

# **THE GROWTH OF A LITERARY TRADITION IN EAST AFRICA**

**An  
Inaugural Lecture delivered  
at the  
University of Nairobi**

**By  
Chris L. Wanjala  
BA (Hons), Ph.D (Nairobi)  
Professor of Literature**

**Venue:  
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TRADITION IN EAST AFRICA**

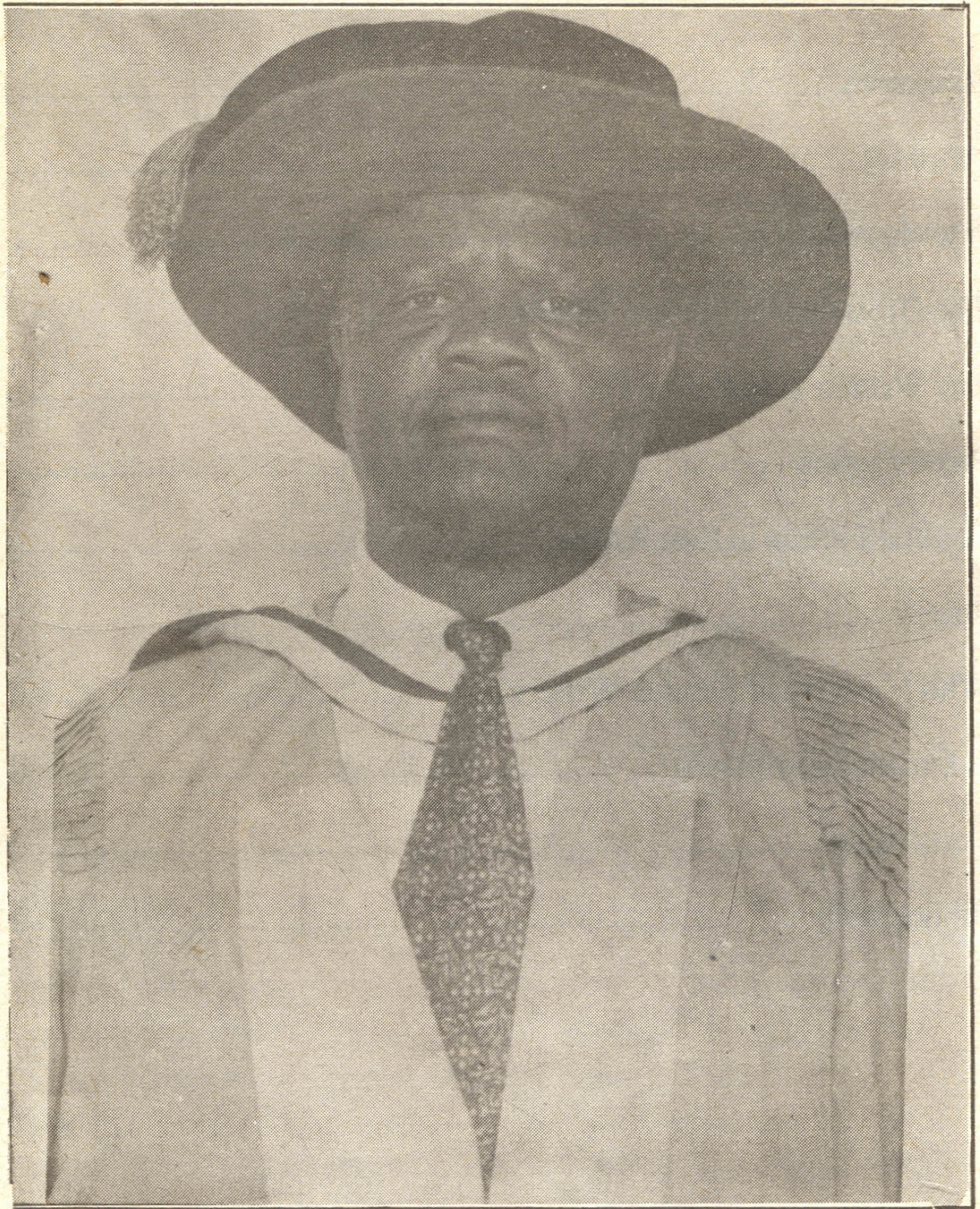
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*Professor Christopher Lukorito Wanjala*

## BIOGRAPHY

Christopher Lukorito Wanjala is a Professor of Literature in the Department of Linguistics and Literature, at the College of Education and External Studies, University of Nairobi, where he lectures in Practical Criticism, Theories and Concepts of Oral Literature. The Oral Literature of Kenya, East African and South African Prose. He is currently conducting research on Culture and Tourism, sponsored by the Ministry of Information and Tourism. He is seeking to redefine the role of the Bomas of Kenya in the promotion of tourism in Kenya. Professor Chris. L. Wanjala returned to the University of Nairobi in October, 2000, after his stint in Egerton University between April 1990 and October 2000.

Chris L. Wanjala was born at Chesamisi Village on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1944. He went to school at Kamusinde F.A.M. Primary School (1952 -1957), Chesamisi Intermediate School (1957-1961), Bungoma Secondary School (1962 – 1965), Friend's School, Kamusinga (1965-1967). In September 1968, he joined the University College, Nairobi, to study English, History and Education. In his Second Year of study at the university, he dropped History and Education, and concentrated on Literature (with the University College, Nairobi, becoming the University of Nairobi). The Department of English converted to the Department of Literature in 1970. Chris Wanjala graduated in Literature in 1971. He worked with the East African Literature Bureau as a Book Production Officer for four (4) months, before being recalled by the University of Nairobi to embark on his PhD degree studies in East African Literature in November 1971. He was at the same time appointed a Part-Time Lecturer in the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, to teach *African Poetry*, *East African Writing*, *Fasihi ya Kiswahili*, and *Shakespeare and Toistoy*. In August 1973, he was among the four members of staff (besides Dr. Eddah W. Gachukia, Prof. Micere Githae – Mugo and Mr. G.R. Gacheche) who were appointed lecturers in the Department of Literature.

Wanjala taught and conducted research for his Ph.D degree. On being appointed Lecturer in the Department, he worked on his postgraduate studies as a Part-Time student. He taught African Poetry, East African Literature, Theory of Literature, at undergraduate levels and Criticism of African Literature, at postgraduate levels. He published books and articles on literature, and edited journals, the highlights of which being *The Season of Harvest* (1978) and *For Home and Freedom* (1980). He also conducted programmes on radio and television on literature and culture. He travelled widely, writing, reading papers on African Literature, and speaking on culture and development.

1978 was a year of dispersal in the history of the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi. Chris Wanjala obtained his PhD in East African literature at the convocation of the Great Court in November 1979. In 1981, he moved from the Department of Literature, to become a Senior Research fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi. In his initial years at the Institute of African Studies, he showed especial interest in the performance arts in Western Province, focusing on *Litungu* lyricists and *Kumuse* historical reciters of Bungoma and Trans Nzoia Districts. He conducted field research on the oral literature of The Maasai (Kajiado and Narok), and the Boran, Gabbra, Konzo, Sakuye, Rendille, Samburu and Burji (Marsabit District). He accumulated a lot of oral materials which have informed his novel, and a book on the oral literature of Western Province. It is from this material that he is teaching *RLT 204 Theories and Concepts of Oral Literature* and *RLT 203 The Oral Literature of Kenya*.

The University of Nairobi appointed Chris L. Wanjala, Director of the Institute of African Studies in September 1983. During his tenure at the Institute, he was the Director of the District Socio-Cultural Profiles Project which conducted research in Culture and Development in Kenya. By the time he left the Institute in 1985, to join the Department of Literature, as Associate Professor of Literature, the Institute of African Studies had covered more than eleven Kenyan districts.

He returned to The Department of Literature to help reinvigorate the postgraduate studies in literature. He founded the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) in 1986. In 1987, he was appointed Director, Kenya Airways, a position he occupied up to 1991. In April 1990, he moved to Egerton University as Professor and Chairman of Literature Department. He served the Egerton University Senate in several capacities, including, Representative in University Council. Professor Wanjala chaired several senate sub-committees of inquiry and participated in academic and statutory committees of Egerton University. He created a Department of Literature which taught courses in literary criticism and creative writing at Njoro and Laikipia campuses of Egerton University. He launched The Okot p'Bitek Arts Festival which ran in July every year for all the time he was Chairman of the Department of Literature at Egerton University. He attached Literature students to publishers, newspaper offices, broadcasting stations and to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and thus gave B.A. Literature students a vocational outlook. He was the founding editor-in-Chief of *Egerton Journal* (1996-present).

Since his return to the University of Nairobi, he has shown especial interest in book development, creative and critical writing. He is involved in the formulation of the Kenya Cultural Policy and participates in the activities of the committee on culture at the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO. He writes for newspapers from time to time, and debates on literature, culture and politics. Professor Wanjala is giving us a lecture on the East African Literary Tradition, a topic which has interested him for many years.

## ABSTRACT

The concern for a literary tradition in East Africa is an old one. It is tied to the attempts by East African Men of Letters to liberate the African aesthetic. For a long time what held sway here was the Great Tradition. The literary culture evolved based on English letters. The English language was picked by the African child when he made the first journey to school. At school he or she was introduced to a culture of literacy. He or she was formally introduced to setbooks. He or she studied books to help acquire a certain level of literacy. The pupil formulated sentences in English, described his first journey to school. But when he came back home he was open to the world of his village, with all the narratives, the songs, the riddles and the proverbs. This was especially true of children in the colonial era who were told that the English language was the basis of their social mobility.

The literary education of the African child was more imitative than creative. The African school was based on the English School, with a Debating Society, a Sunday School, The School Magazine, and the Open School Speech Day. These institutions formed the first base available to the African child in entering the world of public debate. The school debate conducted its affairs in the English language. The school magazine accepted to publish short stories and poems in the English language. The subjects debated and written about revolved around career roles and the adjustment of the African child to the Western world. The English literary culture instilled into the African child was reinforced when he or she joined the University College. The literary education acquired manifested itself in the English Department Magazine, which changed its name to *Penpoint* and *Dhana*, *Nexus* which became *Busara* and *Darlite* which became *Umma*. There were other magazines available to the student, coming from Kampala, the cities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. They included *Transition*, *East Africa Journal* and its literary supplement, *Ghala* and *Zuka*.



Makerere University, more than any other institution of higher learning, did a lot to shape East Africa's literary culture. The writer at that campus fashioned his writings to the English literary tradition in themes and style. The definition of the writer and literature that came from Makerere reflected the view of literature by the New Criticism in England articulated by Mathew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, and later, F.R. Leavis. Makerere argued that a writer drew from the tradition which had been developed by writers who had gone before him or before her. This tradition suited critics of East African literature who focused on realism. But it did not fit into theoretical framework of the scholars who wanted to study literature in indigenous languages.

New schools of literature emerged at the University of Nairobi and at the University of Dar es Salaam. Others, like the song school was forged by writers who grew outside the University "Eng. Lit", literary culture. These included Okot p'Bitek, Okello Oculi, Taban Lo Liyong, and Ali A. Mazrui. These writers worked with Pio Zirimu, Peter Nazareth, Grant Kamenju, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Micere Githae Mugo and Chris L. Wanjala to sever the links of East African literary culture from The Great Tradition. East African men of culture redefined their literature. They consciously based their writings on the oral tradition, whilst keeping their literary practice within the whirlwind of the world debate. The rumbles in the United States of America and the United Kingdom over canon revision affects us here in East Africa in a very direct way. The Departments of Literature and English in those countries robbed our idea of literature and its relevance to history and society, and resold it to the whole world. But East African writers have built on the oral traditions which have become the bases for their creativity and literary criticism. This foundation is becoming stronger and stronger every day.

## INTRODUCTION

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration and Finance), the Principal, College of Education and External Studies, and your colleagues, Professors, lecturers, our dear students and our colleagues at the University, the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science, the Dean of the Faculty of Education, the Chairman, Department of Linguistics and Literature at the College of Education and External Studies (CEES), I have the notoriety of having advocated in the *Daily Nation* of May 9, 1990, the scrapping of the then public universities undergraduate literature syllabus originally prepared by the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi in the 1973/1974 Academic Year. I would like to report to this august convocation that the teaching of literature and linguistics is done separately at the main campus of the University of Nairobi. However, at the College of Education and External Studies, linguistics (especially English) and literature are taught in one Department.

Moi, Egerton and Kenyatta Universities have followed the example of the main campus of the University of Nairobi. Professor K.E. Senanu said in 1997:

At Moi University, the Department of Literature is located in the School of Social Cultural and Development Studies, an interdisciplinary institute whose challenge consists in raising questions about the value and the contribution of our various disciplines of knowledge to the transformation of our society (Senanu 1997).

Mr. Chairman, there seem to be two emphases in the teaching of literature, both at the University, and in our secondary schools. We have the emphasis on content and the other emphasis on form and the language of literature. These emphases put us on the horns of a dilemma. We have either to choose a generic approach, or a thematic one, to the study and the

teaching of literature. The generic or structural approach was propagated by Dr. Eddah Gachukia, then a Part-time Lecturer in the Department of Literature in the early 1970s. In her paper for the staff meeting of June 28, 1973, she addressed herself to "The Effective Handling of Language by Students of Literature." She challenged the Department to initiate a programme to improve the language of literature students. She raised a point which has never been addressed adequately. There are no programmes in the public universities, Literature Departments to teach translation, Eddah Wacheke Gachukia offered a big cautionary remark towards the literary revolution of the 1970s:

It is an apparent fact that with our enthusiasm over the Africanisation and the broadening of the literature programme both here at the University and in the East African Secondary Schools, we have lost the emphasis that used to be placed on the teaching of the English language through the study of English Literature. There is a general feeling that the standard of expression, both oral and written, is not what it should be and that something ought to be done about it. For besides attempting to train students in the arts of critical judgement and enjoyment of literature, it is also our duty to train them for practical life - (for the teaching profession, journalism, editing etc.) (Gachukia June 28, 1973).

What she said in 1973, was revisited by Professor K.E. Senanu in his inaugural lecture at Moi University in 1997. Indeed in the strength of her recommendations a course called "Language Use and Description" was initiated and is taught up to this day. She wanted us to maintain language laboratories and teach translation techniques to students of oral literature. (June 28, 1973). There is the view that literature is "first and foremost the art of words." (Senanu 1997). Thus, is the other view that literature is an expression of cultural values (Senanu 1997: 9). This view was proposed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his two papers "Discussion Paper No. 2," and "Literature and Society," a paper which was to be published later in *Teaching Literature in Kenya Schools*, Edited by E.W. Gachukia and S.K. Akivaga. In presenting the new Literature Syllabus at the University of Nairobi, Ngugi came up with eight hypotheses:

- i) We in the Literature Department of The University of Nairobi are at war "with a tradition of scholarship, with a category of thinking, with a way of looking at the world fashioned within a historical framework of Western Europeansim." Literature arises from individual societies. It is expressed

by the genius of that society. The human alienation is the subject of European Literature. Europe was dead, dehumanized by capitalism. She celebrates Art for Art's sake.

- ii) All Western education and the philosophy of Europe's and America's great thinkers and philosophers support oppression. They oppress and suppress voices of dissent and liberation.
- iii) African Literature Departments of the 1960s and early 1970s perpetuated oppression. They taught Western literary values, and exalted decadent literary tradition like Romanticism, Critical Realism and Modernism. This was done by expatriate literary experts.
- iv) African literary scholars want to liberate the study of literature and promote aesthetic theories based on oral literature and use them to analyse their literature.
- v) Literature arises from individual societies. It is best expressed by the genius of those societies.
- vi) University of Nairobi Literature Department is more progressive than most. It must revise its syllabus.
- vii) At the centre of our study must be our people - their poverty, their ignorance and their disease. It must be people-specific.
- viii) The revolution in the teaching of literature started by the University of Nairobi must gain more momentum and percolate through Kenya's Secondary Schools.

Subsumed under this debate was the question: "Should we study the literature of North America, Europe and Japan in our universities?"

In the 1990's the Kenyan University literature syllabus needed a new look. The issues I raised in the 1990s about the syllabus are still with us. The teaching of literature in Kenya's public universities is so important that universities elsewhere in Africa look to the University of Nairobi as a model. Recently, Dr. James Ogude of the University of Witswatersrand said:

The internal dynamics of the struggle in Kenya and South Africa are in many ways similar and (South African) students easily relate to the Kenyan literature (Ogude 28<sup>th</sup> October 2001:22)

James Ogude is one of the products of our literature department training in Kenya. He has worked as one of the Heads of Department in Witswatersrand. Ogude is drawing from the views of socialist realism,

which we trained him to embrace here at the University of Nairobi in the 1970's. The interest in Bertolt Brecht and M M Bakhtin is what we armed him with whilst he was doing a Masters programme here at the University of Nairobi. He says that we are conservative and that we should overhaul our literature syllabuses in our universities. He is an expert on the post-colonial novel. He focuses on one genre, namely the novel. He is the *author of Ngugi's novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. He has attracted many Kenyan scholars to South Africa. Before he went to South Africa, he helped to establish the Department of Literature at Moi University. He is one of the Kenyan scholars abroad who have helped in the promotion of teaching and research on Kenyan literature. He has popularised authors like Grace Ogot, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Meja Mwangi, in South Africa. He has introduced a course called *Fiction and Ideology in Kenya*. The course deals with Euro-Kenyan Literature and the canonical writers and the post-colonial experience. He has introduced another course on African popular media and the novel. What he has not told us is at what level these courses are being introduced.

We have to look at our University literature syllabuses in the public and private universities of Kenya all over again. We have been doing this useful self-re-examination for very many years. Many adjustments had been made in order to give the syllabus the practical face, in keeping with the 8-4-4 curriculum. The syllabus was designed to give the students the orientation they did not get in their secondary schools. There are problems posed by divorcing language from literature. Some campus train teachers of literature and language in schools. They should be able to handle all the linguistic and literary aspects of the Kenya Secondary Certificate syllabus.

The personnel of a Department of literature in Africa is composed of creative writers who form an effective public of literary men and women, and trained literary critics, the commentators on literature, culture and the Arts. The University is the centre of excellence for literary studies. Academics in literature departments produce works of criticism. The writers produce novels, plays, poems, essays and autobiographies. But should creative writers have been University lecturers? Writing from

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the University of Cambridge in 1969, F.R. Leavis had this to say:

A literature grows out of a culture. A great poet, though he may have a profound influence on his native language by his supremely creative use of it (it is developed and is kept living in a creative sense) didn't create it. Shakespeare had an immeasurable great influence upon English, but couldn't have done so had he not inherited in it a rich, supple and exquisitely vital language. The indebtedness of Shakespearean English to the universities (though Shakespeare was notoriously not a classical or an English don) was immense-a subject on which a first year reading "English could write at least a page or two and which a maturer student, a distinguished mind than a language specialist - or a linguist - is likely (I believe) to have provided for in his implicit canons of relevance, or to be predisposed to applaud or to see the point of (F.R. Leavis 1969:41).

The issue is not to fight against the major players of the literary revolution in East Africa. The interest in the creative use of language in Kenya is normally targeted to secondary school students and not University undergraduates. In the secondary level, publishing interests have shifted from creative writing to the production of materials.

