).

Annett: H.E. Annett, M.D., D.P.H.

Austen: Ernest E. Austen, (British Museum – Natural History).

Fielding–Ould: R. Fielding–Ould, M.A., M.B.

(*They leave the stage.*)

Narrator: The Colonial Surgeon endorsed Ross's report and also recommended the construction of a small railway to the hills to convey the Europeans to and from Freetown.[6]

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[6] "Memorandum: From the Malaria Expedition to the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. To His Excellency Major Nathan, C.M.G., R.E., Acting Governor of Sierra Leone, Freetown, 22nd September 1899." Quoted as an appendix in Fitch–Jones, "Hill Station," *Sierra Leone Studies* 18 (November 1932): 2–22.

SCENE FOUR

NARRATOR: So, if Europeans were to be housed beyond the mosquito range of African dwellings, it began to be important to determine how far a mosquito could fly. High-powered scientific investigations began.

(*A* CHIEF SCIENTIST *and three other scientists come on to the stage. A blackboard is set up centre stage. Each scientist carries a test tube. The* CHIEF SCIENTIST *addresses the audience*).

CHIEF SCIENTIST: For the European officials to settle conveniently at Hill Station it is but proper to carry out certain investigations. For that purpose a high-powered scientific committee has been set up. The Committee To Determine How Far a Mosquito Can Fly. C.T.D.H.F.M.C.F. Or CTDHFMCF (*attempts to run the initials together into a* UNESCO*-type sound*) for short! Scientist A, release your mosquito!

(SCIENTIST A *takes the cork out of the top of his test tube. There is a loud mosquito buzzing sound which travels all over the theatre. The* CHIEF SCIENTIST *takes a tape measure from his pocket and, like a madman, chases all over the theatre, trying to follow the flight of the mosquito. The chase lasts for as long as the fun can be sustained, and then finishes with the 'mosquito' apparently coming to rest between* SCIENTIST A*'s feet. The* CHIEF SCIENTIST *ends up panting, and measuring down to that point. He then looks at his tape measure, in astonishment, and walks to the blackboard, where he writes down….*)

CHIEF SCIENTIST: Four hundred and seventy-five…. yards! Scientist B, release your mosquito.

(*The same kind of business, but shorter, as this 'mosquito' simply rises a foot or two in the air, and then descends, apparently, onto the scientist's nose. The* CHIEF SCIENTIST *measures, walks to the blackboard, writes it down….*)

CHIEF SCIENTIST: That's wonderful! Two hundred and five…. cubic centimetres. Scientist C, release your mosquito. (*Same business, but a different direction of flight from the first 'mosquito'*) Gracious! Seven hundred and twenty-three miles! (CHIEF SCIENTIST *now does some ridiculous mathematics on the blackboard and arrives at the triumphant conclusion…*) Total, three thousand, two hundred and seventeen square inches! That's how far a mosquito can fly! (SCIENTISTS *all depart, taking blackboard with them.*)

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, in Freetown, the newspapers commented on the scheme to remove Europeans to the hills……

SCENE FIVE

(*Two* ACTORS *enter*).

FIRST ACTOR: *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, December 22nd, 1900. Among the many urgent matters which should claim the attention of our new governor not the least is the preservation of those committed to his charge. The climate is moist, damp, and enervating to the last degree, and this of itself is sufficient to account for the languid and anaemic condition of the inhabitants of this peninsula. The Governor, of course, cannot change the climate, but he can mitigate its rigours by altering the insanitary condition in which the public business is carried on.

We view with disfavour the proposal to remove the European officials from unhealthy Freetown to the breezy hillsides and leave the African officials to the filthy and ill-kept surroundings of Freetown. If the chief Europeans were removed from Freetown there would be less likelihood than ever of the sanitary condition of Freetown being improved. The African official requires healthy surroundings as much as his European brother, and His Excellency will see on reference to the Registrar General's returns that the civilized cultured African when living in an unhealthy climate is as frail and prone to disease as the European, and requires equal care. His Excellency will find the Africans the backbone of the service, even as non-commissioned officers are in the British Army, and we trust that His Excellency will endeavour to improve the sanitary conditions under which the African officials as well as the natives generally live and have their being. Besides, if the native is to progress on European lines or association with Europeans is desirable would that object be attained by isolating the chief Europeans from the native population? No, after Freetown has been placed on a proper sanitary footing, it will be found that the general health both of the African and the European will have improved, and render the erection of a European official settlement as unnecessary expense as well as detrimental to the best interest of the natives. AFRICA IS NOT INTENDED AS AN ABIDING PLACE FOR THE EUROPEAN. HE CANNOT LIVE HERE FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME, AND HE CAN NEVER PROPAGATE HIS RACE HERE.

(*At this point a slide of a contemporary European family living in the tropics – preferably with several children – is quickly flashed on the screen.*)

FIRST ACTOR: (*Looking up at it*) WELL, hardly ever!

SECOND ACTOR: To the editor of the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, March 7th, 1903.

SIR,

As time goes on it becomes more and more apparent that the Mountain Railway was an ill-considered scheme. A report has it that this scheme was hatched in England, and this is the more credible, as most of the European officials for whose special benefit it is being constructed have expressed their disapproval – though, of course, not officially. None of the merchants residing in Freetown will avail themselves of a free grant of land to build residences for themselves in the hills. I believe one European firm did express their willingness to do so, but even they are now convinced of the error of their ways, having lately rented a commodious habitation which has met their former want of a decent and healthy residence.

It is clear that the Governor and his circle are not going to move to the hills, for if so why has the large expenditure been incurred for the thorough repairs of government house? However the railway is now under construction, and no matter what anyone may say it will be completed, therefore the only resource for the Colony to recoup the outlay before further expense is incurred in building bungalows at an estimated cost of £47,000 (and everybody knows what Government estimates are, the amount is more likely to be doubled) is to hand the whole concern over to the Imperial Government for strategic purposes. There is a rumour in town that such is actually going to take place. It is to be hoped that this really will happen and so relieve the Colonial Government of a WHITE ELEPHANT for which there is no necessity.

