The Study of African Literature:
Birth and Early Growth of a New Branch of Learning

The phrase 'African Literature' refers to three distinct fields of creativeness and scholarship, each of which is characterized by its own bewildering diversity. First came oral literature which, as Africa has a comparatively low level of literacy, is still popular and thriving, availing itself of the opportunities offered by modern audiovisual mass media. It exists in the hundreds of languages and dialects which are spoken on the black continent. It is a field for folklorists and linguists, and will not be discussed here.

Next came pre-colonial writing, which developed in two stages. The beginning of our era saw the emergence of written literature in Ethiopia. This resulted in a considerable amount of writing, which already awakened scholarly curiosity in seventeenth-century Europe.1 Two centuries after Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704), colonial interest in sub-Saharan Africa prompted more systematic research, especially by Ignazio Guidi (1844–1935) and Enrico Cerulli2 in Italy and Enno Littmann (1875–1958) in Germany.3 While these scholars concentrated on traditional Ge‘ez writing, in recent decades interest has tended to shift to Amharic, which is the actual language of the people.4

The second stage in the growth of written literature began with the spread of Islam over North, West, and East Africa. A distinction must be made between those three areas, each of which has its own literary individuality. In North Africa, Arab conquerors settled in appreciable numbers, establishing their control over the original, mostly Berber, populations. The Arabic literature that has been produced in the Maghrib and in Egypt during the last thousand years is usually studied as part of the Arabic culture of the Muslim world rather than as part of African literature. Two organizations that have

1 See especially Hiob Ludolf’s Lexicon aethiopicus-latinum (London 1661), and his History aethiopica (1682); the latter was soon translated into English as A new History of Ethiopia, being a full and accurate description of the kingdom of Abessinia, vulgarly, though erroneously, called the empire of Prester John (London 1682).
2 Enrico Cerulli’s Storia della letteratura etiopica (Milan: Nuova Accademia 1956) is still the most convenient general introduction to the subject. It went through a third edition in Florence in 1968.
3 Enno Littmann, Die altamharischen Kaiserlieder (Strassburg 1914). Littmann was responsible for the section on ‘Die äthiopische Literatur’ in Handbuch der Orientalistik. Erste Abteilung: Der nahe und der mittlere Osten. m. Semistik (Leiden 1954) 375–85.
4 Thomas L. Kane, Ethiopian Literature in Amharic (Wiesbaden 1975)
shown specialized interest in Maghrebi writing are the Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes in Tunis and the Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura in Madrid. A considerable amount of research has of course been conducted in Arabic, and is therefore of restricted availability to western scholars.

Although the islamization of West Africa was a direct result of the Arab conquest of North Africa, there are considerable differences between the two areas. While Muslim proselytism, peaceful or otherwise, introduced Islam and its sacred language, Arab settlement was slight and produced that synthesis of cultural traits which Vincent Monteil was to call 'L'Isam noir.' Nevertheless, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, Timbuctoo was an important centre of Islamic learning and Arabic writing. This received considerable scholarly attention, especially from such French experts as Octave Houdas (1840–1916), between the Berlin Conference (1885) and the end of the First World War. After that, it became more convenient in official quarters to pretend that Africa had no past, no history, no culture, and it was only the approach of independence that brought a renewal of interest in the Arabic literature of Sudanic West Africa. This was chiefly effected by English and American scholars, often working in close collaboration with the Centre of Arabic Documentation which had been established at Ibadan. So far, however, the most extensive single piece of research was produced by Amar Samb at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire in Dakar.

Although poetic composition in Arabic is still practised today by Muslim literati in many parts of West Africa, the fact does not seem to have aroused much interest among literary historians and critics, who tend to concentrate on vernacular languages. For in the eighteenth century, the needs of religious propaganda prompted learned men to use the Arabic script in order to transliterate some of the more widely spoken vernacular languages of West Africa. There thus arose several literatures of the ajami type: in Fula, in Hausa, in Wolof, and perhaps in other languages as well. Fula is very widely spoken, especially in Guinea (Futa Jalon), Senegal (Futa Toro) and Cameroon (Adamawa): these were all parts of French Africa, and their vernacular literary achievements have been studied in recent years by a number of French, or French-educated, scholars, such as Alfa Ibrahim Sow, Pierre Lacroix, and others: in a sense, these are the successors of Henri Gaden (b.

5 Houdas was chiefly important as the translator of the great Timbuctoo classics.
6 Amar Samb, Essai sur la contribution du Sénégal à la littérature d'expression arabe (Dakar 1973). It must be noted, however, that much information on the subject was already available in Paul Marty, Études sur l'Isam au Sénégal (Paris 1917), and also in Thomas Hodgkin, The Radical Tradition in the Literature of Muslim West Africa (London 1968).
7 Alfa Ibrahim Sow, La Femme, la vache, la foi: Écrivains et poètes du Foûta-Djalon (Paris 1966) and Chroniques et récits du Foûta-Djalon (Paris 1968)
8 Pierre Lacroix, Poésie peule de l'Adamawa (Paris 1965); but see also Rupert East, Stories from Old Adamawa (Lagos 1935).
1867) and Gilbert Vieillard (b. 1899), who had been active in that field earlier in the century. The most systematically studied of those vernacular literatures is Hausa, which, apart from its ajami tradition, has also been transliterated into roman script since the 1930s: the most informative work so far is that of Mervyn Hiskett, who is chiefly concerned with traditional religious poetry;9 for modern Hausa writing both religious and secular, the best-known specialist is Neil Skinner;10 but with the launching of a scholarly periodical in Hausa and English, Harsunan Nijeriya, it is to be expected that local scholars will bring a decisive contribution to the knowledge of their own literature. As to Wolof, in spite of the efforts of such Senegalese scholars as Cheikh Anta Diop, Pathé Diagne, and Amar Samb, there is as yet no substantive survey of its written literature, which anyhow did not begin until the late nineteenth century.

The literary consequences of islamization have been quite different in Eastern Africa, where there does not seem to have been any real urge to use the Arabic language for literary purposes. In the present stage of our knowledge, the Arabic script, introduced under the influence of Islam, was generally used to transliterate some of the local languages. One exception is to be seen in Somalia, which has produced some writing in Arabic, as an orthography for the Somali language was not agreed upon until 1972; the problems inherent in such a situation have been discussed by B.W. Andrzejewski.11 Nor is it possible, in the present context, to dwell on early Malagasy writing, which, following the West African pattern, was studied during the early decades of the French regime by such scholars as Gabriel Ferrand, (b. 1864), Gustave Julien (b. 1870), and, later, Gustave Mondain.12

The most important of the pre-colonial East African literatures is of course Swahili, the existence of which was first revealed in the mid-nineteenth century when Ludwig Krapf (1810–81), a German missionary in the service of the Church Missionary Society of London, brought to Berlin some ajami manuscripts in the language. These lay dormant in a museum until the Berlin Conference prompted German missionaries and administrators to edit, translate, and study them, and to collect other Swahili writings in the

