
This brief collection of eleven scholarly and well-documented critical essays, written largely by African university professors of language and literature who hold degrees from European and American universities, is even more restricted than the title suggests. With a half dozen or so notable exceptions, only the poetry, drama, and novels published since 1965 are discussed here. And not all West African countries are represented.

According the the editor, who died in 1979, only one guideline was given to the contributors: to concentrate upon the works themselves. However, one dominant theme which emerged was "the writer's search for an appropriate response to the political moment of his society."

In past years, writes Chinua Achebe, he was appalled by novels about Africa such as Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. The African writer's response to works like this was an affirmation of the worth of African civilizations. Later, political independence was followed by disenchantment with the new political scene. The essays in this volume, therefore, may be considered a series of re-evaluations and new responses.

Grief and shock over the Nigerian civil war and whether a "redemptive meaning [can be drawn] from the chaos, violence and destruction" is one of the themes found here. In contrast, a writer from another country questions whether colonialism is really past. A re-evaluation is asked for Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*, a novel praised by the French and discredited by Africans for very nearly the same reason--its "sure-fire formula of sex and violence." The new critic's view is that the novel suggests that in any society the quantity of sex and violence at any point in history is inversely proportionate to the quality of government.

Other critics are much less concerned with universality than with the "critical celebration of traditional African culture," and with writing for an African audience in Africa by Africans, while at the same time recognizing the benefits of "cross cultural fertilization." This appears to be especially true for drama and to an extent for poetry as well.

In Ghana, one of the most important developments
of the 1970s is said to be the "institutionalization" of the poetry recital as a popular theatrical event which attracts people from all walks of life. There is no lack of variety in content or treatment. One young poet writes: "Go/Go ask Jesus/Whether He really said/We cannot reach our God" except through Christian rituals. The poem continues with the statement that the African's ancestors lived and died before Jesus was born and the final question is: "Will all of them be/damned?"

Finally, a word from Wole Soyinka. ". . . the African writer must have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity."

This is a rewarding book. While the index is much too brief, the abundant notes following each essay are ample enough to introduce even a new reader to current African literature. And for some, to African universities and their professors in West Africa.

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