The money so obtained might with advantage be spent in improving the condition of Freetown, so benefitting the Africans and the Europeans alike.

Yours sincerely,
AN ONLOOKER

(*Both actors leave.*)

SCENE SIX

NARRATOR: But, as it had been decided to build the mountain railway, it was necessary to consider what kind of railway it should be. There were four major suggestions…..

(*Four actors come onto the stage as* Engineers, *each carrying small self-standing posters with a picture of the type of locomotion on them. As the actors announce the schemes for which they stand, they walk along the route painted on the ground-cloth, and place their symbols at the named places. By this means both the proposed route and the type of vehicle proposed is made clear. This should be done with as much clarity as possible as the information contained in this action is of importance to the audience.*

ALSO with them comes Man in the Street *– an opportunity for a clown again – who follows the actors round their routes, looking quizzical, and asks the silly questions. A lot of comic 'business' can be invented here, between the actors, but within the discretion of director!*)

Narrator: Scheme A.

Engineer 1: After much consideration I am sure a funicular Railway would be the most suitable. The route will start from Cline Town and come right to the top of Kortright Hill. From here passengers can use a tramway to get to Leicester, Gloucester, and then to Hill Station.

Man in the Street: Excuse me Mr Engineer. Did you say vernacular railway?

Engineer 1: I said a funicular railway. Funicular!

Man in the Street: Ah! Sorry Sir! How does it move?

Engineer 1: A cabin is pulled up and down the hillside on steel ropes.

Man in the Street: On steel ropes!

Engineer 1: Yes.

Man in the Street: Suppose the rope breaks?

Engineer 1: It cannot.

Man in the Street: That's wonderful!

(*The Man in the Street looks unbelieving at the strength of this 'rope' while the actor* Engineer *retires and his place is taken by the second actor.*)

Engineer 2: Now, I think what we need here is a form of transportation that has been found very successful in mountainous regions in other parts of the world. That is, an Aerial Railway. It would have overhead cables running across the valley from Cline Town to the top of Kortright. And from there, there would be the tramway along through Leicester, Gloucester, and on to Hill Station.

Man in the Street: In this – did you say Aureol Railway?

Engineer 2: No, my friend, I said Aerial Railway.

Man in the Street: Aerial?

Engineer 2: By Air! Through the air!

Man in the Street: Eh! You mean a train flying?

Engineer 2: No! You sit in a box, which runs up through the air on a cable.

Man in the Street: In a box? Ah!

(*Business as above; then third actor.*)

Engineer 3: I propose a Rack Railway. This line starts a little south of Cline Town and proceeds direct to Kortright. Distance about two-thirds of a mile. On arrival at the summit, passengers would have to be carried to Leicester and Gloucester or wherever their destination might be by means of a tramline or other means of conveyance.

Man in the Street: Ah! This is interesting. Did you say a Rat Railway? You mean a railway pulled by rats?

Engineer 3: I said a rack railway. R.A.C.K.!

Man in the Street: How does it move?

Engineer 3: It moves along a track. The teeth on the wheels of the engine fit into the grooves of the central track, and pull the train along by fitting into the grooves.

Man in the Street: A train moving on screws?

Engineer 3: I said grooves.

Man in the Street: Oooo!

(*Full of an abundant lack of confidence, the* Man in the Street *moves on to hear the next scheme.*)

Engineer 4: I would suggest an Adhesion Railway. This is an ordinary type of railway such as the one that runs to the provinces. It could be laid as steep as possible, starting from Cline Town, on to Wilberforce, and then Hill Station.

Man in the Street: Um! Did you say an addition railway? You mean sub-traction?

Engineer 4: No. I said Adhesion!

Man in the Street: Addition?

Engineer 4: ADHESION!

Man in the Street: Sorry! Lucky Sierra Leone! So we are going to end up with one addition railway, a rat railway, one flying railway, and a big big vernacular railway!

(*The actors leave the stage, with the exception of the* Man in the Street.)

Narrator: It was decided in the end to favour the Adhesion Railway. For this, four possible routes were put forward. First, Route A.

(*Four* Actors *enter, each to advocate one route. As they describe it, they also follow the course of the route on the ground-cloth map. The* Man in the Street *says nothing, but follows each route with naive interest.*)

First Actor: Route A leaves the existing main line at about 1,000 feet to the east of Water Street Station, curves round to the Alligator River, then turning southwards ascends the valley of the George-Water (later known as the Congo River), thence by a series of zig-zags and 'back shunts', the line rises to a height of 1,100 feet just below Leicester Peak. From this point it runs on a slight gradient to Kortright, its terminus, a station being placed at the junction of the Leicester and Gloucester Roads for the convenience of these villages, with a branch to the Western Hills.

Narrator: Route B.

Second Actor: Route B leaves the main line at Nicols Brook Viaduct, ascends the north-east face of the hill by a series of zig-zags and 'back shunts' to the summit of Kortright at an inclination of 1 in 30. From thence at an altitude of 1,100 feet it proceeds on the level to the road connecting Leicester and Gloucester, and continues on to the site of the new settlement.

Narrator: Route C.

THIRD ACTOR: The direction of this line is similar to Route A for the first two miles; it then proceeds by a longer route at an easier gradient of 1 in 45 to the summit on the Gloucester and Leicester Roads mentioned above and then continues in both directions to Kortright and to the proposed Hill Station.

NARRATOR: Route D.