10 Neil Skinner, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin, has written many articles on the subject, such as 'Realism and Fantasy in Hausa Literature,' which appeared in a special 'Black Africa' issue of the Review of National Literatures 2 (1971) ii, 167–87
12 For full information about their many publications concerning the famous 'manuscrits arabico-madecasses,' it is best to consult G. Grandidier, Bibliographie de Madagascar. 2 vols. (Paris 1905 and 1935).
German colony of Tanganyika. Swahili scholarship was distinguished by several generations of German students, from Carl Velten (b. 1862) to Alice Werner (1859–1935), most of whose work is in English, and to Ernst Dammann. Meanwhile, in British Kenya, the real source of traditional Swahili literature, efforts were concentrated on the creation of a modern literature using the roman script; nevertheless much useful work was done on Swahili literature, both classical and modern, by such British scholars as William E. Taylor, Lyndon Harries, Wilfred Whiteley, and J.W.T. Allen, without forgetting the contribution of a local scholar, Sir Mbarak Ali Hinawy. In recent years, these have been joined by an international contingent of researchers such as Rajmund Ohly from Poland, or Rainer Arnold from East Germany; special mention should be made of the basic bibliographical spadework of Marcel van Spaandonck from Belgium, and, even more, of the many editions, translations, theological analyses, and historical studies by Jan Knappert from the Netherlands. The main centre for Swahili studies is now the Institute for Swahili Research; it is attached to the University of Dar es Salaam and is bound to yield an important crop of local specialists endowed with something that non-African students cannot have: the irreplaceable insider's view.

Strangely enough, few among those whose main scientific concern is the study of African literature realize that the first literary consequence of the European conquest and of its general cultural influence was the spread of 'creative' writing in other African languages. On the whole, this phenomenon was limited to British Africa: it was the outcome of the Protestant missionaries' intention to translate the Bible for the local people; and it was begun during the second quarter of the nineteenth century among the Xhosa of South Africa, spreading later to the Sotho and the Zulu. Between the two world wars, Literature Bureaux were set up in many parts of the British Empire with a view to stimulate vernacular writing.


15 Marcel van Spaandonck, *Practical and Systematical Swahili Bibliography* (Leiden 1965); this has been usefully supplemented and corrected in Alberto Mioni, 'La bibliographie de la langue swahili,' *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 7 (1967) 485–532.


17 This point has been elaborated in Albert Gérard, 'La politique coloniale et la formation des littératures vernaculaires en Afrique britannique,' *Commonwealth Miscellanea* (Pau) 1 (1974–5) 3–10.
Until the end of World War II, only linguists and teachers paid any attention to this. Even then, interest was strictly localized, as exemplified in the works of Shepherd, Nyembezi, and Jordan.18 While the very first survey-type study to appear outside Africa was the work of Swiss scholar Peter Sulzer,19 few other book-length studies have been devoted to the fifty-odd vernacular literatures that emerged as a result of the spread of European education. A few stray essays are available about Ganda writing in Uganda,20 and especially about Yoruba writing in Nigeria;21 the Shona literature of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, whose existence was revealed to the outside world in 1966,22 has been exceptionally lucky, thanks mainly to the laudable exertions of a local scholar, George Kahari.23 The reason for this comparative dearth of academic interest is, of course, that any serious student of ‘creative’ writing in any vernacular ought to have a thorough knowledge of the language and of the society that speaks it, as well as genuine expertise in the methods of literary history and criticism. Lack of the former inevitably detracts from whatever interest may attach to the present writer’s two books on the topic:24 his ambition could only be to show that sufficient information is available in European languages to sketch the history of this extremely complex and recondite subject, thus – we hope – paving the way for more competent scholars.

Black Africa’s contacts with Europe had been continuous (although mostly painful) ever since the Renaissance: the slave trade led certain black authors to write in the European languages taught them by their masters. Their work passed largely unnoticed until a French priest opposed to slavery, the Abbé Henri Grégoire (1750–1831), published his De la littérature des nègres

18 R.H.W. Shepherd’s Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu (1945), revised, enlarged, and reissued as Bantu Literature and Life ([Lovedale, S.A.] 1955); C.L.S. Nyembezi, A Review of Zulu Literature (Pietermaritzburg 1961); see also Archibald C. Jordan’s essays of the late fifties, later collected as Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa (Berkeley 1973).
21 See for example Adeboye Babalola, ‘A Survey of Modern Literature in the Yoruba, Efik and Hausa Languages’ in Bruce King, ed. Introduction to Nigerian Literatures (Lagos 1971) 50–63. On the most important among the founders of Yoruba written prose fiction, see Ayo Bamigbe, The Novels of O.O. Fagunwa (Benin City 1974).
22 E. Walter Krog, ed. African Literature in Rhodesia (Gwelo, Rhodesia 1966); this book also deals with Ndebele writing.
23 George Kahari, The Novels of Patrick Chakaipa (Salisbury 1972) and The Imaginative Writings of Paul Chidyausiku (Gwelo 1975).
(1808) as a weapon in his campaign for the rehabilitation of the black race. Actually, African imaginative writing in European languages did not emerge on a significant scale until the late 1940s, when it became a manifestation of the upheavals—cultural, educational, social, and ideological—resulting from World War II. The publication of Senghor’s first collection, *Chants d’ombre* (1945), did not cause much of a stir, but, in 1948, his *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* did, largely because of Jean-Paul Sartre’s prefatory essay, ‘Orphée noir,’ the first in-depth discussion of any African writing by an important member of the Western intelligentsia. The significance of the birth of this African literature in French was brought to the whole world’s notice by the Conference of Black Writers and Artists held in Paris in 1956. From then on, it was obvious to shrewder minds that here was a new area for scientific scrutiny.

Inevitably, the kind of interest given to modern African literature during the last decade of colonialism, and even for some time afterwards, was primarily human and political: these writings presented a vivid image of Africa as seen through African eyes; at a time when political independence was in sight, they offered a unique means of enlarging our perception and understanding of the experiences, problems, and tragedies of peoples that were about to take their fates into their own hands. In consequence, much of the critical reception accorded to African literature was at first mainly journalistic, a word which need not imply contempt.

But the scholarly approach, ponderous, elitist, obstinate, and reliable, intervened with notable rapidity. After such precursors as Bakary Traoré, whose *Le Théâtre négro-africain* (1958) surveyed the beginnings of West African drama in French, and Joseph-Marie Jadot, whose *Les Ecrivains africains du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi* (1959) provided detailed information about what little writing had been done in what is now Zaire, Lilyan Kesteloot presented at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, in 1960, her historic dissertation, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d’une littérature*, which was printed in 1963. Meanwhile, other studies had appeared in book form. While Thomas Melone’s *De la négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine* and Ezekiel Mphahlele’s *The African Image* combined scholarly care with the committed attitude which no African could possibly relinquish in those days when colonialism was still very much present (often in men’s memories, but sometimes, unfortunately, in actual fact), another work of 1962 was especially instrumental in popularizing the new African authors in the West. This was Gerald Moore’s *Seven African Writers*, which contained discussions of two francophone poets, Senghor and David Diop; two francophone novelists, Camara Laye and Mongo Beti; and

25 The complete proceedings were published as a special issue of *Présence Africaine* (1956).
three anglophone authors of prose fiction, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, and Ezekiel Mphahlele. Lilyan Kesteloot was interested mainly in poetry and the concept of negritude; her approach was historical and sociological. Moore gave more attention to prose writers, and his bias was fundamentally critical. But, while in a way they thus complemented each other, they had one important thing in common: their international outlook. This was obvious in the case of Moore, whose authors came from Senegal, Cameroon, Guinea, Nigeria, and South Africa. But, although Lilyan Kesteloot confined herself to writings in French, her authors represented both Africa (chiefly Senegal) and the West Indies. The year 1963 was chiefly marked by the publication of several studies in Portuguese on the literatures of Angola and the Cape Verde islands. But the tendency to view the black world, or at any rate black Africa, as a whole, visibly spread when the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow published Literatura stran Afriki (1964) under the editorship of F.M. Breskina; this first important Soviet work was followed by several wide-ranging collections of essays culminating in the two volumes edited by Irina D. Nikiforova, Sovremennye literatury Afriki (Moscow 1973–4).