We would be wrong to argue that things began going wrong with the abolition of the Department of English at the University of Nairobi in 1970. We must talk of the separation of literature from language Departments in Kenyan Universities as "a practice which began at the University of Nairobi in the early seventies and as a result of a literary revolution launched by the triumvirate of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p. Bitek, and Taban Lo Liyong." (Senanu 1997: 8). But what you expect from me tonight is:-

- Emphasize the importance of literary criticism in the formation of a literary tradition.
- To give a reasoned and persuasive account of the subject I profess and how we in East Africa have broken the external monopolization of literary criticism.
- To set out my vision for the furtherance of literary knowledge through research and teaching under the guidance of lecturers and professors of literature.
- To set an example for the younger generation of lecturers and students entrusted to my care and to create an awareness of what an academic community is all about.

As a student of African literature, I want to live up to the expectations of African communities (which include the writers themselves). They expect me to offer criticism of literary works and encourage the familiarity of those works to the reader. James Reeves, an English literary critic asserted that we enjoy literature more when we read it critically. Those who talk intelligently and critically about what they read are the ones who get the most out of it. We have East African literature, South African Literature, North and West African Literature. Outsiders want to see it as one literature. The setting of African works is varied. The cultural terrain on which the works are based varies from one African writer and from one book to another. But outsiders want to see African literature as a monolith.

This lecture is addressed to the University of Nairobi academic community. But I am aware that colleagues have come from sister public and private universities, colleges and schools, to attend it. This is not the situation in which one can talk about specific texts of study. But the lecture focuses on what the best of ourselves have thought and said on literature for a long time. Rather than focusing on the creative writers, the lecture focuses on the literary scholar.

As you can see, Sir, I was first appointed to full professorship in April 1990 at Egerton University. But I did not give my lecture there. If I had given this lecture in the 1990s, its title would have been, "African Literature in our Time and The University." The stress in this lecture is on the evolution of literary criticism in East Africa. The centre of operation in our literary studies has moved. We do not only move to African literature as the centre (both oral and written), but we must write it in our local languages. *The Literature of the African peoples is compulsory.* The approach to African literature is both thematic and stylistic. We go beyond language use to Stylistics, a course which runs through **all** the four years." (Gachukia 28 June 1973). We teach practical criticism, a unit of university study in which we teach: the student how to go about reading a novel, poem, or play. We teach him/her how to take notes, and how to write an essay or a term paper.



If you are teaching *Feather Woman of the Jungle* by Amos Tutuola you ask the students to search through the text for areas where the author fails to communicate. The student should be able to pick out passages in *Daughter of Mumbi* by C. Waciuma, that could have been expressed more vividly or more imaginatively, given a better command of the medium. *Song of Lawino* should sharpen the student's awareness and sensitivity to the use of simple, and yet clear and expressive language - complex language does not necessarily express complex ideas.

Mr. Chairman, we expect a very high standard from our students and lecturers. The essentials we try to instill in the students in the use of language are also practiced by lecturers in lectures and seminars. The teacher must also be the performer. Departments of Literature, with language teachers in their midst, concern themselves with problems of language facing the students of literature. Sometimes there is lack of consistent policy on language at school level leading to a situation where most students are not proficient in any one language. Related to this is the quality of students who get admitted into University, we have a situation in which English is not emphasized. This undermines its status in the University curriculum.

The problem of anchoring our studies into the African soil has been solved by creating programmes which put oral literature at the centre. History of African political thought teaches us that African leaders had to return to their traditions to explain their world view *vis-à-vis* Western ideas of governance. Those writers who lay stress on content in African literature, have taken ideas of African statesmen, philosophers, and historians into consideration.

But to talk about the growth of an East African literary tradition is to explain the development of East African literary consciousness. It is to define our post-coloniality. To discuss the post-coloniality of our literature we must concern ourselves with the way literature has shaped our Tanzanianness, Ugandanness, Kenyanness, or in a word, our East Africanness. Since the publication of Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*, and Okot

p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, there had developed a literature in East Africa that has stopped us from looking at European and North American literature as our cultural yardstick. In other words, we concern ourselves with the literature that has separated us from Europe and North America.

There are many undergraduate, Masters dissertations and PhD's in our public universities which deal with post-coloniality in East Africa. They show how East African literature enacts a new history which separates us from the colonial past and connects us with the democratic future. Our present realities gives us a second chance as a human race after the first chance had been disastrously ruined by colonialism.

The story of individualism in the postcolonial context is the one in which the African child does not want to conform to a Westernized society. The father of that child wants him to study the local situation and appreciate it before he studies the foreign situation. It is in this respect that the concept of alienation as it is related to literature is discussed in the West Indies (Caribbean Literature), African-American literature and African literature, Colonial and Independent African situations of alienation are tackled by creative writers.

East African literature is a part of the world aesthetics. It is important that its development and its critical climate are evaluated in order to bridge the gap between the East African debates and the world debates on literature. East African literature has been developed not only by East African men and women of letters. It has had a jolt from scholars of the North. There has been a big impact on the East African scene by foreigners who have worked in East Africa. The growth of the University of East Africa, is synonymous with the growth of East African Literature.

A lecture of this nature is therefore very easy to justify. The competence of African writers in the use of language, and the use of creativity are milestones in the epistemology of Africa. Critics, historians and philosophers who originate from Africa operate on the world scale. From the works of literary criticism, magazines and newspaper, and even

interviews and pronouncements on the screen, you can tell who the best living writers of the world are. As critic of African literature, will tell who the outstanding writers from this continent are. The writers and their critics are cross-fertilizing the global culture, and contributing to the world's cultural debate.

As we think of the origin of the world today, and the creativity of man, we must appreciate the origin of Christianity with its emphasis on the word, Graeco-Roman thought and its classical culture, and the Judaist thought in the Middle East with its creation stories, and then Europe and North America with their extensions to Australia and New Zealand. We think of the expansion of the New Testament religion. The 66 books of the Old and New Testament have influenced world literacy more than we can admit. Christianity has influenced literary thinking from the Dark Ages, Middle Ages, The Romantic period, the era of the Industrial Revolution, the World War I and the World War II, to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The U.S. pentecostalism has seized the world by the storm and it is here to stay up to the end of the world.

The antithesis of Christianity are Islam, Marxism and Communism. The latter have their own social values and their philosophy of language. Marxist aesthetics have a materialist theory of language. They try to find fruitful ways of thinking about language and the manner in which human beings act and interact with each other through language. The atheism in its theology is repugnant to African Socialism. African Socialism, especially as expressed by Leopold Sedar Sengheor and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, espouses Christianity and Islam. It does not see the world without religion.

In the Asian Sub-Continent and the Far East, Buddhism has held the sway. There are specific theories of knowledge which date back to the centuries which are associated with Buddhism. Buddhism has swept across the entire continent of Asia and it has affected the way people react to literature. Christianity, on the other hand, has swept the whole of North and Latin America. Most of the thinkers in the American continent operate with it as their theoretical framework. In Africa, our epistemological field

is tied to the Anglo-American systems of thought and feeling. Our literary thinking is tied to the Great Tradition of Europe and America. Our literary theories start with Plato and end with Dr. Simon Gikandi, an East African literary scholar teaching in the US.

The standpoint which stresses language use and description in the study of literature is expressed by some Professors of literature in East Africa. But how different is their approach from that of the expatriate literary experts in East Africa who were condemnatory and talked about our literature and culture with a dismissive intonation? In the post-colonial period, the literature was explained by the natives themselves. To their voices were added the voices of female critics. Bakhtin and Ngugi wa Thiong'o now drive us to the communities that produce the literature for meaning. The society and the language give us a set of abstract norms and rules that we carry around in our heads. The conflicts and contradictions in our thinking are reflected in the language as we express it. In the study of literature, we first see the need to classify literature at the level of words and then proceed to see different texts for what they are. In our literature courses in the Department of Linguistics and Literature, we introduce students to the nature and function of literature. We ask the question: "What is literature?" We go into its relationship with other disciplines and discuss its aesthetic values. We look at literature as a form of communication between the author and the reader. The study of literature involves the study of the relationship between it and language. By language here we mean the medium in which the message of the creative work is clothed; sounds, the images and the figures of speech. From the study of oral literature we realize that we can define literature in terms of its mode of transmission. A creative work communicates either orally or through the written words. This division transcends generic classifications.

Oral literature is sometimes referred to by literary scholars as *orature*. It is characterized by oration. Examples of oration are there in *Sermon on the Mount* by our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul's speech to the Athenians, and among politicians, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg speech. We can discuss oral literature without reference to writing. But oral literature is

covered by the term *literature* (writings, or literature derived from the word *litera* or letter of the alphabet, only that it is a form of literature which is untouched by writing).

We can talk about oral literature, in stories, proverbs, formulaic expressions, and distinguish “primary orality” from “secondary orality.” Other literary forms are warsongs, laments, sermons, wailings, lyrics, rhapsodies, riddles, proverbs, prayers, biographies, speeches and stories. There are examples of short stories in the Holy Bible; the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-38); the story of Balaam and Balak (Numbers 22-24). The capture of Jericho (Joshua 6); The Wars of Gideon (Judges 14-16); Ruth (the entire book); David and Goliath (1 Sam. 18-20); Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18); Naboth’s Vineyard (1 Kings 21); The Ascension of Elijah (Kings 2, 2, ff); Esther (the entire book); The Three Hebrew Children (Daniel 3); Jonah (The entire books); Daniel in the Lion’s Den (Daniel 6); the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-3-7); The Prodigal Son (Luke 5: 11-32); The healing of the Lame man at Bethsaida (John 5: 1-9); The Shipwreck of St. Paul (Acts 27).

By “secondary orality” we mean the orality sustained by the present-day culture of high technology (i.e. telephones, radio, television and cinema). Primary orality, on the other hand, is what exists in the actual performance. It can only be sustained by the potential in certain human beings to tell it. Oral literature is a heritage of verbally organized materials. It is a heritage of oral performance. When a pupil chooses literature as a subject of study and the source of livelihood, what first thing that attracts the student to it is the magic of words.

It was fascinating for me in my early days to watch the half-educated village dandies trying to mutter simple words in Kiswahili and English, with the aim of bewildering their audience in social places and/or political and administrative meetings.

Language is to the creative writer what paint is to the Fine Artists. Just as stones or bricks are the raw materials of the builders, or sounds are the

raw materials for the musician, words are the raw materials of the writer. Words are live creations in the mouths of human beings. We derive pleasure or suffering from what words mean to us. We enjoy the words. We are excited by them, and weep when we hear them. The Bible has examples of free verse. Perhaps the best example is *Song of Solomon* (8:6-7). Western poets who were influenced by biblical verse were Walt Whitman, Heine, Goethe, William Blake and John Milton. Students of literature are concerned with the way language works. The role of the artist in society is not only defined at the language level. It is defined at the societal level. Wole Soyinka has defined an artist as a prophet: the artist has always functioned in African Society as the record of *mores* and the experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his time (Soyinka in Wastberg 1968).

In our courses in literature at the College of Education and External studies in this University we teach the function of literature. We teach the value and function of literature believing that literature communicates human experiences which delight and educate us when we read about them. These experiences are sources of knowledge. The delight we get from literature is cognitive and aesthetic. We can therefore learn from and enjoy literature because we are human beings. The poet, Mabel Segun, gives us the three-pronged role of oral literature. It is to recall the past, to pulsate the present, and to be tremulous with the future. The elite poets write for each other. They address the whole world. But the folk artists address their own communities. Oral literature is not a commodity of the individual artist. It is an asset to the community. As we see in the Togolese tale, "The Ground Full of Wisdom," Oral Literature is a property of the entire community. The tale goes something like this:

The spider noticed one day how other people than himself were beginning to use wisdom. This did not suit him at all, as he wanted to keep all the wisdom for himself. So he collected it all and put it into a large gourd that he had hollowed out for the purpose. He then hung the gourd up on the wall of his house. But his fear were not allayed and he decided to hide it right away in the bush where no man could find it. Therefore on the following morning he took down the gourd from the wall, and accompanied by his son went with into the bush. Presently they came to a tall palm tree, and it seemed to the spider that if he put the gourd

at the top among the foliage it would be quite safe. So he began to climb the palm tree. But the gourd was a large one and the spider had slung it in front of him. So he could not make any progress. Always the gourd got in his way.

Now the son of the spider had been watching his father's progress and at last cried out: "Father, why not sling the gourd over your back?" And Anansi the spider answered, "My son you are right: but your word shows me that it is better for many people to have wisdom rather than one. For alone I should not have thought of that." So speaking, he opened the gourd and scattered the wisdom all over the ground so that he who may want it can gather what he will. ("Four Tales from Togoland," by A.W. Cardinall from; *Tales Told In Togoland*. Published by Oxford University Press. Quoted, James E Miller, Jr, et.al 1970:82).

Anansi the spider is the hero of a huge body of folk tales which spread from their West African origin to the West Indies and other parts of the New World as a result of the Slave Trade. His name changes slightly from people to people, but his role is always that of the clever trickster who lives by his wits. In the other tale, "Anansi's Fishing Expedition," from *The Cow-tail Switch and other Western African stories* by Harold Courlander and George Herzog, 1947, (Quoted in Miller et al 1970, pp. 55-59) we see Anansi in a new predicament. He tries to look for a fool who would work for him so that he may rip the fruits. But he ends up working for that "fool". The name of the "fool" is Anene. Anansi and Anene set out to trap fish. Anene divides their jobs into doing the work and getting tired. If one person works then the job of the other person is to carry the tiredness. In one of the incidents we are told:

Anansi was busy thinking how he could make Anene do most of the work. But when they came to the place where the palm tree grew, Anene said to Anansi; Give me the knife, Anansi. I shall cut the branches for the traps. We are partners. We share everything. My part of the work will be cut branches, your part of the work will be to get tired for me.

Anansi wonders why he should be the one to become tired. He resolves to cut the branches so that Anene may be tired for him. Anansi suffers for his hypocrisy. He does things because he does not want to be controlled as a fool. He over-reaches himself, Anene benefits from all their chores. Anansi, the clever one, ends up with the rotten and worn out fish traps. Anene, the man who is supposed to be a fool, sells the fish for his own

profit. Anansi is taken away and whipped. The moral of the story is what Anene tells Anansi:

Anansi, this ought to be a lesson to you. You wanted a fool to go fishing with you, but you didn't have to look so hard to find one. You were a fool yourself.

The traditional artist is "a gourd full of wisdom scattered all over the earth of Africa," (Cartey in Miller 1970:9). The role of the artist in contemporary Africa is fulfilled by the man of wisdom. The western role of the artist is fulfilled by the man who was full of folly, if not confusion.

During the Nationalist period, African literary scholars had a high regard for literature and culture. The perpetrators of English culture like Professor David Cook (Makerere University), James Stewart (University College, Nairobi), and Robert Green (University College, Dar-es-Salaam) understood literature to be a carrier of values. The English novel which Ngugi wa Thiongo's contemporaries studied at Makerere (and Achebe's contemporaries studied at Ibadan University), came with English values.

In any case, the student who joined the University College, Nairobi, came from his own literary background with its own literary traditions. Before I came to the University of Nairobi, for instance, I had been exposed to oral forms and utterances (spoken, recited, declaimed or sung). The compositions and performances exhibited an appreciable degree of literary validity. They came from the folk imagination, beliefs and customs, lessons in the arts and crafts, history, literary creations of my people. It came from an oral and non-literate society in which practically everything was communicated and passed by the word of mouth.

Oral literature provided the root of the consciousness of my people. How was I to achieve a meaningful literary education? To answer this question, I must start by identifying characteristics and assumptions of my literary traditions. In my community and yours, the didactic role of literature was emphasized. Even today, this role of literature is emphasized.

The linguists study folk phenomena called myth and metaphor. Myth is there in narratives. Though given the same source material, that is the



myth, scholars will tend to emphasize different aspects of it, depending on the interest of their discipline. The anthropologist whose main interest is in the structure and organization of society and its evolution, will study the myth from that particular angle. Anthropologists will want to study what system of relationships the myth tries to inculcate; what socio-political institutions it derives from; what values it condemns and what values it praises. An example of an anthropologist who has studied African myths in this way is the French scholar, Claude-Levi Strauss.

The historian will regard the myth as a piece of historical evidence, and will be formally interested in the historical incidents from which it is derived and in assessing its veracity or “falsity” and in accounting for these. This is the approach that Jan Vansina in *The Oral Tradition* adopts. But in studying West African literature, Professor Oladele Taiwo has explained myth in literature as follows:-

The theologian is a close neighbour to the anthropologist. He may study man’s expression of his concept of the relationship between him and the cosmos, the supernatural God. Prominent theologians who have done this kind of study to a large scale are John S. Mbiti, in his book, *African Religions and Philosophy* and articles on African traditional religion, Reverend J. Idowu, Professor Jesse Mugambi, and A. Shorter. In Philosophy, we have Professor Henry Odera Oruka with his *Sage Philosophy Project* which proved useful to students of oral literature and biography as a genre. He moved from the view that philosophy is the intellectual expression of the individual like Hegel, Plato, Aristotle and Jean-Paul Sartre, to the view that African Philosophy is “a group philosophy”. He brought a world debate on philosophy to Kenya by drawing philosophers of the world to Nairobi. The debate that preoccupied historians on what history is in the 1960s, and the debate that preoccupied the *literati* in the 1970s on the place of African literature in pedagogy, gave way to the debate on Sage Philosophy in the 1980s and the 1990s.

Europeans wondered whether a blackman could produce oral literature. Did he have any imagination, the originality and the discipline of arranging

writer handle European themes like human alienation? Can the African writer master techniques of fitting a theme into the form in the convention of a modern novel? The hero of our time in Europe and North America is the anti-hero, an angry young man. Can an African writer produce what Hegel called a world historical figure, the man who seeks to go beyond the conflicts of his village, push back the barriers of understanding in order to apprehend and make sense of life? These were the questions the *literati* asked in the 1960s and the 1970s.

When Professor Odera Oruka came to the scene in the 1980s and even as late as 1991, he tackled the view that primitive people are preliterate, pre-scientific, pre-logical, pre-rational and philosophically innocent. They are unscientific. He dealt with the myth of pre-mentality in Fr. P. Temple's *Bantu Philosophy* and J.Mbiti's, *African Religions and Philosophy*. He proposed Sage Philosophy as the thinking of people in traditional Africa. He tied this with Negritudist consciousness which we study in literary criticism alongside the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa.

The linguist is, of course, the literary scholar's "Next of Kin." He will probably study the compositions from the point of view of the mechanics of the language; its phonology, morphology, syntax, and other such aspects. Wilfred Whitley, who started as an anthropologist, but ended up as a linguist, shows this linguistic tendency in his presentation of oral compositions from Africa.

The example of these are *African Prose (I) Oral Texts*. He influenced Professor Mohammed Hassan Abdulaziz a great deal in this direction. Recent examples of linguists who have shown an interest in literary scholarship include Dr. Tom Gorman, Professor D. Okoth Okombo and Dr. Eunice Nyamasio. The literary scholar is a recent phenomenon drawing as he does his concepts from the philosopher and the historian.