FOURTH ACTOR: This route goes from Water Street and after crossing the Alligator and Congo Rivers it winds round the spur of the hill below Wilberforce, crosses the main road from Lumley, then continues to rise at a gradient mainly of 1 in 30 to the south-west slope of the hills; then passing near the Freetown-Wilberforce Road, where a station could be located for the residents of Wilberforce and the new European Settlement, continues onwards until it crosses the Wilberforce-Regent Road, where a station could be provided for the latter village, thence on to Leicester and Gloucester, from which point it might, if considered necessary, be extended to Kortright.

NARRATOR: This line, with modifications, was that eventually decided upon. It did not, however, find favour at first with the Colonial Government on account of its length. This route being the longest of the four lines under consideration as from its point of departure at Water Street to its destination at Kortright some eleven and a quarter miles long.[7] So building commenced. But not without disturbing the town in more ways than one.

SCENE SEVEN

Enter First Actor, also three 'Families' carrying with them simple bamboo constructions, self-standing, to represent their houses. The Families begin to mime their work and play, while the action continues.

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[7] Fitch–Jones, "Hill Station," 7.

First Actor: "Editorial," *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, January 10th, 1903.

While the construction is being vigorously prosecuted in the interests of commerce, the mountain railway is also being constructed with a view of affording travelling facilities to Europeans, who in the future are to take up their residences on the hills after days' duties in the city have been gone through, it having been found that it is by far healthier and cooler in the mountains than in the valleys below. We cannot but regard such a step as showing the growth and development of the country, and the necessity which makes it imperative that it should be protected and governed in the interests of the British Empire. In the course of laying out the grounds, lands – with and without buildings upon them – have fallen within the range, and notices to the following effect have been affixed to them:

Narrator: "THE SIERRA LEONE GOVERNMENT, TAKEN FOR THE MOUNTAIN RAILWAY. W. Bradford, Resident Engineer, December 1st, 1902."

(*As the Narrator reads this, "Mr Bradford" ascends the steps on the set and assumes his position, while a Messenger sticks a notice containing the statement the narrator is reading onto each of the houses. The families gather round them in consternation as the newspaper editorial continues.*)

The owners, on being asked to call at the Public Works Department on a given day, presented themselves, when inadequate sums [were] for the most part offered them for their houses and land, and after they were requested to attach their signatures or marks to certain documents thereby renouncing all rights to the same. Some of the people as reported were thrown into the utmost confusion and dismay by the amount offered them.

(*The following scene is 'ad-libbed'. The families, one by one, go to Mr Bradford, who offers them a small sum for their house. All disagree and cry pathe-*

tically that their homes are being destroyed without proper compensation. But Mr Bradford is adamant, and the Messenger drives the families off the stage, taking their 'houses' with them, thus leaving the stage clear for the railway to be built. The sums offered by Mr Bradford should be very small – in the region of £25 to £40. The protests about the values of the houses from the families will be equally unlikely – say £600 or £1,000.

As this sequence ends, music breaks forth and the entire cast, in a train-line 'conga', come from behind the scene, led by two men miming the cutting of the bush, and two the digging of the track, and two rolling out ahead of the train a railway line made of rope and bamboo sections. This should go right round the edges of the stage and up the steps and levels to Hill Station. The company go right up and then down again, and at the end of the music collapse on the stage in a wild heap of celebration! Flags are waved, greetings shouted to the audience, and all in all a happy and noisy scene is made of the building.

SCENE EIGHT

NARRATOR: The Railway having been built it became necessary to define the limits of Hill Station, to save this sacred plot of land from the encroachment of the people. It was described like this:

(*The actors having moved quietly during this sequence up the steps and levels of the set, now form a choir, who sing the following 'psalm'. Individual verses can be sung as solos, or all together, as preferred.*)

(*HILL STATION 'PSALM'*)

On the North East
Starting from the highest point of Leicester peak,
On the one nine five two contour
In a south-westerly direction.
To the Northern side
Of the Dam supplying Hill Station
With water and thence
Along the right bank of the Congo River
On to where it meets
The Sentinel Road
Thence in a south

Westerly direction
Along the Sentinel Road aforesaid
Until it meets the Wilberforce-Regent Road
In an easterly direction
For a distance of 60 yards
And from this point
In a south westerly direction
Until it meets
The 400-foot contour
Thence in an easterly direction
Along the 400-foot contour
To a point where it meets the footpath
Leading to the road going to the Sugar Loaf Gap.
And thence along the footpath aforesaid
To a point along the Babadori Saddle
140 yards south east of the reservoir
Supplying water to the War Department Barracks at Wilberforce
Thence in a northerly direction
Crossing the Wilberforce-Regent Road aforesaid
Until it meets the starting point of the north eastern boundary
Which is the highest point of Leicester peak on the one nine five two contour.[8]

SCENE NINE

After the 'psalm', the company, with the exception of one or two individuals who have parts to play, form themselves into a train, headed by an 'engine' that is created by about six actors, and with 'carriages' formed by the other members of the company. The train progresses round the stage, miming the actions described in the accompanying commentary, and eventually creating the picnic scene at Congo Town. In the background, specially composed local music is played to enliven the scene and to create the correct atmosphere of the train, the picnic, and excitement.

NARRATOR: The railway itself opened in a flurry of activity.

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[8] "Order in Council Made December 31st, 1910." Quoted in Fitch–Jones, "Hill Station," 11–12.

FIRST ACTOR: (*Against the action described above*) “An Enjoyable Afternoon: Boxing Day Trip for Europeans to Hill Station,” *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, January 2nd, 1904. Through the kindness of the Chief Resident Engineer of the Sierra Leone Government Mountain Railway, Mr Bradford, invitations were issued to the European commercial community on Boxing Day, for a trip to the site of the Bungalows near Wilberforce.

A train consisting of a new engine and three new composite cars, started punctually at 3.15 p.m., for the first time carrying passengers to Wilberforce. The streets were crowded with people along the line who cheered the train as it went along. The destination was reached in about 40 minutes, exclusive of the time that the engine was given a feed of water close to Wilberforce. (*‘Engine’ mimes taking a drink from overhead pipe!*)

At the site for the new bungalows everyone got out and viewed the site.