Historical circumstances, the facts of a common struggle against white supremacy, bolstered by the political ideology of Pan-Africanism and the cultural ideology of negritude, thus fostered an international approach which seemed to enable African literary scholarship to eschew, at an early stage of its development, the pitfalls of the narrow nationalism that had plagued the development of European literary scholarship during the nineteenth century. This, it might be thought, ought to be a cause for rejoicing and thanksgiving among comparatists. Indeed, as years went by, it appeared that this promising trend was steadily gaining ground. While few works of a monographic kind such as Norman Arajo’s Study of Cape Verdean literature (1966) have appeared so far, most books concerned with African literature in European languages have been international in scope, dealing, for example, with all the literatures in one particular language. Instances are Gerald Moser’s studies of luso-African writing, or Robert Cornevin’s misleadingly entitled Le théâtre en Afrique noire et à Madagascar (1970), which deals solely with French-language writers as did Robert Pageard’s Littérature négro-africaine (1966). Sometimes, too, scholarly works appeared that were concerned with the literary production of one large part of the continent, irrespective of the languages used; to this category belong Judith I. Gleason’s This Africa: Novels by West Africans in English and French (1965), one of the first book-size discussions of African literature to have come from the United States, or Oladele Taiwo’s Introduction to West African literature (1967). If the distinguishing feature of comparative literature is to transcend national boundaries, then the major trend in early African literary scholarship seemed to be comparative.
The most radical view was that of Janheinz Jahn, who held that no balanced view of African writing could be gained unless vernacular works were taken into account as well as works in European languages. The foundation for this approach was laid in his two bibliographies (1965–71). His Geschichte der neoafrikanischen Literatur (1966) was a valiant but clearly premature attempt to offer a comparative historical account on the basis of fragmentary information. For obvious reasons, Jahn had few followers in this particular field. The only systematic endeavour was Literatura cerně Afriky which three Czech scholars, Vladimír Klíma, Karel F. Růžička, and Petr Zima, published in 1972. It is a promising sign that African-language writing has received increasing attention in the course of the last decade. Nevertheless, studies of the survey type have tended to concentrate on European languages and to treat vast multinational areas, or even the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. O.R. Dathorne’s courageous and bulky The Black Mind: A History of African Literature (1974) will probably be the last one-man job of its kind, for the amount of writing in European languages is now so vast that it can be satisfactorily managed only by a team of scholars and not by any single man, however competent and industrious.

The early years of this infant discipline were thus characterized by a willingness to survey its field on a Pan-African, continental, or even all-black, scale, disregarding possible local differences. These, it is true, might not be perceptible to the European student. They might also have been willingly ignored by the African student, who was all too conscious of the need for all-African solidarity and of the dangers presented by tribal fragmentation. It was also, as Frantz Fanon had shrewdly perceived, part of the psychological aftermath of colonial racialism:

26 The latter version, Bibliography of Creative African Writing by Janheinz Jahn and Claus Peter Dressler (Nendeln 1971), is indeed a basic tool for anyone concerned with the study of African literature. It is highly desirable that it should be continued. Meanwhile, the bibliography of francophone creative writing has been updated in Thérèse Baratte et al., Bibliographie des auteurs africains de la langue française, fourth edition (Paris 1979). Students of African literature are eagerly waiting for the Bibliographia de literatura de expressão portuguesa which is being prepared jointly by Gerald Moser and Manuel Ferreira.

27 Jahn’s Geschichte, which appeared in English as A History of Neo-African Literature (London 1968), was also published in French, under a less presumptuous title, Manuel de littérature néo-africaine (Paris 1969).

28 This is obviously the case in African and in linguistic journals, where an impressive amount of work is being done on the literary achievement in such languages as Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, and the Bantu languages of South Africa. But vernacular writing is also studied in such Western journals as Research in African Literatures and Ba Shiru. The 1971 special Black Africa issue of the Review of National Literatures contained a significant proportion of articles centring on African-language writing. And I.D. Nikiforova’s inclusion of an essay on Amharic literature in her volume of 1975 is typical of Soviet practice in this respect.
L'intellectuel colonisé qui décide de livrer combat aux mensonges colonialistes, le livrera à l'échelle du continent. Le passé est valorisé. La culture, qui est arrachée du passé pour être déployée dans toute sa splendeur, n'est pas celle de son pays. Le colonialisme, qui n'a pas nuancé ses efforts, n'a cessé d'affirmer que le nègre est un sauvage et le nègre pour lui n'était ni l'Angolais, ni le Nigérien. Il parlait du nègre. Pour le colonialisme ce vaste continent était un repaire de sauvages, un pays infesté de superstitions et de fanatisme, voué au mépris, lourd de la malediction de Dieu, pays d'anthropophages, pays de nègres. La condamnation du colonialisme est continentale. L'affirmation par le colonialisme que la nuit humaine a caractérisé la période anticoloniale concerne l'ensemble du continent africain. Les efforts du colonisé pour se réhabiliter et échapper à la morsure coloniale, s'inscrivent logiquement dans la même perspective que celle du colonialisme. L'intellectuel colonisé qui est parti très loin du côté de la culture occidentale et qui se met en tête de proclamer l'existence d'une culture ne le fait jamais au nom de l'Angola ou du Dahomey. La culture qui est affirmée est la culture africaine.29

The achievement of independence was bound to alter this outlook, however slowly, and this combined with the natural evolution of any scientific discipline beyond the misty generalizations of journalism or political pamphleteering to generate the second major feature of African literary scholarship: the fast-growing amount of scrupulous study that is being devoted to individual works and individual authors. When African Literature was graced with a heading of its own in the MLA Annual Bibliography — in 1966, partly as the result of a lengthy, impassioned correspondence between this writer and the then Association Bibliographer, Professor Paul A. Brown — fewer than seventy items were listed, many of them in fact dealing with oral literature and linguistics. Ten years later, the number had swollen to nearly eight hundred titles, the vast majority of which were truly about written literature. By 1977, serious writing about African literature had reached such a volume that this chapter of the MLA Bibliography could be subdivided by countries and even by authors. The increasing predominance of serious and close consideration of individual authors and works over the somewhat vague and sweeping generalities characteristic of politically motivated literary journalism during the years preceding and immediately following independence was a sign that the whole approach was itself becoming 'decolonized.' The enormous rise in the quality as well as the quantity of contributions by African scholars was of twofold significance: not only did it testify to the seriousness of the training dispensed in the increasingly numerous universities of black Africa, but also to the scholars' growing awareness of

29 Frantz Fanon, Les Damnés de la terre (Paris 1961; new ed. 1968) 145
their social environment at a time—the late sixties—when creative artists were becoming more and more vocally critical of the newly ‘established’ societies. As the blurring effect of negritude and vestigian Pan-Africanism began to dissipate in the late sixties, a hitherto neglected factor began to impinge upon the consciousness of intellectuals in general and literary scholars in particular: the realization that Africa was not just one huge blob of undifferentiated blackness, but that each writer, each ethnic group, each country, each linguistic nexus of countries had its own specificity. Accordingly, closer attention began to be paid to more particular phenomena on three clearly distinguishable levels: linguistic community, national unity, and authorial identity.