The literary scholar will be primarily interested in the creative process at work in the myth. He will examine the accuracy with which the mythmaker has observed the reality around him. In this regard, he will be interested in the communicative ability and the intersubjective truth of the myth. He will be interested in the keenness with which the composer's imagination has worked on the observation to turn it into a particular experience giving it significance, a point of view, a sense of humour, and finally the effectiveness with which both observation and imagination find expression through the medium of language.

The difference between the nationalists who drew the syllabus in the year 1973/1974 and the implementation in the different universities is a matter of approach. When we discuss approach to literature by anthropologists, historians, theologians, linguists, and literary scholars, we tell them about the different approaches. To wit:

At work on the same material, these approaches would not only complement one another... but also overlap, over wide areas in some cases. What a scholar from any of the disciplines must understand and keep constantly in mind is where his main points of emphasis lie. This would save him from irrelevantly impinging on areas which should rather be left to other disciplines and also from misunderstanding other scholars who might quite legitimately, not be looking at the subject from his own point of view. All these should be pretty obvious, but it has not always been accepted by scholars of oral tradition or folklore... Literature is a rather late starter in the field of African Oral traditions and it cannot afford to waste valuable time quibbling about irrelevancies (Ref 1706/75).

Joining a Department of English in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an invitation to partake of the English tradition. Mr. Chairman, if you look at the prose and the poetry which were composed by University graduates of this period, these compositions were in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The writers who stand out in this generation are Christopher Okigbo, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka, in *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *The River Between* and *The Interpreters* respectively. Oral literature was a means of communication. It is a carrier of indigenous education. It is also a tool of improving cultural expression, including image and idiom.

The functions of Western and African literature may be the same, if you talk about the creation of moral and aesthetic awareness. In the 1970's we were critical of the use of English language because it created an elite in the region. It was also believed that the competent use of the English language had a remarkable effect on the onward or upward mobility of the learner. It opened avenues to the commonwealth and North American world for the East African. These are not all the writers who wrote the literature but the white male lecturers in English who taught at the University of East Africa in Kampala, Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. They traversed the entire literary scene reading books and articles in literature, and giving advice to the East African reading elite.

They wrote books and articles about books and literary essays, for people like themselves in South Africa, West Africa, Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. These critics still exist and have moved from East Africa to North America, South Africa and Europe. They network through associations like ACLALS, Afro-Asian Writers Association, African Literature Association, and MLA.

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, he was a white male. In the 1970s and at the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century he was an indigenous African. But he was still male. This person writes books and articles on fiction, poetry and drama. He attends meetings in the university, in the Department, in the Faculty, in the Senate and even in the Council. He is a Chairman of a Department, a Dean or a Director of an Institute, a Principal, a Deputy Vice-chancellor or a Vice-Chancellor. He travels to conferences, workshops, summits and symposia. He appears on television and his opinion can be felt in the mass media. He gives advice to undergraduate students, his younger colleagues. This person has been described by Bruce Franklin in his essay, "The Teaching of Literature in the Highest Academies of the Empire." (Spring 1971: 47):

He believes that his work is very important, because in every century there is a handful of men, and perhaps one or two women, who have written great works that only he and a few others can understand and explain. It is important to understand and explain these works if only, even if only the brightest, the best

educated students can understand the explanation, because these works are supreme human achievements. They stand above time and constitute the furthest advance of culture and civilization (Franklin 1971: 47).

The business of these men and women is literary appreciation. They select great works for study. They point out faults and weaknesses in the works. They see themselves as middlemen between the creative writers and the young and untutored readers. The great writers of the time speak through them, as it were. They shape the literary tastes and the cultural values of their time. They direct readers to good writers past and present.

The literary critics of the developed world - North America, Europe and Japan - are pro-establishment critics. They reflect the bias of their societies. This bias became apparent when some of them operated in Africa in between the 1950s and the 1970s. They masqueraded as democrats and liberals. But in essence they defended the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. There is something more in the pro-establishment literary critic of the developed world than "moulding opinion as to what books are good and bad, what books should be read or avoided, and what we are to learn from the good books we ought to read." (Franklin 1971; 41).

We may argue that not everyone likes literary critics. I remember, as a young literary critic in the 1970s, going to the Ghanaian poet and playwright, Joe De Graft with a review of his play, *Visitors from the Past*. He looked at me condescendingly and said, "Young man, go ahead and please yourself!" He did not ask for a copy of the review to look at. Bruce Franklin refers to a critic as "This ignorant, self-deceived parasite, perfect butt of the satire he so admires." (Franklin 1971: 47).

But take it or leave it, critics have a role to play and they are here to stay. Every country and every region has its community of readers. It has its own writers and eminent literary scholars who have affected the way readers have responded to literature. In West Africa, for instance, Chinweizu, Professors Eldred Durosimi Jones, Donatus Nwoga, and

Abiola Irele are eminent literary critics and have influenced the literary culture there. The writers in West Africa are Leopold Sedar Senghor, Camara Laye, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. They have carried the day.

In South Africa, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, and Njabulo Ndebele have swayed the way literature is received. Ezekiel Mphahlele is known for his autobiography *Down Second Avenue*, his short stories and poems, and his literary studies *The African Image* and *The Whirlwind and other Essays*.

These writers and literary scholars may not wield economic power like publishers and booksellers, librarians and custodians of museums and cultural centers. They may not wield political power like Presidents Kenyatta, Moi, Kibaki, Nyerere, Muniy, William Mkapa, Milton Obote, Idi Amin and Yoweri Museveni. They hold the imagination of their readers.

Some of their works, despise the masses and the politicians. But they catch the interest of the reader because they use their language and ideas imaginatively, and as the writers and critics are controversial. Some of the works are abstract, esoteric, and others are popular using popular forms from folk songs, mysteries, westerns and science fiction.

Professor David Cook is an example of leading literary scholars in East Africa. He must have been born in the 1930's. He edited *Origin. East Africa, Poems from East Africa, East African Plays* and *In Black and White*. His studies included broad perspectives of African literature and an analysis of some issues and a close-up studies of literary texts. In the latter he did close textual analysis of African fiction. Some of the texts he studied included those of his students and contemporaries of his students. They included *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Dying in the Sun* by Peter Palangyo and *Prostitute* by Okello Oculi. David Cook studied the art of persuasion in East Africa. He studied Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, among East African texts. Typical essays by David Cook are in his volume, *African Literature: A Critical*

*View.* Reviewing the book in *Kunapipi*, Kristen Holst Petersen, a lecturer at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, said;

This book is a scholarly achievement. It is well researched and is characterized by careful attention to details, a logical and coherent organization, and a lucid style. It shows the love and care for literature, which is a true hallmark of a man of letters. (In *Kunapipi* 1979: 150)

David Cook belongs to a group of European and North American scholars who devoted themselves to the promotion of African literature. His counterpart in West Africa is Ulli Beier. He was heavily criticized for romanticizing traditional Africa. In his obvious admiration for the African society, he was blind to its complexity and flaws. He was unwilling and unable to express a point of view in any controversial matter. He was unwilling to commit himself. David Cook was a typical liberal white male who was in Africa to apologize for Europe. His contemporary was Margaret Macpherson who came up with a book, *They Built For the Future: A chronicle for Makerere University College 1922 – 1962*. The book was published by Cambridge University Press in 1964.

She shows that Makerere developed from a post-primary technical school to a University College. Makerere sought to meet the shortage of trained high level manpower in the period of African nationalism. Macpherson was known to old Makerereans for her loyal editing of the Old Makerereans Newsletter. But her book is unbalanced, sketchy and noncommittal and it brings out her attitude towards Africans. Like David Cook, she avoided controversy. She is not critical of the colonial Kenya, which did not seem to favour higher education for Kenyan Africans. Sheldon G. Weeks who reviewed her book in *Transition 18* asked this question:

Why was Uganda in the early 40's, the most favoured of the three in student enrollment at Makerere (enrollment was based on the proportion a country contributed to the endowment fund)? What was behind Kenya's colonial government contributing only 50,000 to the endowment compared to Uganda's 250,000 pounds)? (Weeks in *Transition 18:51*)

The Makerere curriculum revealed “ a sparsity of local content (due largely to the absence of research and publications in different fields)” (Weeks in *Transition* 18, 1965: 51). Margaret Macpherson’s book failed on the fact that African Universities between 1922 and 1962 did not offer courses bearing on African languages and cultures (Weeks in *Transition* 18, 1965: 52). The University organization was in the hands of expatriates who constantly looked to Britain for advice and guidance. It led to alienation and dislocation of this system. Ngugi wa Thiong’o was later to say:

Literature (at Makerere) had nothing, very little to do with what was happening in Africa. So in novels and plays we learnt about British people. And even then, we learnt about them not in terms of social issues, but in terms of universal values and tragedy of a human being caught in a situation whose conditions he cannot control. (Interview, Leeds)

Makerere was one of the British Export Universities. One of its critics wondered what a three- year Arts degree in Latin, Greek and in the ancient history of the Mediterranean or in English Literature, drama and the literary criticism of Dr F. R. Leavis would bring to an African student. Africans who were educated solely in the western tradition were as alien as their Western masters. The answer then lay in the creative response to one’s environment:

Sir Eric Ashby said:

The prime task of African intellectuals is to make African nationalism creative. To enable scholars to fulfill this task the Universities of Africa must not only preserve their present loyalty to the western tradition, they must also discover and proclaim a loyalty to the indigenous values of African society. (Quoted in *Transition* 18, 1965: 53)

We have discussed David Cook and Margaret Macpherson at length. Peter Nazareth and Grant Kamenju have stood out as advocates of Socialist Realism. Peter Nazareth is a prototype of Makerere and the University of Leeds. He belongs to what I have called “ The Leeds post-graduate school of East African literary criticism,” (Chris Wanjala 1981 – 137). The mood of these critics was captured by Peter Nazareth who says:



Previously when I read literature, I asked how good is this work? What does it mean? What moral values emerge from it? Now I started asking in addition, What does the work reveal about the society that the writer is dealing with? Does it reveal anything about my society, directly or indirectly, or is it irrelevant to my society? How powerful is the writer's vision and how central to me and my society are the issues he raises and the way in which he raises issues? (Nazareth 1972: 1)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is the leader of the Socialist Realism School in East Africa. He is put on the pedestal, in *Marxism and African Literature* edited by George M. Gugelberger (1985).

Peter Nazareth has "The second *Homecoming*; Multiple Ngugi's in *Petals of Blood*" and *Survive the Peace*: Cyprian Ekwensi as a political novelist "in this book. Grant Kamenju has "*Petals of Blood* as a mirror of the African Revolution" in that book. These literary scholars stand in absolute contradistinction with Taban Lo Liyong and Charles Mangua. Taban Lo Liyong published *The last word* (1969), *Another Last Word* and *Culture Rotan*.

We as literary scholars are not in literature because we think it would solve life's problems for them. Unlike the scriptural writings, good literature will not lead you to heaven.

Poetry for the young African child, especially poetry in a foreign language, does not have to prove anything for him. Poetry does not have to say anything to him. Poetry for the pedantic scribe and the teachers of Africa is like mathematics for the tough minded Professors of Mathematics. Scribes will look for messages in tough convoluted and surrealistic poetry which is not accessible to the average reader. The pedantic scribe hails the writers' experimentation with form and content and the novelty of the use of language. Literature must teach by grace; the word in literature and scripture must have cleansing qualities.

But what is our aim? It is to achieve the interests of the oppressed peoples of the African continent in opposition of those of the Western imperialists

and their agents of oppression in Africa. The method of doing this is the abolition of individualism such as is engendered by American Existentialism, and to replace it by the spirit of African communalism. For many years, top faculty members were Westerners and Non-Africans. Oral literature was given little prominence. There was no real field research for students of oral literature. The means of carrying out these objectives includes democratizing the role of the intellectual in Africa. To involve the broad masses, the people in Africa, into this social movement we must bring the African expression into prominence. With the advent of multipartyism and world liberation, the participants in this movement are interested in what Pope John Paul II and Mikhail Gorbachev have done, to revolutionize the Church and revert to good governance.

Petestroika and Gladsnot are the two phenomena which have taken the literary critic by the storm. When George Bush (Senior), Mihhail Gorbachev, and Dr. Henry Kissinger, talked of the new world order, what did that mean for our social movement? Was this new world order based on religious or secular values? Multi-partyism and pluralism ruined the cohesion and the current statutes which govern political life. In Africa, the pharaos, the scribes, and the Pharasees were represented by all the politicians who were against the democratization of the continent. Why did the tragedgies which beset the contient going on unabated? What was nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s? What was the role of tribalists in the process of Nationalism?

Was Africa going to suffer despite the fact that we Africans were educated and had acquired a formal education? What was Democracy? The fight to achieve independence was one-man one-vote. What was the role of the African Union (A.U.)? The situation was so pathetic that even a *Mzungu* without a PhD *anazunguza* those which PhDs. The literary critic was poised between the hardliners who had ceased to serve the interests of the people and the proponents of the new world order, who do not understand its nature. The interests of the hardliners conflict with the interests of the people. No meaningful song could come from the mouth of a hardliner - whose song only expressed the fear of the possibility

of the loss of oppressive power, over the people. It is G.V. Plekhanov who has said:

The ideology of a ruling class loses its inherent value as that class ripens for doom. The art engendered by its emotional experience falls into decay (G.V. Plekhanov, 1974:37).

Any creative writer, critic, journalist or intellectual who tried to defend the false ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century hardliners, wherever they were, had catapulted himself into peril. He sank his literary reputation into a seething bog. The task of the literary critic and the writer today was to understand the great emancipatory ideas of his time and then to delineate them as they occurred in the literature. But, as the adage goes, if you shout "Progress!" You must know where you want progress to lead you. While the clamour for the new world order was on, while the debate on multipartyism was on, the critic was careful not to jump on to the band wagon of the new world order nor on that of the hardliners. He had to must consider the course which lead him to truer peace and arrive at a course which has a more just cause for the greatest number of people. G.V. Plekhanov says in his book, *Art and Social Life*: "a judgement of taste always carries the presumption that the person who pronounces it is not actuated by consideration of personal advantage." (G.V. Plekhanov 1974:64).

Literary criticism does not grow on isolationism, nor on lack of a stand. The New World order, which was proclaimed by Gorbachev and Bush, according to Christians who were studying the book of Revelation closely, was not necessarily to bring about true peace. In fact it was only preparing the way for the coming of the Anti-Christ. Not all people who shout for world tranquility were genuine harbingers of a "New age." The search must continue. To wit:

Everybody who searches for something new, really finds it. One must know how to look for it. He who is blind to the teachings of social life, he to whom there is no reality save his own ego, will find his search for something "new" nothing but a new absurdity (G.V. Plekhanov 1974:61).

Grace A. Ogot in her earlier short stories collected in *Land Without*

*Thunder*, Miriam Were in her novel, *The Eighth Wife*, Chinua Achebe in his earlier trilogy of novels, (*Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*) and sometimes Okot p'Bitek' in (*Song of Lawino*) seem to address themselves in a great part to the values of precolonial African societies and the way they conflict with the Western values. Their views emanate from the societies in which their creative imagination has been shaped.

Most changes in cultural and material life in present-day Africa were brought by European imperialists. The shattering experience of the Mau Mau war and the emergency has provided a lot of fodder for creative writing by Europeans and Africans in Kenya. The cultural, socio-economic and political changes which changed African lives were made by Europeans who planted churches in Africa. They brought an education which was ill-suited to the African, and they settled on the best soils of the land. Land alienation from Africans to Europeans (whether farmers or missionaries) created emotional turmoil in African lives. Institutions established by the Europeans in Africa still unleash alienation onto Africans.

Alienation of the writer is shown in the idyllic picture drawn of the past by the African. It is also shown in the way some African writers romanticize not only the African past, but the African leaders. Here, we argue with Taban Lo Liyong and say, "we can no longer trust an African just because he is an African." (Taban Lo Liyong in Helen Tiffin January 1979:18). The over-romanticization of Africa and the African past is symptomatic of the writer's alienation from the realities of oppression and economic deprivations. We sometimes accuse Okot p'Bitek, Leopold Sedar Senghor, of this form of alienation. Their kind of alienation makes our task in this lecture even more complicated because we are not only talking about it as it affects them as writers, but is also there in the characters studied in literature. These characters are created by the same alienated writers.

In the 1960s and in the 1970s the majority of the creative writers were members of a sub-culture - the elite - which led a lifestyle which was

different from that led by the mass of the people (the people in the village and the lumpen proletariat).

They wrote in the Ibadan, Legon or Makerere tradition which was elitist and pandering to the Great Tradition. As we argue elsewhere:

For the exponents of the Great Tradition at Makerere, the writer was not expected to be a creator of ideal republics. He was not expected to create a nation-state. They argued that a nation grows not out of mere propaganda about its greatness, but out of the joint movement of the mind. The joint movement of the mind was composed of Matthew Arnold's best culture of the mind, "the best that has been known and said in the world" of book culture. But for the current criticism (of literature) in East Africa, research in literature must go beyond the study of literary texts to a documentation of proverbs, sayings, myths, songs and oral tales, in order to grasp the real soul of the people about whom and for whom literature is written (Chris L. Wanjala in FILLM 1981, 1983:172).

But all said and done the great writers of Africa are products of English and French literature. Some of them, like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o come from demographically dominant tribes. Books written in English or indigenous languages by these writers will reach their target audience. Operating in the English literary culture gives the average writer many advantages. It exposes the writer to a wider audience.

Some of the works by literary scholars who have worked in East African Literature are abstract, esoteric and addressed to a few specialists. Others are popular, using popular forms from folksongs, mysteries, westerns and science fiction. The famous Africanist, V. Y Mudimbe is well known in the US. His book, *The Invention Of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* is the answer to the idea of an African literary critic who does not uncritically embrace the educational philosophy of the West. He believes in delineating African institutions to discover African cultural artefacts.

Examples of proletarian writers are Hermann Melville, Alex La Guma and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. They write about the working people on ships, in factories, in offices. Alex La Guma writes about street brawls in colored

parts of Cape Town, racial violence, and attempts to overthrow apartheid. His fiction is in tandem with the poetry of the Black Consciousness Movement in the Soweto of the 1970's.

The literature that we teach in East Africa is about societies in transition. It is Bertolt Brecht's poetry and drama, Tolstoy's fiction and essays, Athol Fugard's drama. It deals with where we have been and where we are headed.

At secondary school level, we teach literature about growing up in East Africa, filial love, and rebellion of youth. The theme of mother-son relationship, occurs constantly in East African novels and short fictions. Davis Sebukima's fiction shows the fears of children growing up in the village. This fear is instilled in them by adults who conjure up terrible consequences if the children are led by their curiosity to probe the world around them. The young are shown to be the hope of mankind. Creative literature is about imagination. Writers put themselves in the shoes of ageing men and women and the indisposed. All these are subjects of study by creative writers.

In the endeavours, the woman's place is at mans side. Mr. Chairman, we teach world literature. In globalization, all of us place values of success to the use of the English language, as the magic in the white man's hands, which we want to appropriate. The use of English and other European languages in African writing made our intentions suspect. The African writers who wrote in English produced an Afro-Saxon literature and not African literature.