After the return from viewing the place, refreshments were offered and a little time was spent in social chat, when one of the guests in proposing the health of Mr Bradford said:

SECOND ACTOR: (*In the original production this part was spoken by the front buffer of the ‘engine’!*) Gentlemen, though we may differ in opinion about the scheme for building the Railway and for its purpose, there is however one thing we can all agree about, that is the work as a piece of engineering deserves all the credit we can give to Mr Bradford in having done it in less than 12 months. Also kept within the estimated cost.

FIRST ACTOR: Toast closed with the singing of…..

(*Everybody sings “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow!” with great enthusiasm and three final hurrahs!*)

When the talking was over, Mr Cooper, the Accountant of the Mountain Railway, took a photograph of the party.

(*The company form an elaborate Victorian family album photograph pose, and Mr Cooper throws a cloth over his head and, with much palaver, takes the 'Photograph'.*

After the "Photograph," the train moves on, and taped voices speak the next two announcements. As indicated earlier, the company create on stage the actions described, and a wild picnic involving both 'native' and 'foreign' dancing, acrobats, lovers, beggars, children at play, drunks, and whatever the director thinks appropriate ensues. Eventually the train re-forms, and leaves the stage, with singing and music and jollity fading away as the company leaves.)

FIRST VOICE: Beautiful Views, Cool and Bracing Air, Boxing Day Arrangements, Boxing Day December 26th, 1904, the Public will for the first time, have an opportunity of visiting Wilberforce and the mountains. Fares – double journey – 6d only for adults, 4d for children (under 12) to Hill Station from Freetown. From Wilberforce to Water Street or Hill Station – 3d for adults and 2d for children.[9]

SECOND VOICE: Eastertide Picnic Mountain Railway Excursion to "The Retreat, Congo Town." A grand Picnic is arranged to take place at the Congo Town Retreat on Easter Monday: 4th April Next. Every facility in travelling thereto is afforded the public by means of the "Sierra Leone Mountain Railway" to the Wilberforce Station, at very reasonable fares. Admittance to Picnic – 5s. Free refreshments. Beer and wine extra. "Native" and "foreign" dancing.[10]

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[9] *Sierra Leone Weekly News* (2 April 1904).

[10] *Sierra Leone Weekly News* (2 April 1904).

SCENE TEN

NARRATOR: But very soon afterwards, the tone became less happy, and the press began to raise some queries and to advertise some grievances….

(*Five* ACTORS *come onto the stage, and take up arranged positions*).

FIRST ACTOR: Danger – TROLLEY RIDING SATURDAY NIGHTS. To the Editor of the *Weekly News*, May 3rd, 1904. Sir, Please allow me some portion of your valuable medium for the information of the Sierra Leone Mountain Railway Authorities about the dangerous practice indulged in by some of their subordinates concerning the above subject. At Krootown Road, last Saturday night about 8 o'clock, when that thoroughfare was thronged with over a thousand pedestrians, a Trolley driven by two or more of the Sierra Leone Mountain Railway Officials came spinning down that steep incline of railway opposite Hebron's Public Shop (Krootown Road's night-centre) at full speed without light or any signal of its approach, not even the usual "lookout" was shouted by the Trolley men. Had it not been for the strong arm and shouts of a good folk in my company, I would have today, been lying an inmate of the Colonial Hospital or where the rude fore-fathers of the hamlet sleep. I beg to request the consideration of the Sierra Leone Mountain Railway Authorities to the above serious matter and trust it would be remedied. Yours truly, Disgusted.

SECOND ACTOR: *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, April 13th, 1904. Dear Sir, Mr Bradford, the Resident Engineer for the construction of the Mountain Railway having left, it is fair to assume that the line is finished in every detail and is now in the hands of the Colonial Government.

It is to be hoped that a strict account will be kept of the cost of working the line so that it can be ascertained what the real cost will be for removing a few

Europeans to the Hills to save the amount of rent allowance made to them which amounts altogether to £1,400 annually. Of course interest on the cost of the Construction of the line and the Bungalows, the maintenance of the depreciation, fire insurance etc., are to be added and all for what? To locate a few European officials to a presumably healthier spot than Freetown and even that against their wish.

It would have certainly been cheaper if it was absolutely found necessary to remove the European Officers from Freetown to grant each of them a Hammock Allowance (some already enjoy that privilege) than to build a railway which will never pay even for the cost of coal consumed by the engines.

The first duty of the Government should have been to take measure to make Freetown sanitary which could have been effected at perhaps less than one-fifth of the cost of the Mountain Railway, apart from the cost of the Bungalows, the cost of Water Supply for them and also the cost of Road making which certainly must be considerable. Freetown even now is the healthiest place for Europeans on the whole West Coast of Africa and it can be easily seen what it might have become if the Town had been drained and made sanitary.

I trust you will find a space in your valuable journal for this and thanking you in advance – I remain, Yours truly, A Freetown Resident.

THIRD ACTOR: *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, January 7th, 1905. The opening of the bungalows for European officials up the Wilberforce Hill by Sir C.A. King–Harman during the [last] year is an event which came under our survey. Already several of the Government Officials of the Civil department have taken up their abode in that delightful portion of the colony, the temperature of which is said to be mild and moderate and much akin to that of the Canary Islands, and the bracing breeze of which will, we hope and trust prove quite as invigorating to them. The sanitary condition of the city of Freetown has of late years rendered mortality among Europeans of temperate habits, a rare occurrence, and it is to be hoped that the residents on the hills will prove quite as healthy if not more so, to enable our European residents to have the company of their wives and their families. The mountain railway affords facility to officials coming to town and returning from day to day.

FOURTH ACTOR: Letter to the editor of the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, November 21st· 1904.