Not unnaturally, since francophone writing had been the first to occupy the foreground of the African literary scene, the earliest studies important enough to be issued in book form were devoted to Africa’s creative writing in French. Following in the wake of Traoré, Kesteloot, and Melone, an important symposium held in Dakar in March 1963 had its proceedings printed as Actes du colloque sur la littérature africaine d’expression française (Dakar 1965); and Claude Wauthier produced L’Afrique des Africains, inventaire de la négritude (Paris 1964), which has been revised and enlarged more than once. Likewise devoted to African literature in French, despite their unduly grandiose titles, were Edouard Eliet’s Panorama de la littérature négro-africaine (1965), Louis-Vincent Thomas’s Les Idéologies négo-africaines d’aujourd’hui (1965), and Robert Pageard’s Littérature négo-africaine (1966). Even in the seventies, the titles of Robert Cornevin’s Le théâtre en Afrique noire et à Madagascar (1970) and of Jacques Chevrier’s Littérature nègre (1974) seemed to ignore that African authors might decide to use a language other than French for their literary exertions. This strangely chauvinistic attitude was less glaring in Cornevin’s Littératures d’Afrique noire de langue française (1976), which contains a wealth of valuable factual details, and, of course, in Dorothy S. Blair’s African Literature in French: A History of Creative Writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa (Cambridge University Press 1976), the first serious attempt at a systematic survey of the whole field, even though the author regretfully omitted Madagascar.

Although Cornevin had devoted one fifty-page chapter of his book of 1976 to what he called ‘les littératures nationales,’ examining the literary output of each francophone country separately, this was simply a matter of convenient listing and in the late seventies it was still standard procedure for French and French-educated specialists to regard the whole of African francophone writing as a homogeneous entity, which was often taken to include the French West Indies. It is significant that the first book-length study of a
single national literature was written in Czechoslovakia,\textsuperscript{30} and that it dealt with Cameroon, which had a very unusual status in French Africa. As Zaïre was never part of the French empire, Zaïrian scholars often exhibit an intellectual independence and a sense of nationhood which informs many publications by Ngal, Mudimbe, Ngandu and others,\textsuperscript{31} even though, as late as 1975, Iyaayi Kimoni's \textit{Destin de la littérature négro-africaine, ou problématique d'une culture} (Kinshasa) revealed the scantest acquaintance, and second-hand at that, with non-French writing. Among the successor states, only the Congo Republic as yet betrays the beginnings of an awareness that a nation's literature is intimately bound up with its collective identity.\textsuperscript{32}

Few francophone authors have received serious monographic study: the slender pamphlets, part essay and part anthology, published by Nathan as introductions to \textit{La littérature africaine et malgache} are the mediocre offspring of a close alliance between pedagogy and business. Apart from Senghor, whose poetry and thought have understandably been the subject not only of much controversy, but also of serious scholarly investigation, only two writers have seen their works discussed in substantial monographs: Birago Diop\textsuperscript{33} of Senegal and Mongo Beti of Cameroon.\textsuperscript{34}

The scholarly study of anglophone literature followed a slightly different path. One reason was the priority of French, which accounts for the organization of Gerald Moore's \textit{Seven African Writers} and Judith I. Gleason's \textit{This Africa}, as well as for the extraordinary confusion of Anne Tibble's \textit{African-English Literature} (London 1965). A second reason is that by the time anglophone writing in Africa had reached sufficient proportions to merit scientific consideration, there already existed an enormous body of creative writing in English from outside the British Isles: this new area for research naturally belonged from the start to the general discipline known as 'Commonwealth studies.' African literary studies in Britain thus began under the sign of a deep-seated belief that the language did preserve something of the former unity of the British Commonwealth and Empire: much valuable work on anglophone African writing was published in the \textit{Journal of Com-
monwealth Literature launched at the University of Leeds in 1965 and, as Jahn was to put it in 1971, 'some of the most searching and relevant analysis of African literature in English that we have had so far' is contained in Gerald Moore's The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World (1969). From a comparatist viewpoint, one of the finest fruits of the 'Commonwealth approach' is undoubtedly Molly Mahood's wrongfully neglected The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels (London 1977). Two of these novels – Forster's A Passage to India and Greene's The Comedians – are thoroughly English, and one – Conrad's Heart of Darkness – an English hybrid, while the other three come respectively from Nigeria (Achebe), India (Narayan), and Trinidad (Naipaul). But Commonwealth writing is so abundant and varied that its study is in itself an exercise in comparative literature.

The same is true of another 'set' to which the nascent anglophone literature of Africa might have been assigned: the field of 'Black Studies,' which could conceivably cover the two main areas of black writing, Africa and the United States. If this did not happen, it is probably because, as early as the Paris Conference of 1956, the ideology of negritude – at the time, we must remember, the only definition of African identity to have gained an international hearing – sounded reactionary and repulsive to American blacks such as Richard Wright. Despite Jahn's foredoomed attempts to enrol Africa and black America under the banner of negritude, the trend came to nothing; hence the paucity of scholarly studies concerning, for example, the influence of Negro-American Christianity on the growth of African literature, or the similarities and dissimilarities between the black man's experience in Africa and in the United States as described in literature.

Given the unmanageable complexity of Commonwealth studies on the one

35 It should be remembered, however, that the first Institute of Commonwealth Literature was founded in 1958 at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, by Greta Horst, whose work has since been actively taken over by Anna Rutherford.


38 On the basis of the idea elaborated in his Muntu (1958), Jahn included some consideration of black American writing both in the first version of his Bibliography (this was dropped in the revised version) and in several chapters of his Geschichte. Prior to these, Muntu had influenced one of the few Spanish scholars to show interest in African literature: Fernando Morán, whose Nación y alienación en la literatura negroeairicana (Madrid 1964), contains a not very convincing chapter entitled 'La africanidad del negro norteamericano.' The influence of Muntu was also clearly at work in Willfried Feuser's Portuguese book, Aspectos da literatura do mundo negro (Bahia 1969). So far, the most cogent comparative discussion of two black authors, one African, the other American, remains Alain Ricard's Théâtre et nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones (Paris 1972).
hand and the relative indifference of American blacks to African literature on the other, the need to focus on Africa was soon felt. It led to the launching of two periodicals: in 1968, the modestly mimeographed Bulletin of the Association For African Literature, which had been issued in Freetown, gave birth to a far more ambitious and successful venture, African Literature Today; and 1970 saw the publication of Research in African Literatures, whose exceptional quality makes it the nearest approach to the journals of established international repute in other areas of world literature.