English literature from Geoffrey Chaucer's works to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century works, are available to the reader in the original. Other foreign texts have been translated into English. These include Sir Rider Haggard's novels, Shakespeare's plays, the *Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar*. Other foreign works are Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, *The overcoat*, Brecht's poems, essays, and plays and Pablo Neruda's poetry.

At secondary school, we teach literature, but we should show the students that creative literature is about imagination. Writers put themselves in the shoes of ageing men and women, madmen, and the indisposed. All these are subjects of study by writers. The NARC Government will be happy to note that the subject that fills creative works is anti-corruption. Chinua Achebe's novel, *A Man of the People* is a set book. Its subject corruption. Other African works on this subject are *The Voice* by Gabriel Okara and Thomas Aluko's *His Worshipful Majesty*.

The foreign works are in translation but we are not seriously teaching translation at the University. East Africa has had periodicals in English like *Transition*, *East Africa Journal*, *penpoint*, *Umma*, *Nexus* and *Busara*, *Ghala* and *Juliso*, *East African Journal of Literature and Society*. These journals displayed some interest in English literature.

I would like to appreciate the integral role the British Council and the American Cultural Centre have played in helping us to teach literature in this country. I note the priority given to English literature objectives in the management annex of the British Council in their support of the teaching of literature in East Africa.

Mr. Chairman, I am one of the beneficiaries of the scholarships of the Inter-University Council program. The British Council assisted me to visit the University of Leeds in 1975 to meet the supervisor of my doctoral thesis, Professor Andrew John Gurr. This was in September 1975. During Easter in 1976, they arranged for him to come to Nairobi to toil through the carbon copies of my thesis. The British Council has helped many other scholars in this way. Through their resident workers here in East Africa, they have improved our attitude towards literature. They have held workshops and conferences on reading masterpieces for examinations and reading for relaxation. They have promoted reading and writing.

The lecturer at the University creates his/her own course outline and a reading list for the student. At the most, he or she tries to focus on books which are available. The training at M.A. and PhD levels is meant to

train the University lecturer in English literature to select, grade and adapt material for University level studies. The excellence of the course outlines reflects the personal response of the lecturer to literature, his or her involvement in the subject, and co-opting students in the common pursuit for literary values. If the lecturer is interested in poetry, this will be reflected in his induction of his/her students into poetry. The same could be said of drama, the novel and theories of literature and/or oral literature. The question we ask ourselves in the BEd (Arts) programme is whether or not we are interesting the student sufficiently to poetry, drama and grammar. These are the weak areas in the teaching of literature in schools.

The British Council in Nairobi has helped in to talk about teaching of literature in schools. At this level, the focus is on set texts. Do the courses at this level stress the development of wide reading for the student? What is the role of the literature set books at this level? Is it to fortify the language skills of the student, or is it to instill aesthetic competence in the student? Taking the cue from the University lecturer, we ask the same question about the teacher of English in school: Are teachers made aware of the range of literature available to them at the secondary school level in East Africa?

Well, at the University, we train teachers in the BEd (Arts) programmes. But the Kenya Institute of Education has a great say in the practical relevance of literature in the life of the student. Why is oral literature taught to all secondary school students in Kenya? Is the teaching of oral literature part of the language course at this level? Why is it that the teaching of literature only seriously starts in Form III when students are introduced to set books? Before they are introduced the teacher is expected to select reading materials for his students. He is expected to teach the student how to read for information, how to read fiction, and how to read poetry. He teaches his students to keep a Reading Log, a diary of the thoughts, feelings and questions about characters, memories, reflections, comparisons, from what he or she reads, and a record of dates of such reading. The student is taught how to keep a poetry journal, thus developing a personal style.



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## THE GROWTH OF A LITERARY TRADITION

Worldwide, makers of literary criticism have articulated the traditions of their age. We have the classical times in which Plato and Aristotle reigned. We have the Romantic tradition with S.T. Coleridge at the lead, with a stress on imagination. We have new criticism with the stress on the image. Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis see it to its flowering.

According to T.S. Eliot a writer continues a tradition which has been set by his predecessors who are also writers. How do we define a similar situation, for the African experience, taking into account that the African writer is not preceded by a body of literature in the sense in which the Western writer or the Japanese writer is? Can we redefine the concept of a literary culture and the literary tradition in relation to our own situation? These are the questions, which I am really asking in this lecture and I think that we East African Literary intellectuals ought to face it.

Mr. Chairman, I am very unhappy with literary scholars who have quarreled with Negritude of the 1930s and the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s, without regard to the fact that this movement gave Africa a cultural identity. Mr. Joseph Situma of the Department of Philosophy, a Publisher, Mr. James Shimanyula and I, have been working together since October 2000 when I returned from Egerton University. His publishing house, Africawide Network, has published, with our assistance, two novels, *Mpuonzi's Dream* (2001), and *The Mysterious Killer* (2001). In August 2001, I went to the Harare International Book Fair in Harare, with the express purpose of promoting our work. One woman scholar, Professor Hellen Mwanzi, has published essays with us. Our aim is to promote a literary tradition.

We have a problem. Can we produce a genuine literature in a language which is not African? Can a true literary consciousness, which Professor

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Odera Oruka talked about in the 1990s develop in English, a foreign medium? Joseph Situma's novels are not in Lubukusu nor in Kiswahili. He is a philosopher who expresses himself more appropriately in English. He has not tried to write in Lubukusu.

The people who are critical of Negritude are South Africans who want to be assimilated into the white culture which shut them out. Others, like Nadine Gordimer, think that they are spokespersons for Africa and yet they are isolated. They are not a part of it. Their voices have no authenticity. They know that their grandparents are in Europe and that is where their hearts lie. They explain Africa to fellow whites in Europe, saying that what is in Europe is not in Africa. They are disappointed by the way Africans tell their stories. For them, the styles that emanate from oral literature are exotic. They talk of rambling details of daily life being brought to novels. They say African writers give disparate events which simply do not hold together as themes for literary works. They repudiate realism in African texts and argue that African literature is faithful to the African reality to the extent of being banal. They give the impression that the majority of African writers are not sufficiently imaginative in their writing. Nadine Gordimer for example, says:

African fiction is committed in the most fundamental way, since its inspiration has been the expression and assertion of the African personality as such, and this assertion underlies all political action and seeks recognition primarily through political autonomy (Gordimer n.d.: 13)

African writers and critics get tired of this patronizing tone. African literary traditions are markedly different from the literary traditions of Europe and North America. But does the African literary tradition arise from incompetence or creative originality? Is African originality one of despair? Writers and critics here have come to the conclusion that the problems of these critics have been dealt with very well by the Russian language philosopher, M.M. Bakhtin. Can Africa reconstitute an identity of her own? The identity that we have was defined by Europeans. Parameters employed by them to define us were their own. There are constraints in their paradigms and identity. We can take their

ideas in a spirit of comparative studies. But we must remember, as Masheti Masinjila says:-

Most of them (theories) have their basis in fieldwork carried among European communities, whose findings are subjected to their understanding of (oral) literature. (Masinjila in Okoth Okombo et.al. 1992:8)

The East African writer owes much more to the oral tradition than literary critics would concede. Modern writers today draw from the musical traditions, both dance and song. They embellish their works with myths and legends, stories of origin, stories of migration. A count of proverbs, riddles and other sayings in modern novels reveals a more elaborate use of oral literature than was the case in the early Sixties.

This trend calls for a new approach to the study of East African literature. There is a new demand on the East African writer. He has to explain his own art. When faced by Western critics, the East African writer must ask himself/herself questions: Are there infallible rules of creating works of literature? Originality in an African author is shown by his brilliant creative imagination, his wit and the comic irony. His ironic insight into his characters is shown by their psychological make-up, his consonance with historical sense. Achebe's achievement occurs because of balancing the experience of his people (the Igbo) and his own talent: man's experience with his own talent. *Things fall Apart* is a tragedy in the classical sense. But one cannot forget the African world which is conjured by the use of proverbs by Achebe.

It is no longer possible for a creative writer to reveal the creative ethos of his community unless he integrates his activities into the creative dynamism of his community. In fact the creative writer has a lot to learn from the traditional artist who has always worked as an insider within his community. In defining literature, critics who omit the oral artist and who separate the study of written literature from the study of oral literature become restrictive and discriminatory. Take the case of Margaret A. Ogola's novel, *The River and the Source*. Don't we see a successful presentation of an African narrative in this novel? We in East Africa have rich narratives

which have not been presented in our written literature. We are yet to find our feet in our narrative traditions. They are still at the periphery of the global village.

The task of the critic in East Africa is to redefine literature, and to identify the oral tradition in written literature. In discussing African literature in Western scholarship, some of the African writers seem to be quite clear in their minds about the fact that African literary traditions cannot be adequately separated from the cultural traditions. If you are studying any local literature you have to know something about the stress that community places on certain rituals and indeed, how those rituals help the communities to understand their past. J.P. Clark has gone to the extreme by saying that the critic has to be versed in the "vernacular" of the author to be able to unravel the rhythms of his poetry.

Critics from East Africa are disarmed by the classical Western view of literature which seems to define cultures as a 'thing', something separate and distinguishable from the communal way of life. It is now an altruism what Njabulo said in Stockholm in 1986, after my paper on this topic:

The oral tradition is, on the contrary growing all the time, and you don't have to go to the rural areas, to the grandmothers, it exists in the slums, in the cities of Africa. it takes various forms and more often than not it uses the modern imagery of the city. In Lesotho for example, there is a form of oral poetry that was developed by miners, who are migrant workers. They have developed a very personal startling new imagery, often concerned with the mines and their experiences at work, so the oral tradition is also extremely flexible and highly inventive (Njabulo 1986)

Literature per se is an expression of the soul of a nation irrespective of its language medium. The literary critic must describe its values, and identify the aesthetics which emanate from it. Students of East African literature must explain its traditional world as well as they explain the Western values reflected in it. Okot p'Bitek in his essays shows us the African aesthetic values. In elaborately describing the courtship dances among the Acholi of Northern Uganda, Okot demonstrates to us the Acholi concepts of love which we must bear somewhere in our minds when we study his

poems, *Song of Lawino*, *Song of Ocol* and *Two Songs*. As for his literary criticism, the conclusive statement by Masheti Masinjila on the contribution of scholars to the study of oral literature in East Africa applies. (Okoth Okombo, *et.al.*, 1992:1-17).

Masheti Masinjila was one of the officials of the Kenya Oral Literature Association in the 1990s. As I was discussing with Dr. Peter Wasamba in April 2003, the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA), has done a lot to promote theories and methods of studying oral literature in East Africa. If members of this association were Americans or Nigerians the world would know about what they are doing. They would boast about it all over the place. East African literary scholars have moved from answering the question, "What is literature?" Local ideas about literature have been canonised. They have entrenched ideas on the study of literature in East Africa mooted by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek and Taban lo Liyong. Okot p'Bitek saw the need for relevance and commitment in research. Literary theory in East Africa had to incorporate the study of oral literature. Masheti Masinjila says:

Kenyan researchers have shown a degree of theoretical awareness evident in their consistency as to what they regard as pertinent literature. Since oral literature was conceived of within historical and pedagogical needs which were outlined by the pioneer scholars such as; Okot p'Bitek, Henry Anyumba and Lo Liyong, there already exists a conceptual framework within which researchers have tended to operate. Strictly speaking, there may not exist a harmonious well-articulated theoretical construct that Kenyan scholars/researchers follow. Yet its absence does not necessarily preclude identification of trends that are theoretically significant (in Okoth Okombo *et.al.*, 1992: 17).

African aesthetics and styles are there in the performing arts, and it behooves the critic of African literature to be aware of them when he is analyzing African literature. The critic who studies narrative techniques, plot and character and who ignores traditional African aesthetics does so at his own peril. Oral literature is a dramatic literary mode. It is not only the narrator but members of the audience have a role to play into the narrative. The narrator or the narrator has to repeat well known formulae before he comes to the main story. Members of the audience, too, know

where in the story they have to enter and either make a comment, or repeat a well known formula. The plot, on the other hand, is determined by the completeness of the performance. The funeral reciter from Bungoma District in Western Kenya will make his recital long or short, according to the discipline of his audience, the character of the deceased, and the condition of the weather. If a member of the audience offends him or in some way puts his life in danger, he stops his recital, asks for his fee and leaves. Again if the deceased man has been an evil man so that he narrator finds his feet heavy and he is unable to walk swiftly when performing the ceremony, he curses the spirit of the deceased, asks them to haunt the clan from which the deceased comes, picks up his staff and leaves. The narrator will not remain in the arena when he knows that it is going to rain. The thunderstorms should not come and find the narrator in the arena. He will not live long to offer more recitations if rain finds him in the arena. The roar of the thunderstorms marks the final interruption of the narrator's life. He must bring his story to a close whenever there are signs of the coming rain.

The duration of the song cannot be measured accurately because, despite the fact that the song contains accepted words and concepts, the individual singer will introduce personal elements into the song. Take the following Bukusu song:-

*My stepmother is not my mother,  
She kept the smoked sorghum for me,  
I came from Butia, and ground it on the stone;  
Those were great tales,  
That was the day,  
Those were tales of great days.*

This song was sung to us by Alfred Musebe Marango of Misikhu Friends, Bungoma District in August 1982. Although it contains accepted words, the poet started singing it by praising our guide, mentioning his clan, and moving on to praise the guide's father. Then after reciting one of the well known lines in the song he moved on to praise the members of the



audience. The duration of the song must thus be tied to the time the song is performed.

There is little room for deviation from the norm in traditional societies. The stress is not so much on the individual as on how he perceives himself as a collective being. In Jomo Kenyatta's book *Facing Mount Kenya*, we learn about the individual's concern with the soil. Among the Agikuyu of Central Kenya, there is a ceremonial chant connected with the fertility of the soil, ritual songs which are sung during the sacrifice to the Gikuyu god, cattle songs and songs in praise of teamwork. The song recorded below is sung by elders during the ceremony of purifying the fields before planting starts:

Mwene - Nyaga,  
Peace  
Praise be to you, Ngai.

Peace be with us  
You have brought us rain  
And given us good harvest

Peace,  
Praise be to you, Ngai  
Peace be with us  
Let the people eat the grain of harvest in peace  
Peace, Praise be to you Ngai  
Peace be with us

Let us enjoy the harvest in peace  
Peace, praise be to you, Ngai  
Peace be with us

To understand the growth of the East African literary culture, we should try and bridge the gap between oral and written literatures. The editors of the Oxford Library of African Literature series have put their fingers on the problem when they showed, in the general preface to their series,

that the identification of the past and the present in African literature could benefit from what Eliot said about European literature.

We think it harmful to African literary studies to divide the past from the present. There is a great need to bring to bear upon African literature the interest in living traditions and the concern for discovering order and proportions within them which Mr. T.S. Eliot, in particular, introduced into European literary criticism with his *Selected Essays*. If we consider any artist without prejudice in favour of his personal idiosyncrasy - as Eliot observed of poets in the essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" - "we shall often find not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."

Adrian Roscoe is another critic who has made references to the place of tradition in the composition and analysis of African literature. In the first chapter of this book, *Mother is Gold*, he has a sub-section entitled, "Sew the old days," and in it he quotes T.S. Eliot at length, and makes comments on T.S. Eliot's views on the need for the historical sense in creative writing.

The central idea running through these extracts from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is not new; nor is Eliot the only twentieth-century writer to have subscribed to it, for Chesterton was expressing it when he prophesied that "When the great flowers break forth again, the new epics and the new arts, they will break out on the ancient and living tree." It is also an accepted truth in Africa. "The tree can grow only by sinking its roots into nourishing soil," the Senegalese writer Birago Diop reminded his daughters when dedicating to them his first collection of stories. "Young palm tress grow on old palm trees" runs a proverb from the Cameroons, asserting the truths which Eliot carries in his elegant prose in a more metaphorical, more African, kind of way. (Roscoe 1972)

Adrian Roscoe demonstrates how, for many African writers, true creativity, in the present, begins with the return to the roots which are watered by the deep past. Ezekiel Mphahlele on the other hand does distinguish between the Western tradition and the African tradition. He shows how a discussion of the term is entangled with the reference to the presence of ancestors in the life of the author talking of ancestors who are down there inside his agnostic self, and how he feels a reverence for them. There is a category of ancestors who are in spirit still present within the author's community. This attachment to the African belief system is seen

in the essay as being traditional: "The larger part of Africa is still traditionally minded in varying degree."

Later in the essay, the author shows that a literature which invokes our ancestors makes us think about our traditions and our roots. Mphahlele distinguishes the literature which is based on African traditions from Western literature which is made up of centuries or eras of telescoping into another (*a la* T.S. Eliot).

Features of tradition, according to Mphahlele, include: ancestral worship (or ancestor veneration), the humanism based on communalism, and respect for age. The critic uses the term tradition as a synonym of the words culture, custom, the source and the past. He talks of a 'tribal or ethnic tradition.' Traditions are observed in 'our needs, our family relations, family life, which must continue more or less normally....,' and morals of the family, the clan and the tribe. The author refers to indigenous aspects of African life, traditional ceremonies, traditional authority, traditional sculpture and traditional music. Apparently what is traditional is what belongs or is inherited from the past. In the field of literature and creativity, what is inherited includes artistic modes. The artist learns modes which are passed on from generation to generation, and he innovates within those modes. Mphahlele demonstrates the banality of the poetry which uses materials from oral traditions but fails to inject into those materials the creative impulse. Traditions are contained in the language poets use. In the case of the performing arts, traditions are there in the spoken word, and the paralinguistic devices which artists bring to the stage. Mphahlele, like Okot P. Bitek, mentions some of the African literary traditions, but he does not fully trace them to contemporary literature.

What Okot P. Bitek and Ezekiel Mphahlele say about tradition must be contrasted with what the Anglo-American poet, T.S. Eliot, says. Although the African men of culture and T.S. Eliot recognize the need for the creative writer to draw his materials and inspiration from the past, there is a difference in the way they see the past. Whereas the tradition of Okot and Mphahlele comes from oral literature, T.S. Eliot's comes from what David Cook has called 'a joint movement of mind. Poets, whether using

African orature or drawing from the Western written tradition, have to employ their creative genius to select their images and modes of expressing them from artists who have gone before them. Similarly, to write, the African writer transforms the artistic traditions from his oral background into the printed media.

In fact, he has to transmit these traditions into a metropolitan language like English and French. The artist at work synthesizes 'exposition, narrative, idea, feeling and style onto a work of art.' The three writers I have discussed here appreciate that tradition must live alongside the present. The African writer must commute between the world of oral traditions and the world of written traditions. While he draws from the tradition articulated by oral artists, the African writer must shape his material to the tastes of his generation which reads literature in the indigenous languages, and also literature in foreign languages. Thus, there is a point where the Western writer and the African writer meet.

African writers have to recognize the virile tradition based on oral transmission. All the literary genres which people talk about in journals and learned books - proverbs, riddles, tales, the poetic song, myths and legends - were there in the African community before the introduction of written literature. The mode of communication at that time, though based on oral transmission, was fairly sophisticated. Elders employed it to talk among themselves. Their speeches were coloured with allegorical statements, parables, riddles and anecdotes. The artist, who is referred to in West Africa as 'the man of the word' uses his stories to comment on society.