Sir, as the bungalows at the hill Station are now nearing completion, it is not perhaps undesirable that the leave system, as it exists at present should be considered, as regards European Colonial Officials. The public were told when the scheme was started that although the outlay would be considerable, still it would be a gain, as European officials would be living in a perfect paradise, as far as their health at least is concerned, though they themselves do not think so. Even now the leave system requires consideration; some officers are only too anxious to avail themselves of the twelve months system of work and four months leave at their own convenience. As for instance the Colonial Secretary who has been in harness for about sixteen months and does not look any worse for it. When the bungalows are all completed the leave of each officer should only commence after 2 years service at least, and later on after 3 YEARS, i.e. when the salubriousness of the Wilberforce Hill has been proved. This would save transport to and from England which is a very considerable item. Trusting that you will find a space in your valuable journal, I am, Sir, Yours truly, A CITIZEN.

Fifth Actor: *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, March 30th, 1904.
ADVERTISEMENT – “To Let”
“White House” – situated corner of Charlotte Garrison Streets, facing Victoria Park, at present occupied by the Hon. Colonial Treasurer. Terms of residence commence 1st June. For full particulars apply to:
T.A. WALL, JUNR.
Charlotte Street

(*The five actors leave the stage*).

Scene Eleven

Narrator: And anyway, the Mountain Railway never paid its way. By 1925 the Governor was giving a grim report to the Legislative Council. Gentlemen, please rise for H.E. the Governor…….

(*The* Governor *enters. He is followed by the* Man on the Street. *As the* Governor*'s report gets gloomier and gloomier, he slowing winds up the railway tract, commenting with his eyes and his expression on the* Governor*'s statements.*)

Governor: (*As he speaks, nostalgic slides of the old railway route and stock and relics are shown on the big screen above the audience, and the sound of steam is heard*) Gentlemen, in continuing my review of the year, I wish to refer to the Mountain Railway. This is, from the Railway officer’s point of view, a perpetual thorn in the flesh. The Railway officers have an uphill task in their endeavour to relieve the main system from the stigma of failure to meet working expenses, but when, as is the case with the mountain section, they realize this is unattainable whatever their efforts, the effect is discouraging.

The financial statistics for this section in respect of the last three years are as follows:

1922.	Income £3,376	Expenditure £5,190
1923	Income £3,285	Expenditure £5, 250

1924 Income £3,215 Expenditure £4,763

I recently enquired from the General Manager, Mr Webb, whether any economy would be effected by closing the top half of the mountain railway section, seeing that so many of the officers at Hill Station itself, the terminus of the section, now possess motor transport. The General Manager submitted a memorandum in which he expressed the opinion that “the best, and in fact, the only satisfactory manner from a railway point of view in which to deal with the mountain railway would be to pull up the whole line.” Members of the Executive Council discussed Mr. Webb’s statement but felt that the railway, among other purposes, has materially contributed in the development of the village of Wilberforce which now forms a convenient place of residence for African Government Officers and others who desire to live outside the limits of Freetown.

I regret to say that the General Manager can report very little improvement in the traffic staff. The standard of work, Mr Webb writes, remains deplorably low and the staff appear almost completely to lack a proper sense of their duty to the public whom they suppose to serve. So persistent is this attitude on the part of the Traffic staff and so crass is the ignorance of their duties displayed in many cases, that the General Manager has very properly informed them that before increments of salary are granted, officers must submit themselves to a simple examination in arithmetic, ticket inspection and collection, timetable knowledge, etc. The questions asked are such as would be answered with ease by anyone who has taken an interest in his work, and none but the wilfully lazy and careless clerk has anything to fear from the test. Nevertheless I have to report, with regret, that when the first examination was about to be held the clerks as a body refused to sit it.

In concluding this section I desire to acknowledge the untiring energy and keenness which Mr Webb and his colleagues continue to bring to the performance of their duties. The frequently harassing character of these duties has, I regret to say, caused a temporary breakdown in Mr. Webb's health.[11]

(*The* MAN IN THE STREET *collapses*.)

NARRATOR: (*as the Governor leaves*) Gentlemen, please rise for H.E. the Governor…. and spare a thought for poor Mr Webb. So the Mountain Railway has become part of history, though it still remains as a living memory for many, a few old stations and a bridge here, a track there. Hill Station, the home of the 'Segregation Party' remains, but its original medical purpose was compromised by the fact that though the Europeans were happy to segregate themselves from the Africans, they were not so keen to segregate themselves from their servants, who frequently spent the night in the Hill Station and thus defeated the whole object of the exercise. But one thing still remains just about the same as ever.

(NARRATOR *makes rhythm by slapping imaginary mosquitoes, and as he does so, the Mosquito song is heard again from backstage, and over the four verses the company come out singing to ring the entire stage, looking outwards*).

Mosquito! Mosquito!
One of the curses of this area
Was the dreaded disease malaria!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
When he bites the man he give am
A very nasty fever!
Mosquito! Mosquito!

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[11] *Sierra Leone Legislative Debates* (24 November 1925).

The mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
When the mosquito he go bite 'em
The White Men all go 'fraid am
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The Mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
One of the things about him
We couldn't have done without him!
Mosquito! Mosquito!
The mosquito in bite don pave
The way to the White Man's Grave!

(*At the end of the Mosquito song, the company without a break move into the calypso "Sierra Leone is Not so Bad a Place." Singing this, they move through the audience, and away.*)

Sierra Leone is not so bad a place
As some folks try to make it
Whether you live or you peg out
Depends on how you take it.[12]

(*And repeat as many times as necessary.*)

THE END

© Martin Banham, 1972.

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[12] *Sierra Leone Times* (19 November 1898).