Contrary to what has been done with French and Portuguese literatures, there is as yet no general survey of all the English writing that has been produced in Africa. The widest approach to have been attempted so far is regional, not continental, and one must confess that it has not been as systematic as it should be. Following the example of Judith Gleason, Oladele Taiwo’s school handbook, An Introduction to West African Literature (London 1967), treated both French and English writing. But the decline of the francophone output in the sixties, combined with the amazingly swift growth of Nigerian literature, induced Adrian A. Roscoe to consider only English-speaking countries in his (for that reason mistakenly subtitled) Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature (Cambridge 1971).

Likewise, the development of Kenyan literature in English in the late sixties combined with a vestigial sense of inter-territorial unity inherited from the colonial period to stimulate scholarly interest in East African writing as such; this concentrated on Kenya and pre-Amin Uganda, since Tanzania’s literary production in English is negligible. The regional orientation came to the fore during a seminar held in Nairobi in 1965; the proceedings of which appeared as East Africa’s Cultural Heritage (Nairobi 1966); it was confirmed by Writers in East Africa, which Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder edited in 1974, and by Roscoe’s second study, Uhuru’s Fire: African Literature East to South (Cambridge 1977).

Although Roscoe found it convenient to treat eastern and southern Africa as a single unit, the latter area, of course, poses an entirely different case from the West and the East. While the Republic of South Africa and Rhodesia are still governed in colonial style (in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, more or less covertly) by a racial minority, the English segment of the white population of the R.S.A. has become a minority within a minority: whereas Afrikaner intellectuals have produced a vast amount of very serious scholarly work on the literature of their own language,39 those of British stock have remained provincial to a degree that has long been abandoned by their counterparts in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; and while the grounds

39 For bibliographical information about Afrikaans literature, the reader is referred to R. Musiker, South African Bibliography, 2nd ed. (Cape Town 1980).
for examining black and white writing in English separately, i.e. in a spirit of
apartheid, are hard to justify, censorship laws make it impossible within the
R.S.A. to discuss simultaneously the works produced locally by blacks and
whites, and those which black exiles have published abroad. Ezekiel
Mphahlele’s highly meritiorious attempt to do this, and at the same time to
take Afrikaans writing into account, in The African Image (London: Faber
1962), was not to be followed up. Despite the constrictions imposed by
racist authorities, the launching of English in Africa at Rhodes University
(Grahamstown) in 1974 to supplement the more academically non-
committal English Studies in Africa, which had been founded in 1954 at the
University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), is an encouraging sign of
the younger generation’s determination to abandon the inferiority complex
which views local writing as just a tiny tributary of the mighty stream of
English literature. The region which has produced Olive Schreiner and Roy
Campbell, William Plomer, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, Peter
Abrahams, Alex La Guma, and Oswald Mtshali certainly has a right and a
duty to define its own multilingual identity within the context of African
literature. At this point, however, the regional and the national approaches
tend to merge as exemplified in Stephen Gray’s misleadingly entitled –
though in all other respects excellent – Southern African Literature (Cape
Town 1979). Here, Doris Lessing is barely mentioned and other Rhodesian
writers are completely absent, so that the book in fact deals with the South
African experience as a theme in South African and world literature.40

While no survey-type study of English writing has been attempted on a
more than regional level, the concept of national literatures was developed
explicitly and consistently far earlier in the study of anglophone than in that
of francophone literature. East European scholars introduced this approach,
perhaps because they were more sensitive to the nationalistic elements in the
new states than to Pan-Africanism (which had originated in the Anglo-Saxon
world) or to negritude (which had originated in Paris). The initiator was
V.N. Vavilov, whose discussion of Ghanaian literature appeared in Bres-
kina’s Literatura stran Afriki in 1964. Because of the decline in the literary
productivity of Ghana under the Nkrumah regime, Nigeria took the recog-
nized lead in the course of the sixties. Margaret Laurence’s Long Drums and
was soon followed by Klima’s Modern Nigerian Novels (Prague 1969). The
year 1970 saw the appearance of Irina Nikiforova’s important theoretical
discussion of national characteristics in West African writing, O na-
cional’noj specifike zapadnoafrikanskix Literatur, and, during the following
years, Vavilov contributed several studies of Nigerian literature to collec-

40 For a more detailed consideration, see my review in English in Africa (forthcoming).
tions of essays which she edited in 1973 and 1975. An important step forward in the reconsideration of the concept of African national literature was meanwhile marked by the publication of *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, edited by Bruce King (Lagos 1971), which also included essays on vernacular writing in Yoruba, Hausa, and other local languages. This example was followed in *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures*, edited by Bernth Lindfors (Washington 1976): the plural in the title testified to a welcome departure from the usual English-centredness and to the recognition that Nigeria’s national literature is made up of several Einzelliteraturen in African languages as well as in English.41 Another significant development of the early seventies was the amount of attention given to the lowbrow writing known as ‘Onitsha market literature’ in Emmanual Obiechina’s *Literature for the Masses: An Analytical Study of Popular Pamphleteering in Nigeria* (Enugu 1971).42 While in Alain Ricard’s *Livre et communication au Nigéria* (Paris 1975) this popular literature was viewed in relation both to mass-communication theory and to conventional literary art.

The other national literatures of English-speaking Africa have not given rise to more than a few articles by Vavilov and others,43 who have dealt, usually with unsatisfactory brevity, with such countries as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi. These articles have been mainly concerned with anglophone writing and overlook the diversity and complexity of the literature of Africa’s new states. In 1969, however, Vladimir Klima, addressing the Czechoslovak Society for Eastern Studies, had pointed out that the two main literary centres of Black Africa at the time were Nigeria and South Africa.44 But the smooth, rapid, and continuous growth of literary study which characterized the former country by no means applied to the latter. The reason, of course, lies in the multifariously split personality of the R.S.A. Whereas the fiery nationalism of the Afrikaners has prompted their scholars to chronicle and criticize Afrikaans literature on a really significant scale, the rivalry between Afrikaner and British South Africans has prevented any unified study of the two literatures – a phenomenon also apparent in such multilingual countries as Switzerland, Canada, and Bel-