There is still very little contradiction between what T.S. Eliot says and what Okot P. Bitek and Mphahlele say. The three in effect agree that literary tradition is a continuum. They say that the artist must appreciate the traditions which have gone before those of his generation. He must have a historical sense, which includes the keen sense of distinguishing the present from the past. He must write for his own generation but at the same time he must be conscious that this literature has its roots in the literature of the African continent and co-exists with the epics of Sundiata, Ozidi and Chaka the Great.

## THE WRITTEN TRADITION

East Africa has a large body of oral and written traditions. But critics and scholars argue that the written tradition has not had a very bright record. In 1959, at the Second Conference of Negro Writers and Artists which took place at the Capitol, in Rome, between 26 March and 1 April, J.S. Mbiti, a Kenyan man of God, read a paper on "The Literature of the Akamba Tribe." He made a case for a literary tradition. He argued that as very few Africans at the time were literate, it was difficult for African writers to live off their writing. He recounted the numerous language options which were open to the East African men of letters, although there were few or no books published in those languages. He also pointed to the poverty of the people as the cause for the dearth of readers. Many of the people who were supposed to read books were too poor to purchase and read them. This was in 1959 when an East African child at school drew his inspiration from his immediate environment or from the many traditional musicians in our society.

He made a desperate effort to catch up with English literary traditions. Just at the time that J.S. Mbiti was speaking about a literary tradition, the literary culture at home involved catching up with the Western people by singing hymns, listening to readings from the Bible and to saying prayers. Teachers used the worship period to preach against sin. But when the spirit of competition was instilled in the African, he realized that English was important for his success. The examinations which he was to sit were based on the education system in Britain. He was prepared to sit examinations set in Britain. He had to master English approaches to the study of science, mathematics, history, geography and other subjects of the English Grammar school curriculum. His education disregarded the political, educational and cultural tensions around him.

He was told that writing English compositions was to be at the very heart of his training. The topics which were set for him to write about revolved

around the sports and current affairs in England. There were traps. The examiners used technical expressions which were alien to him. They knew that these technical terms had not been mastered by him. His setbooks did not throw light on the topical situation in his own country. He was taught English narrative poems which ranged from short ballads to "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." The poems talked about maidens with raven hair and flaxen locks, cherry lips and cheeks like apples. They talked about snowy bosoms which the child from "the Dark Continent" could not visualize. But whenever the student asked his teachers questions about cherries, apples and snow, they put down the copies of English rhyme, dashed across the compounds to their houses, and returned carrying lumps of ice from their refrigerators.

With rusty knives, they shaved the ice, and produced little piles of snowflakes. In some kind of grateful consciousness, they hurled the snowballs across the classroom at the unsuspecting student and thus brought the subject of snow home to the African student. Their houses were the unending sources of visual aids in teaching the English culture in the classroom. Schools were not built to produce a well-integrated East African. They were built to counteract the African cultural values enunciated by the anti-colonial movements. The English teacher who gave lessons in peeling apples to school children and indefatigably ploughed through the verses of "The Pied Piper," taught English syntax, English idiom, and English vocabulary.

The erosion of the African ethos did not stop at the secondary school. For a long time African writers have preferred to compose their verse in English. The aesthetics of these poets have been oriented towards the West. African poets have argued that there is no such thing as "Negro art." They have seen themselves artistically as citizens of the world, inheritors of the universal tradition of art and letters and not custodians of an indigenous cultural legacy like their oral counterparts in the village.

The questions, which are asked today, are: Has East Africa run out of creative writers capable of making a mark outside the country's borders?

Is it true to say that East Africa has produced only a handful of writers who, since Independence, have gained international readership and reputation? What has happened to creative writing in East Africa?

The attacks on East African writers have ranged from poor technique in prose to the view that East Africa's literary scholarship has not come of age. The thrust of the criticism has since changed from the creative writer to the literary critic. The radical socialists of the 1970s were the first lot to come under attack. In June 1971 Atieno-Odhiambo and Okello Oculi discussed "Development in East Africa" on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). They did not name the poets they were discussing. Their critical tone was casual and dismissive

Bahadur Tejani had problems with the two writers and he dismissed them as examples of writers who had training in literary criticisms: political scientists, sociologists, and historians. He also found creative writers themselves a nuisance. He argued that being versed in the vernacular and the traditions of an author did not qualify a reader to say "the last word" on an author. He went against the trend of thought we are advancing here and asserted that the literary critic in modern Africa should enjoy a creative freedom which the creative writer enjoys, and at the same time operate beyond the constraints of tradition and cultural dogma. From Tejani's premise we would argue that if there has been a false start in the discipline of English and literary criticism it is because the study of literature was pioneered by creative writers who were guided by their muse rather than by weary and time-tested research methods. Writers may have been geniuses, but theirs was an untutored genius which did not qualify them to write effectively on literature. Criticism of literature, for Bahadur Tejani, should not be colored by an inward-looking nationalism, a parochialism which stresses the cultural context of the work of literature.

East Africa went through an intellectual crisis in the 1960s and the 1970s. We accepted Christopher Caudwell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X and Walter Rodney. We rejected bourgeois intellectuals, like B.A. Ogot, Gideon S. Were, G. Muriuki, William R. Ochieng' and

academic acrobats like Ali A. Mazrui. We rejected the notion of an intellectual as a parasite. As cultural nationalists, socialists and Marxists, we embraced the proletarian culture and oral traditions.

We picked an education in critical theory. We examined the relations between literature and the class struggle. This radicalization came through the teaching of literature at the University of Nairobi. Most of us were not trained in literary criticism at the doctoral level. Our situation was very much like that of Christopher Caudwell. The lives and challenges of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong, and Okot P. Bitek posed a challenge to us all.

In his article, "Ngugi wa Thiongo's Early Journalism," Bernth Lindfors shows that Ngugi trained himself in writing essays by contributing to *The Kenya Weekly News*, the Kampala based *Transition*, and the *Weekly Review*. He wrote commentaries on literature, culture and politics, highlighting African nationalists and emerging creative writers in Africa and in the African Diaspora.

Taban made his name by writing for the press, literary magazines, and journals. He used articles in the popular press and public lectures at the Goethe Institute (in Nairobi) to put across in a more direct, simpler form, the key ideas found in his works. The cases in point were "Breaking the Shackles of Old Ideas," (*Sunday Nation*, 14 December 1969), and "How Long Must we be Children?" (*Sunday Nation*, 14 May 1972), Bahadur Tejani tried to usher Taban off the stage of literary criticism by saying, in June 1971, in the Education Theatre 11, that students of literary criticism should "take over to till the ground," (Gurr and Calder 1974: 135). But Okot p'Bitek offered the kind of literary criticism the African wanted. He asked: "Then why do the professors of literature waste so much time 'teaching' that dry subject called criticism? The creative and most enjoyable human activity has been reduced by interested professors into a game played by professional rules, for which they are paid highest salaries in East Africa!" (Gurr and Calder 1974:130).



East African creative writers made pronouncements and pronouncements on literature. In most cases they talked about their methods as practitioners. When they wrote on creative writing, their own fancy got the better of them. They re-wrote works which they set out to criticize. In a way what they said amounted to a theory of literature. There are those who re-wrote novels which they set out to criticize.

Most of the creative writers who have written on literature did so with their own agenda in mind. They have trained their sensibilities and insight into the reality, which set them apart from lawyers, architects, doctors and engineers. It took them a lot of courage to pursue a literary vocation amidst a culture where educated people pursued careers which brought in more money. But a study of their writings shows the evolution of their ideas and social attitudes. They have made an impact on the literature of East Africa. Reading their pronouncements is reading a detailed history of the contemporary culture of East Africa.

The 1980s and the 1990s and beyond were the decades of the literary critic who had to must work with the social scientist, the historian to understand the works of the creative writer. We had to take note of whatever the social scientist, the historian, and philosopher said about content in literature. But we went beyond saying things on content and talked about the structure and the metaphor and language of the creative work. Works of literature had purposes other than inspiring men into direct action: only propaganda could do that. Social content and social function of the works of literature were not all we wanted from literature.

Gideon Cyrus Mutiso put special emphasis on content in his analysis of literature. He talked about non-literary content and showed how works of literature were informed by non-literary content and non-literary sources. What he needed to do was to go further and demonstrate how the content affected the character of the works.

Mutiso's *Socio - Political Thought in African Literature* makes an

attempt towards and analysis of the socio-political thought in African literature. It is a schematic analysis of the responses of the writers of English-speaking Africa to the African experience. He used a sociological theoretical framework to discuss the socio-political ideas of literature. He brought out apt works and selected from them apt quotations to demonstrate the ideas and aspects of the social situation which the writer deemed important but that was not written with the purpose of expounding a specific social and political idea.

Gideon Mutiso's book falls in the same category as Geoffrey Reeves' study, my own, *For Home and Freedom*, and Eddah Gachukia's thesis on culture conflict. Reeves and I worked together on our doctoral researches, and drew a lot from Mutiso's study.

We discussed culture conflict, alienation, assimilation, exile and return; showed the writer's response to the place of the politician in an African society. The politician is an outsider *vis-a-vis* the African society. He belongs to a "tribe" unto himself - "the pariah to all others in their values or their interests." (Mutiso 1972: 49). He is engaged in the pursuit of money and materialistic values. He hangs onto political power and protects his economic interest.

The writer and the works he produces form a literary culture which forms the antidote to the culture of the politician. What creative writers write in the press and news magazines form a part of the debate on the establishment of the literary and the reading culture which we are discussing in this lecture. A study of the circulation of East African journals - such as *Busara*, *The African Review*, *Dhana*, *Ghala* and (*East Africa Journal*), *Mawazo*, *Taamuli*, *Umma*, *Zuka* in the 1970s showed how the reading culture, was spreading in East Africa. The low-brow of our society consumed *Drum*, *Trust*, *True Love*, *Flamingo*, *Baraza*, *Afrika ya Kesho*, *Africa Nyota*, *Lengo: Target*, *Ukulima wa Kisasa*, *Musizi*, and creative writers variously contributed to these popular magazines. Those with a poetic flare wrote for *Uhuru*, *Nguruma*, *Daily News*, *Sunday News*.

The didactic and political possibilities of cheap, fairly short popular works which have been realized with a remarkably large public in Nigeria have their counterparts here in East Africa. Cyprian Ekwensi pioneered this form of writing in 1947, when his booklets, including *When Love Whispers*, were published by the Tabansi Bookshop in Onitsha. But, again, of this later. The case I want to make is that despite what we say about writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong and Okot p'Bitek they have contributed to establishment of a literary culture in East Africa. They have made serious comments on the literary traditions of the region. Most of the views on literature have come from the creative writers themselves. Their comments have ranged from mundane comments on party politics to wild denunciations of capitalism, imperialism and neo-colonialism which are blamed for everything which goes wrong on our continent. Writers are individuals. In making insights into life's experiences the individual plane, their responses to the social reality has a cumulative effect of creating a pattern which would be called "a pattern of the age" or "the spirit of the time." Here for the artist "the present is made up of thousands each finding his own destiny." (Odera Oruka: *East Africa Journal* October 1972).

Criticism of African literature has responded to the historical realities which inform the development of the writer's criticism of society. Mutiso, would have liked to see a more comprehensive portrait of African societies in literature. For him: "Central to modernity is the theme of alienation," (Mutiso 1972: 60). He looks at issues and debates them.

Criticism of literature is an argument. It is an accumulation of opinions on the arts, editing and annotation of texts, offering biographical details about writers, encouraging others to read the books worth reading, chastising faults in works of art and literature where one finds them, creating values through debates on cultural artifacts, explication of texts.

Informed discussions on works of literature in the mass media create a climate of opinion in which good books drive out bad books. The literary scholar does not operate in isolation from other scholars. He shows

interests in methods and results of research in social, physical, biological and other applied sciences. The critic studies the work of literature in its social and political context and in relation to his aesthetic sense:

This makes us analyse the design of the work, the intention of the writer in the text, its pattern. On the basis of these various features we discern in the text, we can then make a final judgement on the merit of his work (Wanjala 1973:32).

A work of literature is a basis for the reader's self-discovery, and the more he studies it, the more he discovers new things about it. As we discuss a work of literature, we discover new depths of our culture. This work may be a poem, a play, an essay; sacred texts which are used in chanting and speaking, writing, reading and re-telling.

Written texts demand immense attention from us. The critic concentrates on the text in the same way as the play director concentrates on the script of a play. The critic brings *Literature* to the level of performance by discussing the language, the images, the individuality of characters and their place in the plot. He articulates these parts of the text which are muffled by the language of literature; unravels the things which are hidden beneath the piety, needlessness and routine.

I wish to talk about oral literature and written literature all in one breath. I feel that there is something to learn from Western critics, regarding the study of technique. Works of art are vehicles of social change. We study how the authors' intentions are manifested in the works of literature, and the way we should interpret them. One single critic who has influenced Western literary thought and is now spilling into the criticism of African literature is the Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye. Here is a critic who draws his inspiration from the classical critics, including Aristotle. He also related his criticism to the criticism of the Bible. Northrop Frye operates in the same tradition as Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, the most elitist of Western critics. He and these critics operate in the same literary tradition.

Frye is as oft quoted on form as George Lukacs is quoted on content. Bakhtin quotes Frye's theory of literature which makes it appear that the displacing power of the Bible, whose centrality, potency and discriminating interiority inform all Western literature. The texts which formed the Christian worldview were delivered by Moses and Jesus Christ. Frye has influenced M.M. Bakhtin to derive his literary theories from the Quran. Writing on the influence of Northrop Frye, A. Brandon Conron, a Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario has shown how Frye's "image overshadows all other Canadian Critics," (in John Press 1965:194).

There are two sides to this issue. Some of us who are reading East African literature in English must know the trends in the criticism of English literature. Recently I read a work of criticism on the artistic vision and the craftsmanship of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The study followed the traditional concepts of English literary analysis in which the technique of the writer is analyzed against the message of the works. The author based her analysis on the theories of literature broached by Aristotle (and enthusiastically embraced by Frye). Elements like myth, allegory, imagery, symbolism, narrative technique, character presentation, irony and transmutation belong to the neo-classical literary criticism and they are used by Frye. The spirit of this criticism was formulated by S.T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth in the case of England. Critics of this tradition write enthusiastically and give spirited defenses of their writers of study. Nureldin Safia (1989) summarizes her techniques in the introduction. She identifies social change in Ngugi's novels and gives us the author's intentions.

We see that form and content are inseparable bedfellows. But the perspective of the author is crucial. The evocative portrayal of the land, the terrorism of colonial violence, and the author's childhood during the Emergency, are well-explained and documented. The critic's anchor in English literary traditions gives her an unusual insight into the works of the East African Writer. She makes a thorough examination of the primary texts and articulates their meaning. Her study departs from the thematic

surveys of East African works which were popular in the second half of the 1970s.

Although Safia draws her inspiration from classical literary theories to analyse African literature, she fails to understand the Gikuyu oral traditions in Ngugi's works. Her analysis is weakest in this respect. Whereas she is consistent and thorough in her analysis while using Western concepts, she is weak and inadequate when analysing oral sources. In a way, Okot P' Bitek is right to extol literature in the African countryside as the basis of defining African literature.

The critic of East African literature must bring out these elements whilst analysing it. On the other hand, critics are right to say that all the people who read African literature which is based on Islam must read the Quran inside out. The banning of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* which was instigated by the Moslem world makes this point all the more pertinent.

Mazrui has shown how the situation of culture in Africa is paradoxical: "Underlying it all is Africa's triple heritage of indigenous, Islamic and Western forces - focusing and recoiling, at once competitive and complimentary." (Mazrui 1986: 21). To understand our literature (both written and oral), we must drill ourselves in our artistic traditions, the Asiatic artistic traditions, and the indigenous African artistic traditions. In the words of Dr. Tom Gorman:

The work of elaborating a critical apparatus to describe musical, balletic and verbal characteristics of African oral literature, which is being done by Austin Bukonya and Henry Anyumba, for example, would seem to be logically prior to (or a concomitant of) the elaboration of a theory to take account of its aesthetic characteristics. (Andrew Gurr, Pio Zirimu, 1973: 198).

The use of oral traditions is accompanied by a revolutionary consciousness of the masses. Writers have followers who are either euphoric or religious. The followers could sometimes be called supporters. Journalists have different kinds of followers. We have contemporary writers who are deeply rooted in literature, and political thought. They tend to be popular and famous. Sometimes they are heavily literary and use sources

assiduously. I recently interviewed my students over the writing of some of these writers. The students said: "Philip Ochieng's style is complicated." They said, "He is so far above the reach of the common reader that he cannot readily appeal to the majority of the newspaper readers." He is cerebral. They have heard him say, "you either put up or shut up!" The students' view of Philip Ochieng tallies with that of George Wing who acknowledged Ochieng's fascination with unusual dispositions of words. Occasionally, Ochieng's verbal experiments corrupted the message (*East African Journal*, January 1968).

My students advised Philip Ochieng' to learn from orators in any society in any period. Orators believe in simple delivery. Ochieng's esotericism comes from his heavy leaning towards European literature. He draws his writings from ancient writers of European origin.

Philip Ochieng' is a poet. His first poems appeared in *Drum Beat* edited by Lennard Okola and published by the East African publishing House. Bren Hughes, reviewing Ochieng's poetry responded to this obscurity. Ochieng' was accused of obscuring his message through the overuse of nuances from literary texts. He is something of a pedant. He is the exact opposite of Wahome Mutahi and Kwendo Opanga. My Year III students of Linguistics and Literature at the University of Nairobi referred to Wahome Mutahi as a social commentator. He is the author of the *Sunday Nation* column, *Whispers*. It is a humour column. Its style gives the writer his popularity.

The students discussed Wahome Mutahi with the Cape Coloured South Africa writer, Alex La Guma, in mind. Alex La Guma is a radical. He is a lone ranger. In about 90 pages of his novella, *A Walk in the Night*, Alex La Guma brings out the conflict between Coloureds and the white authority. There is a variety of themes and a variety of characters. Alex La Guma deals squarely with the theme of apartheid. Wahome Mutahi invents characters from living persons. The persona in Wahome Mutahi's *Whispers* uses the name of the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to name and symbolize his wife. He means "My

wife,” when he says, “My Thatcher.” There is one situation in which he courts his bride for marriage. He calls the process of looking for a wife. “Thatcher Hunting.” He refers to his future wife as his “future Thatcher.” He uses similes which conjure a familiar meaning to his readers. In one text, about the Valentine’s Day, there are sentences and clauses as follows:

1. I am supposed to dress in red as if I am a KANU youth-winger.
2. Instead she’ll find my love for her flowing in them (veins) like River Chania during the floods.
3. Love was flowing in your veins like a flooded River Nyando.
4. To smell like a broken sewer.

Wahome Mutahi chooses his words deliberately for effect. The word “cube” normally refers to an undergraduate’s room. Undergraduate students refer to “roommates” as “cube mates.” In his piece on the Valentine Day, Mutahi refers to a rural bachelor’s house as “a cube.” Kenyans are also familiar with Mutahi’s reference to bottled beer as “Ruaraka waters.” He draws heavily from a language close to the repertoire of his readers. He commands a big following of readers. The persona in Wahome’s prose is supposed to be the common Kenyan who is faced by social, economic and political problems, sometimes because of his own clumsiness. The tone of his voice is self-deprecating. He is a picaresque character of sorts. Mutahi’s use of language endears him to the reader of the *Sunday Nation*. There are many followers who buy the paper because they want to read “*Whispers*.” The name “*Whispers*” also appears on *Matatus*. His language style has been used to advertise intoxicating spirits in Kenya.