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James Gibbs's Pinteresque Diversion

C.L. Innes

At a conference held in Goldsmiths College's Pinter Centre, London, in 2011, James Gibbs and a group of performers presented a reading of a script written by Gibbs entitled *Memory Play: Revisiting Bristol 1957 and a Production that "made history"* which recalled the first-ever performance of a play by Harold Pinter. That play was *The Room,* and it marked the beginning of Pinter's career as a dramatist. To create his script – or diversion, as he referred to it – James Gibbs explored and drew on the extensive interviews conducted in 2008 as part of the British Library Pinter Project, using the memories and words of the original producer and performers of the play for a student production at Bristol University in 1957. Two of those actors could not be interviewed: George Odlum, who played the blind black lodger Riley, had returned to St Lucia in 1961 and worked for the Ministry of Trade, becoming a well-known left-wing politician before his death in 2003. Claude Jenkins, who played the morose and silent husband of talkative Rose, could not be traced.

But from the interviews with the producer, cast, and backstage crew of that student drama group, Gibbs constructed a lively and fascinating story. The producer, Henry Woolf, a mature student at Bristol, had earlier been at school with Pinter, and it was he who persuaded Pinter to write a one-act play, his first, for Woolf to present as part of his Masters Theatre programme in 1957. Each actor recalls his or her first reactions to the play and the characters, and they also recall Harold Pinter's response to that first production of his first play. Over sixty years later, the audience at Goldsmiths were entranced by Gibbs's evocation of that historic moment in modern British drama.

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Notes on Contributors

Anne Adams received the PhD in Germanic Languages and Literatures from the University of Michigan. From research in Dutch Creole folklore, bridging Germanic languages with Africa / Diaspora studies, her academic career has embraced both areas. She taught for many years at Kent State University and Cornell University and has held guest professorships in Congo–Brazzaville, Ghana, and Germany. She has served as President of the African Literature Association and as Director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan-African Culture in Accra. Her publications include *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, co-edited with Carole Boyce Davies (1986); *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland: Pan-African Cultural Activism*, co-edited with Esi Sutherland–Addy (2007); *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo: A Reader in African Cultural Studies* (2012); as well as translations: *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (1992) and *Blues in Black and White* by May Ayim (2003).

Sola Adeyemi currently teaches Theatre and Performance Studies at Regent's College, London. He studied theatre arts at the University of Ibadan and drama studies at the University of Natal before obtaining his PhD in performance studies at the University of Leeds. He has edited *Portraits for an Eagle: Essays in Honour of Femi Osofisan* (2006) and has co-edited *Developments in the Theory and Practice of Contemporary Nigerian Drama and Theatre* (2011). He edits the *Opon Ifa Review*.

Kofi Anyidoho holds a BA in English (University of Ghana), an MA in folklore (Indiana University, Bloomington), and a PhD in comparative literature (University of Texas at Austin). He is a Professor of Literature, University of Ghana, where he recently completed a two-year term as the first occupant of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies. He has been a visiting professor, guest lecturer, and external examiner at various universities across the world. His published works include six collections of poetry in English, CD recordings of poetry in Ewe and English, numerous journal articles, and book chapters; he has edited a number of major books on African literature and culture. A past President of the US-based African Literature Association, he has served on various boards, including the editorial board of *Research in African Literatures*. He is currently Chairman of Council for the new University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ghana, and Fellow and Council Member of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences.

AWO MANA ASIEDU earned BA and M.Phil degrees at the University of Ghana before winning a Commonwealth Scholarship to pursue doctoral studies in theatre arts at the University of Birmingham, UK. Upon completing her PhD in 2003, she returned to teach a variety of graduate and undergraduate courses in drama and theatre at the University of Ghana, where she is now a senior lecturer and serves as Acting Director of the School of Performing Arts. She has done research on contemporary African theatre and performance, the sociology of theatre, theatre for purposes other than entertainment, and women and popular culture. Her recent publications include essays in *Theatre History Studies*, in *Current Sociology*, and in collections of criticism on African culture and theatre. She was elected to the Executive Committee of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR) in 2009 and currently serves as Chair of the IFTR's New Scholars' Forum. She is a member of the editorial boards of *African Theatre* and *Theatre Research International*.

MARTIN BANHAM is Emeritus Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies in the University of Leeds. After ten years at the University College Ibadan (later the University of Ibadan) he moved, in 1966, to Leeds, where he founded the Workshop Theatre in the School of English. His publications include, as editor, *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre* (1990), with subsequent editions as *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*; *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre*, co-edited with Errol Hill and George Woodyard (1994), and *A History of Theatre in Africa* (2004). Earlier work included (with Clive Wake) *African Theatre Today* (1976) and *Osborne* (1969). He is a member of the editorial team of *African Theatre*.

ECKHARD BREITINGER (*1940 – +2013) read English, history, and archaeology at German, British, and Swiss universities. He taught at universities in Jamaica, Ghana, France, and Germany and held visiting appointments at universities in Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Cameroon, Mozambique, and Poland. He published numerous articles on postcolonial literature, theatre, and performance, contributed biographical entries to major reference works, and edited nearly one hundred titles in the Bayreuth African Studies Series. In addition, he published full-length studies on Gothic novels, American radio drama and film, and political rhetoric, translated plays and poetry, and had his theatre photographs exhibited at various international festivals and conferences.

GORDON COLLIER has published articles on postcolonial film, Caribbean literature, narratology, and iconography, and books on translation and on Patrick White (*The Rocks and Sticks of Words*, 1992). He is the editor of *US/THEM: Translation, Transcription and Identity in Post-Colonial Literary Cultures* (1992) and of a retrospective two-volume essay collection by John Kinsella, *Spatial Relations: Essays, Reviews, Commentaries, and Chorography* (2013), and has co-edited a two-volume selection of Derek Walcott's occasional journalism, *The Journeyman Years* (with Chris Balme, 2013), as well as the critical anthologies *Shuttling Through Cultures Towards Identity* (with Judith Bates, 1996), *A Talent(ed) Digger* (with Hena Maes–Jelinek and Geoff Davis, 1996), *Postcolonial Theory and the Emergence of a Global Society* (with Dieter Riemenschneider and Frank Schulze–Engler, 1998), *Crabtracks: Progress and Process in Teaching the New Literatures in English* (with Frank Schulze–Engler, 2002), and *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean* (with Ulrich Fleischmann, 2003). African studies collections he has edited are *Spheres Public and Private: Western Genres in African Literature* (2011), *Focus on Nigeria: Literature and Culture* (2012), and *African Cultures and Literatures: A Miscellany* (2013). He is co-general editor and technical editor of the book-series Cross/Cultures: Readings in Post/Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English and of the journal *Matatu: A Review of African Literature*. He is currently compiling a comprehensive bibliography and filmography of the African diaspora.