41 For a theoretical discussion of this point, see Albert Gérard, ‘New Frontier for Comp. Lit.: Africa,’ *Komparatistische Hefte* (Bayreuth) 1 (1980) 8–13.
44 In *Inter-relations in Asia and in Africa* (Prague 1970) 168–75
gium. Furthermore, anglophone writers and scholars have never been able to shed their provinciality as entirely as did their counterparts in the United States and, later, in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Hence the paucity of substantial studies of South African literature in English, even though the first book-length account, Manfred Nathan’s *South African Literature*, appeared in Cape Town in 1925; this had no successor until J.P.L. Snyman’s *The South African Novel in English, 1880–1930* (Potchefstroom 1952). At the time such works could only deal with English writing by whites. It was the exceptional merit of the black scholar Ezekiel Mphahlele to produce the first, and so far only, attempt to bring together the various ethnic and linguistic trends that go to the making of a national South African literature. His book *The African Image* (London 1962, enlarged ed. 1974) was followed by Vladimir Klima’s *South African Prose Writing in English* (Prague 1971), which discussed both white and non-white novelists. *Aspects of South African Literature*, edited by Christopher Heywood (London 1976), followed this laudable example, adding for good measure an essay on oral tradition and another on Thomas Mofolo, who, however, was no citizen of the then ‘Union’ of South Africa but of the then protectorate of Basutoland (now Lesotho). Such works could only be printed outside South Africa, but the publication of Nadine Gordimer’s *The Black Interpreters* (Johannesburg 1963), and of Stephen Gray’s *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (Cape Town 1979), which has a chapter on ‘The Emergence of Black English,’ as well as the many essays of Tim Couzens about the early history of black writing in the country and the special R.R.R. Dhlomo issue of *English in Africa* (1975), suggest that the spirit of apartheid can be flouted more or less openly in the rarefied atmosphere of literary criticism. These works also show that the vitality and originality and the international reputation of black South African writing in English have strongly encouraged a South African sense of identity which is no longer subservient to the alleged supremacy of English literature.

With its enormous literary output, its many universities, its increasingly well-trained scholars, and its many (though often irregularly published or ephemeral) literary journals, Nigeria has taken an obvious lead, not only in creative writing, but also in the field of scientific study. This is confirmed, if confirmation is needed, by the number of book-length monographs that have been published about individual Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe.


Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola, Christopher Okigbo, and Cyprian Ekwensi.

Since World War II, some detailed critical and biographical attention, both local and international, had of course been given to the white writers of Southern Africa: not only to the founding mother of this literature, Olive Schreiner, or to those who, like William Plomer and Roy Campbell, had left their country to become, as it were, honorary United Kingdom writers, but also to many others, from Thomas Pringle, Pauline Smith, Sarah Gertrude Millin, and even Francis Slater to Alan Paton, Dan Jacob.


An extremely promising phenomenon connected with Chinua Achebe and, to a lesser extent, Wole Soyinka and one or two other African writers is the publication by local presses of study guides focusing on some of their works: though such little books seldom have any original value, it cannot be doubted that they lay the groundwork for serious scientific research and at any rate for more intelligent reading, among the students for whom they are designed.


52 David Wright, Roy Campbell (London: Longmans 1961); Rowland Smith, Lyric and Polemic: The Literary Personality of Roy Campbell (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press 1972); John Povey, Roy Campbell (Boston: Twayne 1977).


son, H.C. Bosman, Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, and even A.S. Cripps. The only non-white authors to receive this sort of treatment have been Peter Abrahams, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and, curiously, Oswald Mtshali.

It must be admitted that East Africa sadly lags behind in this matter of monographic study: even such an outstanding writer as Ngugi wa Thiong’o has never been the subject of book-length exegesis, although study aids to his novels have been printed in Nairobi in recent years. A noteworthy exception is George Heron’s remarkable essay on The Poetry of Okot P’Bitek (London: Heinemann 1976), Uganda’s leading poet.

The study of lusophone writing in Africa followed yet a different course, mainly because Portuguese is, despite the importance of Brazil, a minor language, far less widely spoken and understood than English or even French. Knowledge of the literature itself was confined to the Portuguese world and such foreign scholars as had learned the language. This unjust but statistically unavoidable situation was bemoaned by many: luso-African writing, which had been, as Gerald Moser proclaimed, ‘the first written,’ was also ‘the last discovered’; or, in the words of Alfredo Margarido, while it belongs to ‘les grandes absentes,’ Manuel Ferreira called it ‘uma literatura ignorada.’ In fact, it did not begin to receive serious critical attention until the mid-sixties, that is, a few years after Salazar’s censorship had practically silenced it.

59 Shora G. DeSaxe, Herman Charles Bosman: A Bibliography (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand 1971); B. Sachs, Herman Bosman as I knew Him (Johannesburg: Dial Press 1971)
62 John Robert Doyle, Arthur Shearly Cripps (Boston: Twayne 1975)
63 Michael Wade, Peter Abrahams (London: Evans 1972)
64 Ursula A. Barnett, Ezekiel Mphahlele (Boston: Twayne 1976)
In Portugal itself, the literatures of Africa were largely viewed as part of the literary output of what was called the ultramar português; an outlook exemplified in the verbose essays of Amândio César’s two-volume Parágrafos de literatura ultramarina (Lisbon: Sociedade de Expansão Cultural 1967 and 1971). The same approach, rather similar to the approach to the Commonwealth in the English-speaking world, prevailed in César’s Elementos para uma bibliographia da literatura e cultura portuguesa ultramarina contemporânea (Lisbon: Agência do Ultramar 1968).

The case for viewing the lusophone literature of Africa as a separate, self-contained whole owing its cultural identity to unique but definable social and economic conditions was first made by Alfredo Margarido in 1962 in his brilliant essay in French, ‘Incidencias socio-económiques sur la poésie noire d’expression portugaise.’69 A narrower nationalistic outlook was, however, introduced by Carlos Ervedosa in A literatura Angolana: Resenha historica (Lisbon: Casa dos Estudantes do Império 1963),70 and especially in A Study of Cape Verdean Literature (Boston: Boston College 1966), a model of historical exposition by an American scholar of Cape Verdean origin, Norman Araujo. This preoccupation with local writing was further shown by Mário António’s study of Cordeiro da Mata, an Angolan writer of the late nineteenth century, and by the literary essays contained in his book on Luanda.71 It also appeared with peculiar intensity on the Cape Verde Islands in a small but pregnant pamphlet by Onésimo Silveira72 and in Manuel Ferreira’s far more ambitious book on the cultural significance of what had been known since the 1930s as caboverdeanidade.73

Throughout the sixties, however, the preservation of the colonial system in Africa’s Portuguese ‘provinces’ and the revolutionary potentialities that this entailed led to their receiving more attention from the Soviet Union than from the western world. Already during the first few years of the decade, far more lus-African literature and analytical, critical, or historical writing about it was available in Russian than in English, let alone in French. In 1964, Literatura estran Afrika contained a thirty-six-page essay by L.V. Nekrasova on the literatures of Angola and Mozambique, which were further discussed in another, shorter paper dealing with the ‘Main Ideological Trends in the

69 Diogène 37 (1962) 53–80
70 A revised and enlarged version has since been published as Roteiro da Literatura angolana (Luanda: Sociedade Cultural de Angola 1975).
71 Mário António, A sociedade angolana do fim do século XIX e um seu escritor (Luanda, Angola: Nôs 1961) and Luanda, ‘ilha crioula’ (Lisbon: Agência-Geral do Ultramar 1968)
72 Onésimo Silveira, Consciencialização na literatura caboverdiana (Lisbon: Casa dos Estudantes do Império 1963)
73 Manuel Ferreira, A aventura crioula, ou Cabo Verde, uma sintese étnica e cultural (Lisbon: Ulisseia 1967); an enlarged edition was issued in 1973 by Plátano Editora.
Literature of Angola and Mozambique,' Aktual'nye problemy izuchenija literatury Afriki, edited by I.D. Nikoforova (Moscow: Nauka 1969). In the early seventies, Elena Rjauzova became the most prominent Soviet specialist on luso-African writing, with many scholarly papers leading up to her Portugalo-jazyčnje literatury Afriki (Moscow: Nauka 1972).