When pioneers in the field of creative writing wrote their first pieces from East Africa, they always said: “I write like D.H. Lawrence.” “I write like Joseph Conrad.” “I have been influenced by Fyodor Dostoevsky.” “I don’t write for non-poets.” “I am a citizen of the world.” “I am not an African Poet. You can’t make me win an African Literary Prize.”



These writers talked about Western writers they had studied in school and university and deliberately imitated them when they embarked on their careers as writers.

When you are told a story at home by your mum, you carry it to school. You take it to school and tell it to your colleagues at the instigation of your teacher. When I was a pupil at Kamusinde, I was a keen observer of dancing *Kamabeka* at beer parties in my village, at Chesanissi. I saw men and women dancing *Kamabeka* at the rhythm of *Chimbengele* and other percussive objects. The harpist played *Litungu* or *Siyilili*. In our school, we held picnics in the caves of Mt. Elgon, at the end of every academic year. The school encouraged me and my villagemate to dance and shake our shoulders in the manner we had observed villagers do. We danced with pride, raising dust. The school awarded us prizes of books. We had learnt how to dance *Kamabeka* from our village experts. We were reliving the dance traditions of our village in the new scheme. This process has been summarized very well by Prof. Donatus I. Nwoga, in his article, "Plagiarism and Authentic Creativity in West Africa." (1976:159-167):

Somebody has said something before - to his own time or to his own contemporaries; another person wants to say the same thing again - to his own time and to his own contemporaries. Some materials have been used before for a certain purpose; another person wants to use the same materials to give expression to another significance. (Nwoga 1976:165).

As members of the writing fraternity, we want to maintain our integrity as authors. We want to honour our profession. It is because of this that writers and critics attacked Yambo Ouoleguem and Camara Laye when the two plagiarized works by European novelists. Ouoleguem, in his novel, *Le Devoir de Violence*, plagiarized the structure of Graham Greene's *It's a Battlefield*. He copied passages from it. The literary critic, Professor Sellin said: "no number of legal releases will render authentic the alleged Africanness of Ouologuem's book." (in Nwoga 1976:159).

Whereas some literary critics were hailing Camara Laye's novel, *Le Regard du roi* as *Kafkaesque*, Wole Soyinka dismissed Camara Laye

as unoriginal in it. Wole Soyinka said:

... most intelligent readers like their Kafka straight not geographically transposed ... it is truly amazing that foreign critics have contented themselves with merely dropping an occasional "Kafkaesque" - a feeble sop to integrity - since they cannot altogether ignore the more obvious imitativeness of Camara Laye's technique. (I think we can tell when the use of mere "influence" has been crossed). Even within the primeval pit of collective allegory consciousness, it is self-delusive to imagine that the progresses of these black and white pilgrims have sprung from independent creative stresses ... the contemporary interpreters of African themes have not truly assimilated the new idioms. It is merely naïve to transpose the castle to the hut. (Soyinka 32-1963:387-88).

There is a lot African writers owe other writers. Professor Donatus I. Nwoga cried out in 1976 and said that literary critics should rally together to stop it. He calls plagiarism "stealing" (Nwoga 1976:165). He demonstrates how Christopher Okigbo, in his entire literary career as a Nigerian poet, stole from other poets, including traditional African poets. He says:

It is an interesting scholarly exercises tracing these borrowings and parallels. But I have yet to see any critic who is so bothered with them that he casts doubt on the creativity of Okigbo and his "authentic Africanness." (Nwoga 1976:163)

A similar study of Jared Angira's poetry ought to be done. His creativity has been strengthened by his debts to Taban Lo Liyong, Yevtushenko, Christopher Okigbo, and Pablo Neruda. He walks in their shadow. I notice a lot of songs in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's later novels. They are songs by contemporary musicians. It is time critics studied them to show the interrelatedness of creativity in Kenya. Donald Nwoga shows how literary critics have analysed Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and demonstrated how he drew from the Igbo prayer over *Cola* into his novel (Nwoga 1976:164).

Expository writing is synthesizing of knowledge from diverse sources and disciplines. It comes from the experience of reading, reflection, conversation, study and research (Marius 1991:53). Through weary study the non-fiction author notices contradictions and inconsistencies of character in the play the novel or the autobiography he is studying.

The French critic, Ronald Barthes, has said that we can never write without taking into account what has been written. Richard Marius, says: "Writing takes place within a community of writers and readers and as part of an unfolding tradition" (Marius 1999:1). Most of our writers are amateurs. They do not know much about the art of writing. What are expected of them are the rules of the game in the literary process, how to use the debts they owe other writers. A good writer draws from his or her own experiences. Almost all teachers of writing agree that a writer's experience is expressed in his memories. The writer employs all our five senses. The good writer engages our imagination as readers. He helps us visualize what we read in the way Okot p'Bitek does in his poem, *Return the Bride Wealth*.

Language is the most important aspect of a text. A writer is first and foremost a researcher. The writer's first duty is to see. The second task is to record. Language is the tool of the writer. The writer is obedient to the Copyright Law of Kenya.

For Chinua Achebe it was not so much admiration for the colonial writers that made him take his pen to write. It was from the challenge they posed to him. He entered a quiet debate with Joyce Currey over the latter's novel called *Mr. Johnson*. When the novel was published, Chinua Achebe saw how it was received - with favourable comments largely from Western critics. Achebe was infuriated. The novel had glaring flaws which he noticed. He resolved to write a better novel than Currey's from an African perspective. (Duerden and Pieterse 1988:4).

Ngugi acknowledges his debt to Peter Abrahams. He learnt the technique of making his stories move from Peter Abrahams. He studied D.H. Lawrence when he was composing his *The River Between*. From D.H. Lawrence, he learnt the technique of bringing out what my lecturer, James E. Stewart, used to call "the thingness in things." Ngugi learnt the technique of probing the soul of human life, nature and the environment.

The Nigerian literary critic, Ben Obumselu has demonstrated in one of his essays the big debt Ngugi owes to Joseph Conrad (Typescript 1973). This is a debt which Ngugi himself acknowledges. Does it amount to plagiarism? He acknowledges the debt and says he likes Joseph Conrad's questioning stance: of action and the morality of action. But all in all, Ngugi's greatness as a novelist, a playwright and an essayist comes from his ability to exploit his subject matter. He found suitable material for his books from the history of his people, Agikuyu. He found a debate among them of marrying the values of the white master and the African colonized and coming up with a synthesis. In the 1930s, this debate raged over female circumcision (Wanjala 1980:34). Ngugi was a Christian convert at his impressionable age. When he was writing *The River Between* he toyed with the central doctrine of the Christian culture and wanted to jigsaw it into the Gikuyu culture. In the manner of handling these subjects, Ngugi looked for models from other fiction writers, who happened to have been the two English novelists, D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad.

## PROSE FICTION

There are several courses in University studies dealing with Prose Fiction. In the 1974/1975 Academic year, for example, there were courses like *The African Novel* which was compulsory for 3-1-1 and 3-2-2 students. The course covered the African novel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly in English, and in English translation, with the related prose writing, shorter fiction, autobiography and critical and theoretical matter relating to the emergence, contents, and form of this work. Texts studied included works from Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Cyprian Okwensi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Peter Abrahams, Alex la Guma, Zeke Mphahlele, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, Jacobson, Mongo Beti, Camara Laye and Sembene Ousmane. There was a course called East African Writing in which contemporary East African fiction, drama and verse of contemporary and recorded oral literature were studied. It was also a study of the cultural and historical background of contemporary literature in East Africa. Biographies and autobiographies and socio-political writings formed an integral portion of the course.

To teach East African prose, literary scholars have had to realize that it is part of the corpus of African literature in general. Indeed it is taught with the classic novel in mind, which has evolved into a course in European literature for the University of Nairobi. East African prose is a part of what was initially called Eastern African Literature. In the year 1973/1974 students in the first year took Eastern African literature as a part of their two papers in their first year of study. The paper aimed at examining East African literature from Ethiopia to Mozambique, as it reflected the East African situation in its traditional, colonial and independence eras. The paper was divided into three courses:-

(a) Oral Literature (One lecture a week in the first term)

This will introduce the students to the oral expression as the basis of traditional life as well as take-off point for modern African cultures. The students will be introduced to the major genres in their social context; the

dominant themes as they emerge from a study of specific texts together with recorded live performances of such texts; performances and composition; audience performer relationship; concepts of tradition and traditional criticism, status content and occasion, e.t.c.; parallels and contrasts between oral art and contemporary mass media like Radio, Television and Cinema. And finally, contemporary oral compositions.

(b) Background to East African Literature (One lecture a week for 3 terms)

The aim of this course is to examine the themes and issues which emerge from social commentaries, autobiographies, literary criticism e.t.c. This would include writers such as Kenyatta, Nyerere, Blixen, Odinga; Taban, Ngugi, Nazareth; Huxley, Kariuki and important articles in journals and anthologies.

(c) The Written Literature of Eastern Africa

A study of written literature since Independence. Fiction (e.g. Ngugi, Kibera, Serumaga, Worku, Honwana, Farah), poetry (e.g. Okot, Angira, Oculi, Taban Lo Liyong) and Drama (e.g. Serumaga, Ruganda, Hussein). An examination of the dominant themes and cultural issues in their literary expression. Study of the literature dealing with the students' own environment is the most relevant introduction to the understanding of literary forms.

Some of the questions asked about East African literature are mere speculations. For example, in 1965, Gerald Moore asked readers whether there was exile literature in East Africa. He tried to answer his own question: "East Africa has produced very little writing which could be placed in this category. *Kenya Land Sunshine* and *Child of Two Worlds* may be exceptions. Even *Facing Mount of Kenya*, though it was written in exile and much of it is a kind of extended argument with the invisible European reader, is filled so strongly with a sense of Kikuyu highlands and their radiant rain washed light that it manages to annihilate the distance which separates it from Africa. (Gerald Moore 1966)

Gerald Moore did not delve into the uniqueness of *Facing Mount Kenya* as a work of literature. He failed to see the book as one of the most articulate defences of African cultural practices. But he noticed an aspect

of Kenyan writing which has remained true to this day. Writing in the foreword to his volume of short stories published in 1975, Ngugi wa Thiongo demonstrated his inability to write 'exile' literature.

In March 1965, Pat Howard made statements on East African literature which showed that the literature of the area had matured. At the same time she was writing no one expected East Africa to produce such works as *Origin of East Africa* which had been edited by David Cook, a lecturer in the English Department at Makerere University which had been written in the mid-sixties. She wrote:

Six years ago, when I was helping to plan a special commonwealth literature supplement in Britain, there seemed little to say about East Africa, although Nigeria and South Africa could claim each a full critical article. It remains true that West Africa may have produced longer, more full-length novels, and greater extremes of English style (from Tutuola to Achebe). But it now emerges that East Africa is producing a style which for grace and exactness does not mean uniformity or pedantry, but rather a suitability to the subject being treated; the grace not floweriness that tires but a real elegance which rouses real admiration.

The publication of *Origin East Africa* marked the flowering of Ngugi's short story form. Ngugi is said to have written prose fiction because he had been moved by the bloodshed and violence of the Emergency period in colonial Kenya. While studying for his degree in English literature at Makerere College, he wrote "The Village Priest," 'Gone with Draught,' 'A Meeting in the Dark,' and 'The Martyr'. His other short story, 'The wind' which was published in *Penpoint* (March 1961) has never been reprinted. But Cook and Okenimkpe say that Ngugi revised the short stories from *Origin East Africa* for publication in *Secret Lives*. He edited out terms which were derogatory to his people. He revised the content of the story entitled, 'The Village Priest':

This sequence (of first publishing in a Makerere University college magazine which was later to be called *Penpoint* and *Dhana* and in *Origin of East Africa* and *Secret Lives*) provides valuable evidence of Ngugi's development as a writer. He revised these stories for appearance in book form, tightening the phrasing, and pruning wording that seemed to labour a point or oversimplify emotional subtleties.

In his letter to *Transition* IV (1965) No. 2, entitled, "A Lament to East Africa." Taban lo Liyong bemoaned East African Literary barrenness. He wished East Africa could have a literary tradition that would compare with those of Europe, North America, the Middle East, South and West Africa. The only indigenous African writers that came to Taban lo Liyong's mind were, Grace Ogot, Okot p'Bitek, with his Acholi novel *Lak Tar*, and Ngugi was Thiong'o. his vision of the East African scene was:-

Homer in Khaki shorts; Virgil in Monkey toga; Dante in a witch-doctor's garb; Shakespeare who speaks a little Karamojong, less Akikuyu, Swahili and Runyankore; a Milton without the eye handicap; a T.S. Eliot who knows Etesot... I mean the black Orpheuses (Taban lo Liyong in *Transition* 19:11)

He shows that if the reader of East African literature in the mid-sixties was told, at gun-point, to produce names of East African writers, he would have given those of Rebeka Njau, Grace Ogot and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Taban says of Ngugi's two early novels: "*Weep Not Child*" and "*The River Between*" by James Ngugi, as we all know, are fictional treatment of the Kenya problems." (Taban Lo Liyong, *The Last Word* 1969) As a follow-up to Taban's discussion of East African backwardness in creativity, Bren Hughes showed in January 1968, that there was a need for more writing to be done in the area to facilitate a widespread cultural awakening. He called for more sharpened critical attitudes and greater powers of observation in creative writers, as well as a general disciplining of artistic methods among them.

The criticism of the novel in English is much more sophisticated than the criticism of prose in Kiswahili. Jay Kitsao of the Department of Linguistics and African languages dominated this area for sometime. He believed that the novel tradition in Kiswahili was new. His M.A. and Ph.D. theses are analyses in the field of stylistics. He classified authors' works and sometimes made mistakes on the genres of the works he chose to study. It was not clear to Kitsao whether Robert's *Kusadikia* and *Wasifu wa Binti Saad* were novels, autobiographies, or allegories using the fable as a literary form. He discussed the influences of earlier novelists like M.S. Mohamed on the later novelists, but his stylistic comments on the issue were exaggerated in many places.



## POPULAR FICTION IN EAST AFRICA

To be asked to address any gathering on popular literature means being asked to address it on literature in which characters are trade unionists, workers, students, prostitutes, and street children. There is the issue of self-censorship in which writers want to maintain a certain position and promote a certain taste. Writers are also state functionaries, in which case they do not want to anger the authorities into sending them into exile, to jail or to the gallows. But there are literary hacksters who write to entertain, have and make money in a cynical way.

The term "popular literature" found itself in the criticism of African Literature in the mid 1940's when the colonial Governors of East Africa met to examine the dearth of reading materials for Africans. They sought to provide literature and textbooks for Africans and Asians.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1945, a meeting of Directors of Education took place in Kampala, Uganda, and resolved that an inter-territorial organization was required to advise the colonial governments in East Africa on the kinds of literature that were to be produced to cater for the need of textbooks, language books, and books for the general reader. On the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1945, they invited Elspeth Huxley to enquire into the needs of East African countries, regarding popular literature, and to make proposals on how the needs could be met. She submitted a report which, *inter alia*, recommended the setting up of an East African Literature Bureau to "produce books and other publications for the African population of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and where necessary, to stimulate and assist in the production of literature by other agencies."

Huxley made recommendations for printing, distribution of books, and for setting up a lending library service throughout East Africa. In 1947, Mr. C.G. Richards worked out Huxley's recommendations into a detailed

scheme. He became the Bureau's first director in 1948. He set out to promote popular literature, its total flow, especially the flow of "desirable literature," to encourage research, and make the Bureau act as a Literary Agency. It would edit and put into publishable shape materials for publishing textbooks in English and in the four languages of the East African community (Swahili, Luganda, Kikuyu, Dholuo-Gang). It would run a fortnightly magazine in the above languages, distribute books for popular readership through sales and libraries. The Bureau would encourage literary creativity through offering prizes and other awards to notable talents.

Popular literature, in this case, included adapted novels, original stories, plays, written by Africans, and having an African setting. It was written in simple English. The Bureau published books on the achievements of European explorers, missionaries, and administrators. The series reflected the bias of its originators. Books in indigenous languages covered a multitude of subjects: Agriculture, Civics, Family Welfare, Economics, Commerce, Biographies of famous men, Geography, Language, Law, Literacy, History, Health, Medicine, Poetry, Politics, Religion, Science, Sociology.

Dr. C.G. Richards retired in 1963 and Mr. Noah Sempira, the Book Production Officer in the Uganda Branch of the EALB, became the Director of the EALB, when the Bureau assumed its modified form in April 1964. With the demise of the East African Community, the EALB was split on territorial lines, giving place to the Kenya Literature Bureau, in July 1977. It enjoys a parastatal status in the Ministry of Education, and carries on the functions of the defunct EALB.

The Bureau assisted in the development and dissemination of Swahili culture by making available, in print, major Swahili works which were in manuscript form. The writing of the books in Swahili and other indigenous languages was encouraged by the East African Inter-territorial Language Committee which consisted of Europeans and Africans. Members of this committee re-wrote the manuscripts and polished them so much that

the final editions of the publications read like translations from works written originally by Europeans. The creative works in indigenous languages were too short to engage the readers for a long time. Those African authors who wrote in their indigenous languages did not expect a large market. They were themselves often so alienated from the cultural traditions of their people that their modes of composition were alien to the African styles of narrative.

The East African Publishing House was launched with the publication of the Swahili edition of J.M. Kariuki's book, *The Mau Mau Detainee*, and later thrived on titles on the Mau Mau war. These included Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* and Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi*. Since 1966, a series of works were being published by the East African Publishing House. They included the novels of Grace E.A. Ogot, *The Promised Land* and the works of Okello Oculi, *Orphan* and *Prostitute*. Grace Ogot also published short stories, *Land Without Thunder*, with East African Publishing House.

The launching of the African Writer's Series, on the other hand, brought East Africa into the limelight, by publishing Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* in 1964. It was the first novel to be published by an East African writer. It won a special award at the Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, in 1965. The novel was followed by *The River Between* and then *A Grain of Wheat*. The last title was inspired by the same verse in the Bible which Andre Gide had borrowed: "And thus *The Grain Never Dies*." Ngugi's books published between 1964 and 1968 were imbued with the historical realism which we find in novels by other African writers. They talk about what might have happened in the Independence struggle.

*The River Between* is a novel of conflict, set in pre-independence Kenya. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is not a Christian novelist. The European characters in his books are depicted in a detestable way. European missionaries occupy a limited space in his books. *Weep Not Child* (1964) is situated in the context of an African Revolution. The main characters in the novel are Ngotho, Boro, Njoroge. Ngotho is an African worker on a European

farm owned by Mr. Howlands. The novel portrays African nationalist politicians who plot a strike. It is an account of a revolution as perceived by a schoolboy, Njoroge. The historical background to the novel shows that prisoners at Hola camp were beaten to death in July 1962. The book deals with black/white relations. This is represented by the conversation between Stephen Howlands and Njoroge, at a football match. This is a typical relationship between an African pupil and a European pupil. It also brings out the racial situation in which African and European children go to different schools. The scene at the end of the novel is telling. In it, Njoroge is prevented from hanging himself by the timely appearance of his mother. This is the scene from which the novel gets its title, *Weep Not Child*. Njoroge stands between his mother and his girlfriend, and he is restrained from committing suicide.