JAMES CURREY, as Editorial Director at Heinemann Educational Publishers, added 250 titles to their African Writers Series from 1967 to 1984. His book *Africa Writes Back* (2008) recounts that Chinua Achebe once described him as a "conspirator in the launch of African Literature." Concerned that this torrent of new literature should be subject to serious critical assessment, he established a series of 'Studies in African Literature' and with Eldred Durosimi Jones set up *African Literature Today.* When he and Clare Currey founded James Currey Publishers in 1985, they saved and continued *African Literature Today* and with Lynn Taylor started *African Theatre*. While at the Oxford

University Press in Cape Town in the early 1960s in the period from Sharpeville to Rivonia, he also designed and produced monthly *The New African*, in which such young writers as Bessie Head, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Dennis Brutus, and Wole Soyinka made early appearances. He is at work putting all fifty-three issues free to view online. He is also advising Pearson on the revival of publishing in the African Writers Series.

GEOFFREY V. DAVIS read modern languages at Oxford and has taught at universities in Austria, France, Germany, and Italy. Among his publications are *Voices of Justice and Reason: Apartheid and beyond in South African Literature* (2003), *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka* (1997), and the co-edited volumes *Theatre and Change in South Africa* (1996); *Staging New Britain: Aspects of Black and South Asian British Theatre Practice* (2006); *Indigeneity: Representation and Interpretation* (2009); *Narrating Nomadism: Tales of Recovery and Resistance* (2013); and *African Literatures*, *Postcolonial Literatures in English: Sources and Resources* (2013). Since 2007 he has been associated with the Bhasha Research Centre in Baroda (India). He co-edits the book series Cross/Cultures and the African studies journal *Matatu*. He is currently chair of the European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS).

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ROBERT FRASER was educated at the universities of Sussex and London. He has since taught at the universities of Leeds and London, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he served as Director of Studies in English. He has also lectured extensively abroad, notably in West Africa. Currently he is Professor of English at the Open University. He has published full-length biographies of the poets George Barker (2001) and David Gascoyne (2012) and has also written performance pieces around the lives of Lord Byron, Dr Johnson, Carlo Gesualdo, D.H. Lawrence, and Katherine Mansfield. He has published critical studies of Marcel Proust (1994), Sir James Frazer (1990), Ben Okri (2002), West African poetry (1986), the Victorian quest romance (1998), and postcolonial aesthetics (2000), as well as several titles on international print history (2008). He has also written and lectured on the relationship between literature and music: specifically on the uses of text by Purcell, Handel, and Mozart. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in May 2007.

RAOUL J. GRANQVIST is Professor Emeritus of English Literature in the Department of Language Studies, Umeå University. He has been teaching English and postcolonial literatures with special attention to the semiotics of space and power, and intercultural critique (Africa and the West). He is currently engaged in two book projects, one related to the American photojournalist Eliot Elisofon's work in Africa (1943–72) and the second, provisionally named 'The Good Swede in Africa', to a critical history of Swedish cultural politics (1900–2000). He has published *Imitation as Resistance: Appropriations of English Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (1995), *Revolution's Urban Landscape: Bucharest Culture and Postcommunist Change* (1999), *The Bulldozer and the Word: Culture at Work in Postcolonial Nairobi* (2004), and the anthologies *Major Minorities: English Literatures in Transit* (1993), *Sensuality and Power in Visual Culture* (2002), *Michael's Eyes: The War against the Ugandan Child* (2005), and *Writing Back in/and Translation* (2006).

GARETH GRIFFITHS earned his BA and PhD at the University of Wales, after which he taught principally at universities in England and Australia, but frequently took up visiting appointments and fellowships at universities in the USA, Belgium, Denmark, India, Canada, France, Austria, and South Africa. Most recently he has served as the Winthrop Professor of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia. He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2007. During the course of his career he has written and edited many books on postcolonial literatures with a special emphasis on African and Australian writing. His lifelong interest in drama and theatre is also reflected in his publications, which include *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing Between Two Cultures* (1978), *The Empire Writes Back*, co-authored by Bill Ashcroft and Helen

Tiffin (1989), *African Literatures in English East and West* (2000), and *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, Missions*, co-edited with Jamie S. Scott (2005).

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LEIF LORENTZON, after living and travelling in Africa in the 1970s, entered the graduate programme of the Department of Comparative Literature, Stockholm University, where he later earned his PhD. He continued his research as a free scholar while teaching at an upper secondary school in Stockholm. His main research interests are the oral and popular literatures of Africa. He has published "*An African Focus": A Study of Ayi Kwei Armah's Narrative Africanization* (1998), participated in the Scandinavian research project 'Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective' as well as in the South African project 'Music & Identity: Transformation & Negotiation', and has published articles on written and oral African literatures in Sweden as well as in *Research in African Literatures*, *African Literature Today*, *Ufahamu*, and other journals.