In fact, this book was the very first attempt at surveying systematically all the imaginative writing produced in Portuguese in Africa, and it is interesting to note that, in the field of Portuguese studies, the 'continental' approach which it illustrates has remained predominant ever since. Earlier local scholars, few as they were, were chiefly preoccupied with the local output; even the well-known French anthropologist René Bastide had produced a brief monograph on a white Angolan writer; but most of the research of the seventies was done along continental, international lines. In spite of Mário de Andrade's efforts in the late sixties, British and French scholars seem to have remained impervious to the interest and problems of luso-African writing. In the English language, the movement was chiefly located in the United States where it was pioneered by Moser, whose unassumingly entitled Essays in Portuguese-African Literature (University Park: Pennsylvania State University 1969) brought together a number of essays he had published in various journals since 1962, while A Tentative Portuguese-African Bibliography (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1970) laid the foundation on which Moser and Manuel Ferreira were to build their Bibliographia de literatura africana de expressão portuguesa (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, forthcoming). During the years that followed the breakdown of the Portuguese empire in 1974, two important works appeared, which covered the same field as Elena Rjauzova's book of 1972: Russell G. Hamilton's Voices from an Empire: A History of Afro-Portuguese Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1975), and Manuel Ferreira's two-volume Literaturas africanas de expressão portuguesa (Lisbon: Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa 1977). All three surveys followed the same pattern, as they were divided according to geopolitical criteria and examined in turn the literatures of Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Sao Tomé e Principe, and Guinea-Bissau (though not necessarily in that order). It can thus be observed that until the late seventies, Africa's lusophone writing was chiefly studied in compliance with the linguistic criterion — as was francophone writing — while at the same time national divisions remained more prominently in the forefront of the scholars' attention than was the case with any other language. This is probably due to the fact the Portuguese empire in

Africa never formed a geographical unity, so that each of its components preserved its own identity within the common framework of Portuguese-language culture.

As each state of the former Portuguese empire is producing a rapidly increasing amount of imaginative writing – which is conveniently chronicled in the Lisbon quarterly Africa, founded in 1978 – there is some likelihood that the ‘national’ approach will become more and more prominent, while scholarship on the subject will no doubt grow in quantity and diversity. African lusophone studies were powerfully boosted when the African Literature Association’s annual conference of 1977 awarded more time than ever before to papers dealing with those literatures. Significantly, it was also in the late seventies that a new generation of lusofigos emerged in the United States, with the publication of Donald Burness’ Fire: Six Writers from Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press 1977).

After the sixties – the period of the founding fathers (and mothers) – the growth of literary African scholarship was thus characterized by the publication of works surveying a whole language area, a region within a definite language area, or, in a few cases, a single country. It was also characterized by an increasing number of monographs devoted to some of the more important writers. Between those two extremes, critical work on African literature mostly took the form of collections of essays, each of which expatiates on one writer or one work. It would be idle to attempt the listing and categorizing of all or even a statistically significant proportion of those works, the majority of which are conveniently mentioned in Bernth Lindfors’ exhaustive and indispensable bibliography, Black African Literature in English: A Guide to Information Sources (Detroit: Gale 1979). Some good recent examples, which followed closely on the heels of Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro’s compilation Protest and Conflict in African Literature (London: Heinemann 1969), are the volumes edited by Edgar Wright, Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan, and Rowland Smith. Similar

77 A Celebration of Black and African Writing (Zaria and Ibadan: Ahmadu Bello and Oxford University Presses 1975). Half the contributions are concerned with black writers of French and English in the United States and the West Indies. The editors’ catholicity is further illustrated by a very informative historical essay on ‘Early South African Black Writing’ and by a study of the Mozambican writer Luís Honwana; the other papers deal with four francophone and five anglophone African writers.
essays are often collected in the proceedings of the many conferences that have been held since the first meetings focusing on African writing were held at Kampala,79 Dakar, and Freetown80 in the early sixties. The miscellaneous, unsystematic, disconnected character of such publications, equally evidenced in many of the collective works issued in Russian in the U.S.S.R., is unfortunately also present in many a volume produced by single scholars, beginning with Gerald Moore’s Seven African Writers (1962). This mere juxtaposition of often (though not always) previously published articles and independently written essays is a frequent procedure exemplified from an early date in collections of essays by Davidson Nicol from Sierra Leone,81 and Lewis Nkosi from South Africa;82 it is still the basic method underlying much of the critical output of the seventies, as is evident from a consideration of Charles R. Larson’s The Emergence of African Fiction (New York: Macmillan 1971), Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics (London: Heinemann 1972), Eustace Palmer’s Introduction to the African Novel (London: Heinemann 1972), and Ezekiel Mphahlele’s Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays (London: Macmillan 1973). To the same category belong the increasingly numerous special issues devoted to Africa by learned journals not otherwise specializing in African literature.83

Although the majority of such publications are in English and in Russian, collections of miscellaneous essays have also been printed in French. Two notable examples from Cameroon are Mélanges Africains, edited by Thomas Méloné (Yaounde: Editions pédagogiques [1973]) and the proceedings of a bilingual, French-English, symposium held at Yaounde in 1973, Le critique africain et son peuple comme producteur de civilisation (Paris: Présence Africaine 1977). A special issue of the Revue de Littérature Comparée was devoted to African literature in 1974, and the present writer must also plead

---

79 See Ezekiel Mphahlele, ed. Conference of African Writers of English Expression, Makerere College, Kampala, Uganda (Kampala: Makerere College [1962]).
80 These were two seminars on ‘African Literature and the University Curriculum’ held at the University of Dakar and Fourah Bay College in March and April 1965. Some of the proceedings of both meetings were published in Gerald Moore, ed. African Literature and the Universities (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press 1965), while the complete proceedings of the Senegal conference were issued as Actes du Colloque sur la littérature africaine d’expression française (Dakar: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines 1965).
81 Africa: A Subjective View (London: Longman 1964)
82 Home and Exile (London: Longman 1965) and The Transplanted Heart: Essays on South Africa (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope 1975)
The Study of African Literature / 89
guilty to his *Etudes de littérature africaine francophone* (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines 1977). Three years after the Portuguese revolution, Jacinto de Prado Coelho produced a special issue of *Colóquio/Letras* (no 39, September 1977) entirely devoted to luso-African writing. Similar collections were produced in countries which had had no, or hardly any, colonial dealings with Africa. In Sweden, for example, Pär Wästberg edited *The Writer in Modern Africa* (Uppsalan: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1968), and in Hungary Pál Párcsy edited his *Studies on Modern Black African Literature* (Budapest: Centre for Afro-Asian Research 1971). While these testified to widely spreading interest in, and knowledge of, African literature, as did the publications of Wanda Leopold in Poland and Biserka Cvetičanin in Yugoslavia, the year 1979 was of peculiar importance because of the publication of *Black Literature*, edited by Eckhard Breitinger (Munich: Fink), which, despite its unwarranted English title, is in German. This book heralds an important change for the eighties because it suggests a massive irruption of German academics into the field of African literature, from which, apart from a few dissertations, they had hitherto generally kept aloof. Another sign of swelling German interest was the publication of two special Black Africa issues of the well-known *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*.  