A meeting to explain the strike is held in a village. Ngotho attends it, and does not contain himself when a rich African farmer, Jacobo, interrupts the meeting. He is flanked by a European policeman. He asks the strikers to go back to work. The last book that Ngugi publishes in the European realist tradition is *Petals of Blood*.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a Kikuyu. Many members of his family participated in the struggle for Independence. They were arrested by the colonial police. What he recounts in his four books is based on what actually took place during his childhood between 1938 and 1953, the years preceding the Mau Mau and its repression, and the Emergency (1950 to 1960). In the latter part, Ngugi was a student in schools and later at Makerere University College, Kampala. His books were written after Independence (1963) and, like Chinua Achebe's, Sembene Ousmane's and Alex La Guma's, they are among the first historic novels talking about the African struggle for political independence.

In discussing myth in African literature above (Wanjala, mimeograph 1984), we have shown how East African writers exploit the rich tradition of oral literature. Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* (which gets its title from Kim Chi Ha's poetry) and *Matigari* exploit Agikuyu Oral

Literature. *Matigari* refers to the remains of the gun which routed the whiteman and to the freedom fighters who remained in the forest. These books are published by British-based multinational book publishers and other subsidiaries.

The historical event which changed the publishing history of East Africa is tied to the publication of *Son of Woman* (1971) and *Son of Woman in Mombasa* by Charles Mangua. Mangua has now published *Kenyatta's Jiggers*.

The period after the publication of *Son of Woman* was marked by a change of attitude towards popular arts in East Africa. Andrew Gurr says:

The new kind of identity that Dodge Kiunnu (the hero of the novel) offers, is a sort of challenge to the kind of seriousness which the earlier writers have up to now taken for granted (Gurr *Sunday Nation*, May 7, 1972:31)

In Kenya, Charles Mangua, Meja Mwangi, and David Maillu were lumped together as popular writers (Cosmas Muchanga, 1976). Maillu's *Broken Drum* has made a basis on which Dr. Evan Mwangi, a renowned Kenyan literary critic, wrote his M.A. Thesis in literature. Osija Mwambungu, the author of *Veneer of Love* was the "Maillu" of Tanzania (A.P. Bullengo 30<sup>th</sup> September 1975). *Veneer of Love* is an account of Dancun Ngusa's educational career. It is a story of childhood in colonial Tanzania. Its epigraph reads as follows:

All big things have little names, such as life and death, love and hate, peace and war, day and night, scorn, anger, hope, dawn, home, shame, and so on.

Euphrase Kezilahabi, the author of the Swahili novel, *Rosa Mistika*, wrote in the popular tradition. The novel was banned from Tanzania schools. *Rosa Mistika* is a Tanzanian young woman who fails to cope with the changing moral values around her. She ends up in prostitution. The book was seen as corruptive to the youth of Tanzania.

Dr. Geoffrey Reeves welcomed the new literature in the popular vein:

The often vitriolic criticism levelled against (popular literature) is partly the product of the feeling that (popular writers have) somehow denied the true vocation of the African intellectual writer and produced "a cacophony fed on neo-colonialist pulp." (Unpublished Ms. 1979).

The term "popular literature" was used in the 1970's. Dr. T.P. Gorman used it in reference to Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (Gurr, Zirimu 1973:197-198). As a poem, *Song of Lawino* struck the critic as less serious in intent than the poems he had read from the continent. It did not pander to the cliches of the period in which the view was that literature should change the extant economic order. It was intelligible to a relatively wide audience; it was generally comprehensible with the first reading, and it drew extensively on figurative sources, primarily metaphorical, from speech form. It reflected "a community sensibility."

*Song of Lawino* was popular in commercial terms. It sold between 100,000 and 150,000 copies as total sales in the mid-seventies. It only compared with *Son of Woman*, a novel which marked the *tour de force* in the composition of East African prose fiction:

Charles Mangua's *Son of woman*, in spite of its treacherously bourgeois conclusion, looks already like a solid beginning for an authentically popular application of the novel form in East Africa (Angus Calder, 1971).

The book won a prize competition for novels organized by the East African Publishing House. It was published before its predecessor, *A Tail in the Mouth*, and it has since been followed by the author's *Son of Woman in Mombasa*. The former sold over 10,000 copies in the first few weeks after its publication.

The novels explored the theme of individual alienation. At the same time they divorced the writer-intellectual from the responsibilities of the artist as we have known them among committed writers. The works have no socially active role, no self-definition, and do not delineate the nature of the major formation and relations in an African Society. Charles Mangua, for example, does not provide literary and ideological solutions to the most important issues of our time.

But it must not be forgotten that popular literature of the 1970's came when the world capitalist system was undergoing a series of major crises, with the international monetary instability and American currencies. Inflation and unemployment were major problems and sources of increased antagonism. In the United States of America, there was considerable opposition to racism and foreign aggression. In the peripheral capitalist societies, the comprador classes resorted to mobilization of "tribe" for class purposes in order to control the tensions and opposition generated by under-development and inequality (Reeves n.d: 262).

The popular literature found a ready market. It was a mirror of society for readers who wanted "people of their kind" portrayed in literature. (G.K. Maina 1975). Books in the popular vein were simple in style and language: "interesting books which make the angry laugh." (G.K. Maina 1975). Readers looked to popular books as a drug, a basis of escape from the stark reality, and also a basis for self-criticism and restraint. Authors were seen as family psychiatrists moral philosophers, and youth advisors. For the first time East Africans were worried about the harmful role of literature, the destructive influence of sex novels, sex films and commercialized art. A correspondent in the daily press said:

We parents are worried about the books our children read in their bedrooms and secretly at school. They are concentrating more on dirty literature than Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Musyimi *Daily Nation*, June 1976).

This is the issue of pornography in literature which Christian theologians, Marxists and other scholars debate at length. To the Liberal Western view "Pornography ... has no aim beyond sexual stimulation." (Biggsby in Roger Fowler 1997: 189)

Pornoaesthetics, whether Kenyan or Western came under censure. The books to be censored were to include *Woman of Rome* and David Maillu's *After 4.30*. readers wanted *Casanova*, copies of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, *Men only* and *Women Only* to be banned (Musyimi 1976). This thinking led to the banning of some works in the popular tradition in

Tanzania. It was argued that popular literature was against the development of the country. Tanzania did not want to promote moral decay of Western capitalist values by allowing popular literature to be read:

It is not possible to expect anything else except a ridiculous copy of the Western capitalist culture. Get on the road to socialism and leave the privileged class no alternative but to join the masses and peasants in that socialist reconstruction. (Ruhumbika 1974:)

The argument was that good literature enjoyed a dialectical relationship with reality. It stood in opposition to negative values. But sterile and impotent literature offered no real opposition to the ailing social system. A writer was alienated in this respect if he armed himself with the sterile and impotent values when writing about the society. He was in effect capitulating to the *Status quo* when the need was to develop a critical consciousness and a sense of identity with the majority of the people who sought to recreate their societies. The public, on their part, could misread the writer because they were led to look for sex symbols in literature. This was an area of alienation that Bertolt Brecht talks about and argues that literature combats alienation in a capitalist state by instilling a critical consciousness in the people. It fights against the debilitating social reality and seeks to change it. The Brechtian theory of alienation, especially as it relates to theatre, countered the Aristotelian theories of tragedy which argued that good theatre provided an escape “from a distressing but real world into a consoling but equally real illusion,” (David Caute 1971:179).

Bertolt Brecht’s theories of epic theatre stressed technique in theatre. Bertolt Brecht is contrasted with Aristotle and referred to as “the classic modernist,” (Michael Hollington in Roger Fowler, 1997: 75). The spectator actively enjoyed the making of art, and identified “the active creative moment.” (David Caute 1971:179). Brecht’s dialectical theatre expects something more than the Aristotelian theory of *Catharsis* (Martin Esslin, *Choice of Evils, Passivism*). For Brecht, the consumer of literature and drama should recognize man’s alienation in them and disapprove of it



although carried away by the trauma of ways and means of ending it. In Brecht's terms he as a member of the audience must be able to say:

This human being's suffering moves me, because there would have been a way out for him. This is great art: nothing here seems inevitable - I am laughing about those who weep on the stage, weeping about those who laugh (Martin Esslin: 63-64).

The absence of *Verfremdung* in literature in turn reinforces *Entfremdung*. The public, when it is green, participates in the acts of literature to the point of entering into the acts and losing their critical sense in them.

In popular literature, sex is boldly described. This is gleefully enjoyed by readers who are themselves vulgar and dirty in their approach to life. The hundreds and thousands who read popular literature look for an artificial paradise which this literature offers and they use it to escape the reality and the hell in which they live. In reading popular literature, they move easily from the contemplation of a character like Dodge Kiunyu in *Son of Woman* to the imitation of him.

We cannot condone the passive mirroring of life in literature because, then, the genius of the writer has gone to sleep. Writers, gifted men and women, should not subordinate their vision to popular and vulgar taste. They should entertain, delight, but instruct. It is evident that writers would achieve good didactic results if they knew what their audience truly wanted. They should see their works as the antidote against anomie, alienation, and insensitivity. Readers should not find passive happiness, fulfillment and a sense of integration in reading popular magazines, cheap literature, and crime-detective novels. The writer must promote values that can be defended. He should not assume that the masses lack sophistication and talk glibly about crises in the human condition.

Criticism of literature is agreed on the demeaning image of man as the target of inferior writers. But there is a way in which writers of popular literature could go for healthy values, as we see in Black and Coloured South African literature.

The study of Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* and Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* shows that South African culture is uniquely urbanized. *Drum Magazine* has been the symbol of "the new African cut adrift from the reserve - urbanized, eager, fast-talking and brash." (Lewis Nkosi 1983:8). Grim stories of farm labour, brutalities, police torture and township riots proliferate *Drum*.

By the 1960's, like their South African counterparts, East African writers were dealing with the serious problems affecting urban dwellers. Their writings dealt with a burgeoning urban culture. Wandegeya, in Kampala, was fast-industrializing (*Makererean*, September 3, 1966), with its "hammering, clattering, clinking and engine-roaring. Charcoal stoves were being made from old tins, iron sheets, and scrap material from the Volkswagen graveyard nearby." An urban proletarian culture has developed, as we see in the novels by Meja Mwangi. In September 1967, Wilson Kyalo Mativo wrote a short story which was later developed into a film. It was called, *The Park Boy*. Bren Hughes, writing about it, said:

Here is a poor boy who is the sole support of his family tries to live upon the gratitude of the rich - he directs the drivers of cars into the much needed parking bays - but is ruthlessly kidnapped, by the rich to make the rich richer and himself and his family poorer. (Bren Hughes 1968:8).

A common bar goer called *Son of the Soil* goes to the restaurant, and he discusses the bombing of Iraq by the allied forces (Wahome Mutahi, *Sunday Nation*, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1991:1). A banal argument ensues and leads to a fight using bottles, referred to by the narrator as "real missiles."

The above episode is about a lack of comprehensive information on the war in the Gulf amongst the *Wananchi*. The agent of ignorance in the episode is the radio - "Radio Ugali" - and the fact that one of the characters reads the newspaper upside down.

The second episode, which features the *lumpen proletariat*, concerns an ordinary kiosk keeper who orders a cart-ful of cabbage, from "Marikiti", the vegetable market place near Race Course Road. He hires

a Mkokoteni driver to bring the vegetables to his kiosk, as he is expecting many customers - University students - at his kiosk. His empty boasting, about the food he is going to sell and impress his customers with, hits a snag. The *Mkokoteni* driver is crushed by a bus until he is a "write-off." The kiosk keeper hears the news of the crush and goes to hospital, not because he wants to see the casualty, but because he wants his cabbages back.

This scene, which was created on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation radio programmes on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1991 was a reflection of the minutiae of life of the *lumpen proletariat*. It has a topicality which lacks in serious novels, drama and poetry, except perhaps the rib-tickling comedy on T.V, *Reddykyulas*. A detailed portrayal of speech forms is recorded. The kiosk keeper speaks English and Kiswahili with a Luo accent. Instead of "Kidogo" (a little) he says "kodogo". He says "Moridadi" instead of "maridadi." He calls "cabbage", "kobiji" and for him "decoration is "dekoresoni."

The text is full of commonplace parlance. The kiosk keeper plays with the words "sukuma wiki" and calls that vegetable "sukuma mwaka." He says of himself, "mimi niko straight", and "haraka kama stima." These are commonplace similes which bring out the trivia and absurdism of popular culture. The realism of the *marikiti* scene is conjured in the references to common vegetables consumed by the common man: "pilipili hoho", and others. The protagonist's word for "kufukuza" is "kupunguza." This episode came from a TV programme sponsored by the Kenya National Assurance. The programme encouraged *Wananchi* to insure their carts, even if they are as ordinary as *mkokoteni*. The two examples of popular culture show that in their composition the "writers" dwell on the ordinary lives of ordinary people. The slum life is the lifespring of urban literature. Popular literature is not included in University syllabuses. It is only mentioned in passing when literary academics are discussing "committed" literature. But my books, *For Home and Freedom* (1980), *The Season of Harvest* (1978), articles in the *Literary Forum* and radio programmes by Egara Kabaji, and the research by

Dr. Evan Mwangi have given this genre a real place in East African literary criticism. From the classical times, popular literature has been relegated to a secondary place because of its inferiority in style and the moral attitude of its producers. Writing in his times, Aristotle distinguished popular literature from serious literature when he talked about comedy, parodies and tragedy. He categorized literature according to the aspects of life, which it reflected:

We must be represented either as better than we are, or worse, or as the same kind of people as ourselves (Dorsch, 1965:33).

In Aristotle's analysis comedy was synonyms with popular literature and it was inferior to tragedy: "(It represents) men as worse as they are nowadays, tragedy as better." (Dorsch, 1965:33). Whereas, for Aristotle, all literature was an imitation of men in action, popular literature reflected the acts of comedians, revellers, the meaner sort of people, the ridiculous. Included, in this definition of comedy by Aristotle, were satires which lowered the dignity of literature by portraying "maimed and diseased low characters and low diction." (Dorsch, 1965:7). The literature in this tradition was described in Aristotle's time as "a purveyor of rag-bag language and rag-bag characters." (Dorsch 1965:7-8).

Comedy is different from tragedy. The latter portrays the doings of noblemen. It reflects the acts of men in dignified verse. Aristotle defines tragedy as:

A representation of an action that is worth serious attention, complete in itself, and with some amplitude; in language enriched by a variety of artistic devices appropriate to the several parts of the play; presented in the form of action, not narration; by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of such emotions." (Dorsch 1965: 38-39).

He and contrasts tragedy with comedy. He distinguishes great literature from the inferior through the characters and the actions it presents. He shows that what is more popular is always the more vulgar, and what is less vulgar is designed for a better audience. That form which is designed to appeal to everybody is extremely vulgar.

When critics discuss popular culture, they take into account its sociological values, commercial values as well as its aesthetic values. In his *An Introduction to the African Novel*, Professor Eustace Palmer from the University of Sierra Leone, is only prepared to discuss African novelists who use an appropriate style and evince sufficient technical competence. Novelists who deserve a place in his study include Ngugi, Achebe, Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Ayi Kwei Armah, Elechi Amadi and Gabriel Okara. Cyprian Ekwensi does not deserve a place in the book. According to Palmer, Ekwensi: "Mars his work by vulgarizing his style to suit the needs of a mass audience. Although he has been reputed to refer to himself as the African Charles Dickens, his literary affinities are really with the fourth-rate American sex and crime fiction. His art is that of the sensational thriller and it is imitative rather than imaginative. (Palmer 1972: XI-XII). Commercial considerations of popular culture compare very well, whether you are discussing the title of a heavy-weight champion whose fights come with a lot of money, or the star from Hollywood, and the prose writer whose fiction is being serialized in the popular press. Popular literature takes its cue from popular magazines. In fact, Cyprian Ekwensi is the "doyen" of the Onitsha Market Literature which has interested such great literary scholars as Professors Emmanuel Obiechina, Donatus Nwoga, Berth Lindfors and Ulli Beier. The Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi has seen this area as a fit phenomenon for study and comment. Richard Hoggart once said that popular literature provides more than undiluted fantasy and sensation (David Lodge 1972:490). Popular fiction goes into passion, but it is crude and does not observe the rules of composition.

A major study of popular Arts in Africa in the mid - 1980's was done by Karin Barber of the University of Birmingham, U.K. It was commissioned by the ACLALS, ACLS, SSRC Joint Committee on African Studies for presentation at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, October 30, November 2, 1986, Madison, Wisconsin. She drew from the large number of PhD. theses which had been completed on the subject. While she was preparing this paper, she visited with us at the Institute of

African studies, University of Nairobi, and we exchanged notes on her research topic. She said in her paper:

Popular arts penetrate and are penetrated by political, economic and religious institutions in ways that may not always be predictable from our own experience (1986:2).

According to her study, popular arts are expressive arts. They communicate eloquently, through radio, cassette tapes and live performances. Like Aristotle, she mentions "comedy", although she does not poise the term against "tragedy." She uses the term "popular arts" more broadly to include theatre, instrumental and vocal music, painting and scriptures, written fiction, decorated bread labels, religious doctrines, portrait photography, house decoration, coffins, jokes and bicycles. (Barber 1986:9). Popular arts are art forms that "are produced by the people, consumed by the people or both." (Barber 1986:28). They are receptacles of political attitudes of the producers of such arts towards the people who are their audience. They should not be confused with the traditional rural folk culture. Unlike the latter, they form a popular mass culture consisting of imported forms of entertainment accessible to ordinary people. Their examples include films (American, Indian, Chinese romance, thrillers, and pornographic). They include music on record or cassette tapes.

Popular literature, on the other hand, consists of novels, mainly thrillers and romances. Barber gives the examples of the popular fiction of Accra, Onitsha Market literature of the 1950's and 1960's in Nigeria and the popular fiction of Nairobi and other cities of East Africa.

Popular arts are also produced by the elite and taken to the people, free of charge, as part of propaganda packages for development and conscientization. Popular arts include didactic films which are shown to masses to popularize government policies. Fiction, in this tradition, is produced for graduates of Government, literacy programmes, cultural artefacts which are produced by the people and not consumed by them also fall into this category. They include carvings, paintings, and music

texts. The final example of popular arts are cultural artefacts which are produced and consumed by the people themselves. The creative books by David G. Maillu which are composed, produced, and consumed locally, fall into this category.

According to Karin Barber folk culture is communal, participatory, and more or less extinct. It comprises of oral texts, myths, folk stories and songs. It is a still-cultural resource for ordinary people whether rural or urban (Barber 1986:9). But popular culture can be defined in terms of the interests it seeks to serve. It must, however, belong to the people. For this, she says, "Truly popular art... is art which furthers the cause of the people by opening their eyes to their objective situation in society." (Barber 1986:7). It conscientizes them. An example of this role of popular art is "Development Theatre", which she discusses at length in the paper. But she reminds us of the Brechtian theories of *Entfremdung* when she sees popular arts as vehicles of "a false consciousness." She distinguishes popular art from the people's art.