JACK MAPANJE is one of Africa's best known poets. Originally from Malawi, he left there after spending three and a half years in the prison of 'Life President' Hastings K. Banda, and has been living in York, England, for over twenty-one years. He is currently on a year's sabbatical leave in the Department of English, University of Botswana, editing his sixth book of poems. He has taught/worked at the University of Malawi; the University of Leeds; Warwick University; Trinity and All Saints University College, Leeds; Dove Cottage, The Wordsworth Trust, Cumbria; Newcastle University; and York St John University. He has published five books of poems, the fifth of which, *Beasts of Nalunga*, was shortlisted for one of the UK's prestigious poetry awards for the best collection in 2007. He has also edited and co-edited four anthologies. His latest book is the acclaimed prison memoir *And Crocodiles Are Hungry At Night* (2011).

CHRISTINE MATZKE studied at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, and Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, and holds degrees from the University of Leeds. She taught literature and theatre in the Department of New Literatures in English at Goethe University and in the African Studies Department, Humboldt University, Berlin, before joining the University of Bayreuth in 2011. Her academic specialities are African theatre, particularly drama and performance in Eritrea, and postcolonial crime fiction. Recent publications include contributions to the *New Theatre Quarterly* (2011) and the *Dictionary of African Biography* (2011). She has also co-edited *African Theatre 8: Diasporas* with Osita Okagbue (2009) and *Life is a Thriller: Investigating African Crime Fiction*, with Anja Oed (2012). She is a member of the editorial board of *Matatu*.

MPALIVE–HANGSON MSISKA, with degrees from the University of Malawi (BA), the University of Alberta (MA), and Stirling University (PhD), is a Reader in English and Humanities at Birkbeck College, University of London. While at the University of Malawi, he was a stage manager for the University of Malawi Travelling Theatre under the directorship of James Gibbs. He was also active in the Writers Group and was editor of *Umodzi*, the annual student magazine. He currently teaches African literature, postcolonial literature, post-war literature, black British writing, and courses on modernism. His publications include *Post-Colonial Identity in Wole Soyinka* (2007), *Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart": A Study* (with David Whittaker) (2007), *Wole Soyinka* (1998), *Writing and Africa* (co-edited with Paul Hyland) (1997), and *The Quiet Chameleon: A Study of Modern Poetry from Central Africa* (with Adrian Roscoe) (1992). He is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* and of the *Journal of Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*.

FEMI OSOFISAN recently retired as Professor of Drama from the University of Ibadan, where he taught for thirty-eight years. A former General Manager and Chief Executive of the National Theatre in Lagos, Osofisan was educated at the Universities of Ibadan, Dakar, and Paris III. In the tradition of activist intellectuals all over the world, Osofisan wears many hats – as actor, playwright, and theatre director, poet and novelist, critic and theorist of literature, composer and translator, scholar and journalist. Arguably the most popular playwright in Nigeria, he has written over fifty plays, which have been performed in different countries including Ghana, Canada, the USA, Sierra Leone, Kenya, the UK, Australia, Sri Lanka, and China. He has won several prestigious honours both for his poetry and drama and for his essays; and in 2005 was awarded the Nigerian National Order of Merit, the country's highest recognition for intellectual achievement.

EUSTACE PALMER, educated in Sierra Leone and at the University of Edinburgh, has taught at Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone, and has held visiting appointments at the University of Texas at Austin and at Randolph Macon Woman's College. He currently teaches at Georgia College & State University, where he is Distinguished Professor of English and Coordinator of Africana Studies. One of the pioneer critics of African literature, he has published *An Introduction to the African Novel* (1972), *The Growth of the African Novel* (1979), and *Of War and Women, Oppression and Optimism: New Essays on the African Novel* (2008), and has edited, with Abioseh

Michael Porter, *Knowledge is More Than Mere Words: A Critical Introduction to Sierra Leonean Literature* (2008). He has also published four novels. For several years he served as Associate Editor of *African Literature Today*, and in 2006 he was elected President of the African Literature Association.

JANE PLASTOW is Professor of African Theatre and Director of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Leeds. All her university education took place at Manchester University, where she finished up with a PhD that subsequently became the book *African Theatre and Politics: A Comparative Study of the Evolution of Theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe* (1996). She has worked as an academic in Ireland, Ethiopia, and the UK, and as a director and theatre trainer in a wide range of African nations – most notably Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and Uganda. Much of her practical work has focused on the empowerment of marginalized groups, including, women, street dwellers, and youth groups. Key publications include *Theatre Matters* (1998), *Theatre and Empowerment* (2004), and *African Theatre: Women* (2002). She is editor of the *Leeds African Studies Bulletin*, co-editor of *African Theatre*, and on the editorial board of *Moving Worlds*, the *Journal of African Cultural Studies,* and the *Contemporary Theatre Review*.

LYNN TAYLOR, Managing Editor for James Currey Publishers, now an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, commissions publishing on African literary criticism, theatre, and film. She joined the firm in 1990 and has worked with James Gibbs both on *African Literature Today* and on the establishment of *African Theatre.* In addition to her work on the series 'Studies in African Literature', she saw through the detailed work on *The Companion to African Literatures,* edited by Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe (2000). Her commissioned list of books on African film includes *Nollywood*, ed. Pierre Barrot, which she translated from the French edition. After a first degree in psychology at the University of York, she studied at the London School of Economics for an MSc in social anthropology. In the late 1980s she worked for the International Health Exchange at the Africa Centre in London and for the American International School of Bamako, Mali.

PIA THIELMANN, educated at the University of Kansas and the University of Hamburg, has taught at universities and institutes in India, Malawi, the USA, and Germany. She has held administrative positions, has convened, co-convened, and co-organized several international conferences and workshops, and has served as co-editor of Bayreuth African Studies Series (BASS). Her interdisciplinary research covers African, African-American, and Caribbean literatures, with an emphasis on aspects of gender. She is the author of *Hotbeds: Black–White Love in Novels from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean* (2004), *Marge Piercy's Women: Visions Captured and Subdued* (1986), and the poetry collection *Love and Other Improbabilities* (2004). In addition, she has published many book chapters, articles, book reviews, encyclopedia entries, and a translation.

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