The collections of Palmer and Larson were signs of incipient preoccupation with genre study. Apart from the numberless discussions of negritude, where poetry and ideology are hopelessly mixed with often hollow rhetoric, the study of poetry as such does not seem to have led to intensive book-length exertions by individual scholars. The historical connection between poetry and negritude is given a new dimension in Richard A. Preto-Rodas, *Negritude as a Theme in the Poetry of the Portuguese-Speaking World* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press 1970); but a book like N. J. Udeyop's *Three Nigerian Poets: A Critical Study of the Poetry of Soyinka, Clark and Okich* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press 1973) is an exception, as is J. Alvarez-Péreyre's far more ambitious essay on South African poetry, *Les Guetteurs de l'aube: Poésie et apartheid* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires 1979). African drama did not receive extensive attention until a symposium on the subject was held at Abidjan in 1970. Since then, it has been the

---

85 Biserka Cvetičanin, *Povijest afričke književnosti* (Zagreb: Institut za zemlje u razvoju 1976)  
86 These are also available as a single volume, *Afrikanische Literatur – Perspektiven und Probleme* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen 1979).  
87 The *Actes du Colloque sur le théâtre négo-africain* (Paris: Présence Africaine 1971) was actually the first book-length study of African drama since Bakary Traoré's work of 1958; a slightly updated version of the latter, incidentally, was later published in English (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press 1972)

It will not come as a surprise that the genre which has been most widely scrutinized in learned circles is the novel. Apart from the works concocted of miscellaneous essays on African novels and those that deal with the novel in individual countries — several of which have already been mentioned — African prose fiction has been the subject of investigations which are all the more interesting as they often deal with a specific theme approached from a specific angle, thus continuing the trend initiated by Lilyan Kesteloot in connection with francophone poetry and prose fiction. This in-depth approach, which is of greater scientific value, has been illustrated in several German dissertations, such as Siegfried Hertlein’s *Christentum und Mission im Urteil der neoafrikanischen Prosa literatur* (Münsterschwarzbach: Vier-Turme-Verlag 1963), Otto Bischofsberger’s *Tradition und Wandel aus der Sicht der Romanschriftsteller Kameruns und Nigerias* (Einsiedeln: Etzel-Druck [1969?]), and Karl-Heinz Böttcher’s *Tradition und Modernität bei Amos Tutuola und Chinua Achebe: Grundzüge der westafrikanischen Erzählliteratur englischer Sprache* (Bonn: Bouvier 1974). As the titles suggest, scholars tend to search African fiction for a realistic image of African society and culture. Indeed, one of the first books in French on the subject bore a quite explicit title: *Sociologie du roman africain: réalisme, structure et détermination dans le roman moderne ouest-africain* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne 1970), by the Nigerian scholar Sunday O. Anozie. It had been preceded by another volume, Bernard Mouralis, *Individu et collectivité dans le roman nègre-africain d’expression française* (Abidjan: Université d’Abidjan 1969), which reflected one orientation of this sociological approach, i.e., the overwhelming preoccupation with the fundamental polarities of modern African society. And it was followed a few years later by yet another work in French, Mineke Schipper-de Leeuw’s *Le Blanc et l’Occident au miroir du roman nègre-africain de langue française* (Assen: Van Gorcum 1973), which reflected another orientation, analogous to Hertlein’s: an intense intellectual curiosity about the black man’s image of the European, who had controlled the continent’s fate for so many decades in his threefold capacity as settler, administrator, and missionary. While the sociological approach was still predominant in Emmanuel Obiechina’s *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975), which is silently limited to former British West Africa, criticism seemed to take a turn in a new direction, more
definitely concerned with formal criteria and narrative technique in Irina D. Nikiforova’s *Afrikanskij roman: Genezis i problemy tipologii* (Moscow: Nauka 1977).

In a recent review of *A Dry White Season* (1979), the latest English novel by the Afrikaner writer André Brink, a British critic observed that ‘in certain places at certain times the subtleties we normally demand from fiction seem almost beside the point: all that matters is that the truth be set down, preferably with directness and simplicity. It’s not a position we’d expect to be taken by British and American novelists, most of whom feel (perhaps mistakenly) that their societies are stable enough to allow a writer to be as fictive as he or she likes: “reporting” can best be left to journalists.’

If such a remark is pertinent to a white writer from South Africa, who can rely on a twofold English and Dutch tradition, it is even more so to the black writers of Africa, and to the scholarship that concerns their works. The study of African literature, now in its early twenties, is no longer quite an infant discipline: it has grown in size and scope and thoroughness at an amazing pace. It is rather doubtful, though, whether it can yet be regarded as fully mature. Just as the literary works themselves try to offer a faithful reflection of African society and its problems, and of the authors’ understandably intense feelings about it all, so scholarship, while it deals with history – as indeed it should, and as objectively as possible – is almost compelled, in its critical explications, to hover at the societal surface of the literary art. The problems of Africa and of her literature are so arduous and obsessive that specialized scholars tend to remain self-contained instead of trying to look beyond the confines of their own expertise. Whereas few people refrain from paying lip-service to the cliché of *la civilisation de l’universel*, they do not seem to realize that the written art in Africa is grafted on to Middle Eastern and Western traditions which are about three thousand years old, and that comparisons with other phases and varieties of these traditions would repay serious investigation.

The most obvious area for comparison is of course the black diaspora, but here again it seems that similarities in skin colour and the sharing of a common subjugated fate are supposed to cancel out the diversification brought to the black experience by history, whose clock no one can put back. Nor does there seem to have been any worthwhile attempt at viewing the literatures of Africa in conjunction with those of the so-called ‘Third World’ which has in fact a far larger proportion of the world’s population and of the world’s natural resources.

But the fact that these and many other topics of legitimate scientific inquiry have not yet led to book-length studies does not mean that they will

88 Blake Morrison in the *New Statesman*, 5 October 1979, p. 516.
be neglected forever. This survey has been concerned solely with books, but it should be remembered that pioneering spadework, the first prerequisite for progress in any sphere of knowledge, is normally done in periodicals. The future growth and impending maturation of scholarship in African literature studies is guaranteed not only by the increasing excellence of American and European specialized periodicals, but even more certainly by the irrepressible intellectual ebullience which is manifested in the proliferation of genuinely scientific journals inside Africa. This is where the future is taking shape, for if African literature as a public form of expression is legitimately liable to discussion and criticism by anyone, it goes without saying that Africans are bound to have better insight into their own literature because they have inside knowledge of what it is about and of what it is up to.

*Université de Liège*