Popular arts emanate from and pertain to the people. They appeal to the common people (a class or group of classes), or all the people (the entire population of the nation (1986:22). But she agrees with Aristotle that the popular arts can be "profane, carefree and abandoned." She agrees with Professor Bigsby by saying that they stimulate the emotions rather than the intellect. Literature in this tradition is "simple ... is easy reading, presenting itself in easily digestible, entertaining form and confirming prejudices rather than challenging them." (1986:22). Popular fiction may not be critical, nor directly concerned with the great public issues of the day. It is not complex when we talk about it in terms of form.

Popular arts are syncretic in the sense that they incorporate elements not previously present in indigenous traditions. They are "imitative rather than imaginative," to fall back to Palmer's term. While African artists raid European art forms for imitation, they do not face their materials with the same artistic discipline as do their European mentors. Here Barber echoes Aristotle in his view that form is a key ingredient of art. It

is by its form that we can say a work of literature is a play, a novel, a poem, or a letter. The trivia in popular literature is not only in its content; it is also in its form. Barber agrees with classical literary critics that creative works in the popular vein can be “dynamic”, “everchanging”, “playful”, with “undefined forms”, as opposed to the committed literature (Barber, 1986:48).

The term “syncretism” in Karin Barber’s study is another name for the rose, “cultural brokage.” Chinua Achebe has used it in his preface to the oral and written texts edited by Professor W. Whitely for the Oxford University Press. Popular arts thrive on an active exploitation of their unofficial status. They use new forms to express a new consciousness. Unlike traditional cultural expressions which are rooted in local culture, popular arts transcend geographical, ethnic, and national boundaries. “Cultural brokage” involves conscious choices and combinations in the process of composition. By this process the foreign is domesticated and made part of the existing culture.

Karin Barber provides a theoretical framework against which she analyses popular arts. The cities are, for her, the principal seats of the popular arts. But the countryside, too, has popular peasant cultures expressed in songs and dramatic enactment (Barber 1986:26). Peasant cultures move to the urban centres where they are influenced by foreign entertainment genres. The latter are recast into new styles and acquire new emphases which reflect the changing situation of the urban workers. The latter, in turn, carry them to the rural areas where they are adopted by the village youth.

The critic lays emphasis on the popular arts which are produced and consumed by the people, and speak with “the people’s voice.” But, in these, she includes the commercial popular fiction from Kenya, the Ghanaian highlife concert party complex, the Onitsha Market Literature, and the music and theatre in South Africa, focusing on the Black townships of Soweto.



Barber does not discuss the popular arts genre by genre. Her purpose in the paper is to identify features in popular Arts which make them a field of study. She discusses the context of producing popular arts, and analyses the specificity of their production. She examines studies which give full weight to specific and social context, and comes up with a methodology of studying popular arts. Can we say that popular art is so free that it ignores the conventions and says what people think? Barber warns us:

What is needed, however, is an approach that recognizes that popular arts have their own conventions through which real experience is transformed, articulated and made communicable. In other words, if they use elements from the established traditions, they do so in accordance with their own principles in order to construct their own meanings in their own way (Barber 1986:52).

In analyzing popular arts we should examine the precise ways in which “tradition” provides the underlying parameters of popular creativity in different cultures. We should examine characteristic aesthetic features of popular art as a whole. In her discussion of methodology she prescribes deconstruction, by which she argues that in the act of communication the literary text cannot be seen as a self-contained package of meaning available to the audience to unravel. The literary text is a forum. Readers interpret the situations and try them out. The audience creates a work of literature from the materials offered by the writer. Here, like Bertolt Brecht, Karin Barber advocates a critical debate in the audience with the creative materials before them. What she writes is instructive to critics of East African literature who situated their discussion on the popular literature of the 1970’s. But as Egara Kabaji and Evan Mwangi continue to show in their critical writings, the ever-growing nature of this literary tradition continues to draw our attention and call for a modification of our theoretical framework. In the 1970’s, the main actors in its production were Charles Mangua, David G. Maillu, Okot p’Bitek, Okello Oculi, and writers in new popular series published by multinational publishers. David G. Maillu’s books went in for passion. They were crude and evinced no sense of texture in their composition. The author sensationalized life without embellishing it with sufficient imagination. His books would not pass the first test set by Aristotle, Bertolt Brecht and Eustace Palmer

above. David Maillu produced about sixteen books a year in his mini-novel series. He sold over 100,000 copies in Tanzania within six months before he was banned in 1976. He is an author as well as a publisher, a one-man publisher. He published Kivutha Kibwana's *Utisi*. Hon. Professor Kivutha Kibwana's books were very much like David Maillu's. But his short stories were much better constructed than David Maillu's. They made a more skilful use of imagery. Kibwana published *Sugar Babies* using his pseudonym, Muli Mutiso.

In the popular tradition in East Africa were *Comb Books*, *Spear Books*, *Afromance*, *Crime Series*, *Pace Setters*, and *Drum Beat Series*. *Comb Books* were an example of products established in East Africa during the 1970's. Having been rejected by established writers, Maillu set up his company to publish his own books, and a few more of his friends. He published a series of paperbacks with some titles such as *After 4.30*, *My Dear Bottle*, *Unfit for Human Consumption*, *The Kommon Man*, *Kadosa*, No. These books sold in thousands.

East Africa's *Spear Books* include Rosemarie Owino's *Sugar Daddy's Lover*, Sam Kahiga's *Lover in the Sky*, Mwangi Ruheni's *Mystery Smugglers*, *The Love Root*, Magaga Alot's *A Girl Cannot Go on Laughing all the Time*. Mwangi Gicheru's *The Ivory Merchant*, Ayub Ndi's *A Brief Assignment*, Yusuf K. Dawood's *No Strings Attached*, Koigi wa Wamwere's *A Woman Reborn*, F. Saisi's *The Bhang Syndicate*, John Kiriamiti's *My Life in Crime*, Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube*, David Maillu's *Operation DXT*, Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman in Mombasa*, Charles K. Githae's *A Worm in the Head*, John Kiggia Kimani's *Life and Times of a Bank Robber*, Thomas Akare's *Twilight Woman*, and Chris Mwangi's *The Operator*. These books may have annoyed the clergy and other faithfuls, but they have helped to establish a mass culture in East Africa. They have provided a situation in which literary critics can discriminate bad from good literature.

Karin Barber says the Government of Tanzania encourages rural popular literature. In Nairobi, heaps of Western novels can be seen on the

pavements in reputable bookshops like the Textbook Centre, Book Point, Nakumatt and Savanis. Karin Barber draws from Ulla Schild's essay, "Words of Deception: Popular Literature in Kenya", (Ulla Schild 1980). Ulla Schild compares Kenya's popular literature with the Nigerian Onitsha Market Literature. The latter is found "charming, original, felicitous and funny": (1986:69). Kenya's popular fiction is "degrading trash", it is "slick, purposeful and calculated... trivia, soft porn, trite moralizing and cynicism." Ulla Schild argues that Kenya has a much stronger European influence than Nigeria. She discusses only the sub-genre of the romantic novelette which is deliberately imitative and dreary. She analyzes a literature by English writers who were hired by Trans-Africa publishers to hide behind African pseudonyms and churn out popular fiction for the gullible reader. She uses one genre to make her wild and general statements.

Ulla Schild correctly says that popular literature can best be studied in social, socio-psychological terms. The themes of the romances she studied are love, romance, marriage, morality, sex and adventure. She says the word "love" is contained in every title: *Hesitant Love*, *Love Music*, *Love and Tears* and *Prescription Love*. The typical heroines are airhostesses, female nurses, students, and rock singers. But as we have already observed, Kenyan popular literature does not seek to change the world around it nor to improve the state of art. It tends to "cement the *status quo*" (Schild 1980:28).

In her theoretical discussion, Karin Barber, cautions us against the view that popular literature is "direct; naïve; simple; vigorous; charming; vivid; unsophisticated; full of life ... *accessible* to a wide range of people." (Barber 1986:60). In analyzing Nigerian popular fiction she draws from the criticism of Emmanuel Obiechina who says: (Onitsha pamphlets are read by) the new literate class of elementary and grammar school boys and girls, low-level white-collar workers, primary school teachers, literate and semi-literate traders, mechanics, taxi-drivers (Obiechina 1972:10-11). In analyzing Kenyan popular fiction she draws from the work of the present lecturer at this convocation, where he says Kenyan popular novels

are read by “taxi drivers, cake sellers and shoe shine boys ... mechanics, low-grade teachers, secretaries, technicians and secondary school pupils.” (Wanjala 1980: 23). The elite who feel guilty about their own alienation from their societies recommend popular novels to each other (Mushi 3 March 1976). Popular fiction appears to the new literates who look for light, simple reading matter (Obiechina: 11). They either read popular fiction, watch football, go to films, dance or play darts. They read Kenyan writers as well as Western writers of popular fiction. The readers see the writer of popular literature as one of them.

Barber discusses *A Tail in the Mouth* by Charles Mangua, *For Mbatha and Rebecca* by David Maillu, and *A Girl Cannot go on Laughing All the Time* by Magaga Alot. She points out the fact that, in Kenyan literature, the village is “the moral true north, the standard by which the city is judged and found wanting.” (Barber 1986:73). She is right to focus on books by Charles Mangua, a Kenyan who has worked in Ivory Coast since early 1970’s. In *Son of Woman* he portrays a civil servant, Dodge Kiunyu, a Makerere graduate of geography. Kiunyu is orphaned from childhood when his mother falls from a moving vehicle and dies in the shanties of Nairobi where he is born. Dodge Kiunyu is forced out of his guardian’s home in Eastleigh and goes to the rural areas in order to join his grandmother, Wangui. But she is dead. He is adopted by missionaries and made to have access to education. He does well in school and joins Mangu High School, and then Makerere University. Kiunyu frequents brothels. He is a corrupt man, and it is a small wonder that he is a jailbird. Karin Barber has Dodge Kiunyu in mind when she writes:

The heroes (in Kenyan popular fiction) are often civil servants or other salaried employees. But they are always broke and they seem to have no prospects of doing better. The only way they can move is down ... the civil servant in *Son of Woman*, seems to gravitate inexorably towards the slums, prostitutes, drink and destitution. There is no upward mobility but a kind of gloomy relish in this extreme degradation. The most, it seems, that a fallen hero can hope for is to be reinstated (Soberer but poorer) in his old job (Barber 1986:75).

But Dodge Kiunyu’s fortune seems to be disguised by his involvement with Jack of Elementaita, the man who cheats Kiunyu out of some Kshs.

15,000/= . In trying to get even with Jack, Kiunyu stumbles onto money left by Jack after the latter's inadvertent death from a heart attack. Jack's death sends Kiunyu to prison and then to hospital where he meets his dying father. The money looted from Jack's house is instrumental in his and Tonia's easy settlement at the Coast, "happily-ever-after":

So there you are. You know all about me. Like mother like son. My mother was a whore and I am getting married to a whore. Honest, no kidding. I am going to marry Tonia just for the sake of it. Why shouldn't I? I am not kidding about the beach cottage either. We are going to buy one. (Charles Mangua 1971:159).

Dodge Kiunyu does not show any signs of maturity. A child of pre-marital pregnancy, Kiunyu breaks down when he sees his father on the latter's deathbed.

"Why are you crying?" the warder asks me. I have no words for him. His presence is redundant. He is wearing a puzzled face. His suffering is more than we can bear. I wish he'd live. Gosh! He is my father.

"What has moved you so that you beguile your cheeks with unchecked tears? Leave it to the women. They feel with their eyes." He said it so weakly and hoarsely that I just about gave up the ghost. This hot torrent of tears comes rushing down my cheeks and my nose is in a mess. I managed to say through my nose, "She is my mother. She..."

"Then you are ... you are Kiunyu, my son. You are my son. You are Kiunyu." (Charles Mangua 1971:138-139).

Kiunyu Senior killed a man and was sentenced to life imprisonment. His tearful re-union with his son brings out the sentimental side of his son's character. But throughout the novel, Kiunyu's curiosity is not that of the analytical mind, it is "that of the child-like person who cannot help life and ignoring all its rules." (Peter Nazareth, 1972:182).

Mr. Chairman, if we want to put East African popular literature in its historical perspective we must go back to titles which were published earlier than *Son of Woman*. We have to look at what the authors of autobiographies and reminiscences say.

Mugo Gatheru, for instance, is a writer who wrote his works in the early 1950s. He discusses his movement from the rural areas to the city in his autobiographical account, *Child of Two worlds*, just as Okot p'Bitek does in his Acholi novel *Tak Tar*. Leonard Kibera's short stories in *Potent Ash* portray quarantine on Africans under the Kipande system (apartheid-like pass system). The black man who stays in the Whiteman's servants' quarters, at work, is estranged from his rural life. He falls prey to city women. This is the story of Kabonde, the main character in Kibera's short story, in *Potent Ash*, "The Hill."

At their inception, East African literary works focused on moral values of the urban scene. Okello Oculi published a prose poem called *Prostitute*, and Okot p'Bitek, "*Song of Malaya*." In his poem, "Night women", of the late 1960's, Laban Erapu, the Ugandan poet, novelist and literary scholar who lives in South Africa, focussed on prostitutes, "ladies of twilight", who operate in a society which frowns upon prostitution:

They only live by night  
For in the day there's light  
That makes their skins look sore.  
Their courage which comes with the dusk goes (Laban Erapu,  
*Makererean* 3.9.66, p.4).

He adds:

They drink to drown their plight  
For they see no love.  
But a dizziness of alcohol, perfumes and flesh.

Seeing the abject life of prostitution, rural life seems to many people more positive as urban life more shocking. In fact, by the 1970's, readers of East African literature were more used to the positive aspect by elite writers. According to the established view, the writer identified positive values in the rural life as well as in the urban experience. If he is to write on city life his work has to have a power to burn through the layers of falsehood of urban values. He was to inject a virile sense of tradition into

the sterile city values. Whereas Charles Mangua's works are entertaining, they demean man's intelligence and dignity. They show the educated man in his most ridiculous posture. Although the works deal with issues like employment, racism, corruption and theft, they leave us completely hopeless about man's condition.

A university graduate in *Son of Woman* is portrayed as having no sense of self-employment. He indulges in senseless fights with prostitutes, and policemen. The vice which causes him to be forced out of his guardian's house in Eastleigh haunts him throughout his adult life. The episodes in which he is the anti-hero show his low morality. His undergraduate studies do not prepare him for life:

I went to Makerere University College on a Kenya Government bursary and broke ties with the mission. At Makerere I drank often and when I could afford, chased women, and read when there was nothing else to do. In brief I did those things that you would not like your mother to hear of. I had no mother to think about. After five years of this life, plus books, I was thoroughly fed up and on graduating I promised myself that I'd never study again (Charles Mangua, 1972:55).

Kiunyu's insensitivity, and incorrigible mind is shown in the language he uses. We feel that he deserves the shabby treatment he gets from Tonia, the police, Jack of Elementaita, and other bar-goers who beat him up. His life is full of tragic episodes which bring out his foolishness, his prurience, his empty boastfulness, and his cynicism. His use of language brings out his depravity. He has the unusual courage referring directly and unashamedly to sexual organs, to recount episodes about sex, and of referring to bodily acts which are better left unmentioned. He is a bad example of a university graduate and the youth of this country had better be warned against imitating his type. His defiance and dismissive attitude come from the cynical urban life which he is brought up, as a tender motherless child:

Son of woman, that's me. I am a louse, a blinking louse and I am the jigger in you toe. I am a hungry jigger and I like to bite. I like to bite women - beautiful women. Women with tits that bounce. If you do not like the idea you are the type that I am least interested in. (Mangua 1972: 137).

He is a rebel. He remorselessly accepts his weakness, but judges everything against his own standards. He is the voice of the cynical urban rebels: those who say “no!” to village values, and become petrified by the damaging values of money and prostitution in the new society.

The depraved acceptance of the urban reality is there in G.K. Murua’s *Never Forgive Father*, David G. Maillu’s *No!*, *After 4.30* and *My Dear Bottle*. The other novels in this tradition include *What a Life!*, *The Future Leaders*, and they represent a phenomenon that is popular to the young readers in East Africa.

*My Dear Bottle* is a virile song of the urban man who is surrounded by the easy values of the city. He does not acquire wealth and property and as a result he chases after illusions about them, easy sex, drinking. Amorous victories are expressed in culinary terms. Sex images scuttle before his mind’s eye like erotic movie pictures. Sex and drink are the soporific. *My Dear Bottle* is a didactic book, which seems to say, “money is the root of evil.”

In all these theoretical discussions and the reviews of the popular literature by scholars in West Africa, East Africa and Africanists in Europe and North America, both in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present, it seems to me that the importance of popular literature cannot be overemphasized. It has helped in the indigenization of publishing in Africa. Achebe has recommended a serious attention to Onitsha Market Literature because its authors are concerned not to provide erotic entertainment but to tackle social problems of “a mixed-up dynamic, brash modernizing community” (Achebe in Obiechina 1971:x).

In Nigeria, the literature has been influenced by “oral traditions of West Africa, Western Oriented education, modern information media, and the changing cultural habits and attitudes which have given rise to many points of conflicts between old and new values and have confronted young people with the problem of adjustment.” (Obiechina 1971:12). It portrays a



new society in which cultural change comes with new desires, new attitudes and new values.

A study of one type of author or one type of popular literature that leaves a bad taste in our mouth can make us repudiate the whole genre. The constant reference to private parts of the body and breaking of the wind in *Son of Woman* is morally degrading. Is the author right to put words of obscenity in his texts? George Orwell says:

People are too frightened either by seeming to be shocked or not seeming to be shocked, to be able to define the relationship between art and morals (George Orwell 1970:223 -235)

Is erotic literature intrinsically bad? Is it what we do with it that matters? These questions take us back to Aristotle of the classical times, and Eustance Palmer of 20<sup>th</sup> century literary Africa, the two critics that we started our discussion review with. We are critical of the lack of concern for form and content in popular literature. Half-fabricated and banal plots which are hurried through the press and sold for money should be heavily criticised. A school teacher has said:

We need simple books with an African setting. Simplified English classics are not satisfactory. Readers should be mature in content and easy to read. (T.P. Gorman 1971:205).

Widespread illiteracy makes it difficult for true literature to develop. The specialist readership will go in for a literature which uses plot, characterization, and figures of speech excellently. Only cultural sociologists will be satisfied with popular literature. The study of literature can only be enhanced by the production of literature whose form and content are worth serious attention in the Aristotelian sense.

## POETRY

This part of my lecture has been occasioned by many incidents. In 1969, Dr Angus Calder then lecturer in the Department of English, asked me to present a paper to young poets in the University who included Amin Kassam and Jared Angira. The crowd included other students in the University College, Nairobi. The paper was then extended for publication in *Busara*, the English Department Magazine at the request of Professor Adrian A. Roscoe, the editorial advisor to the Magazine. It was read at the 1974 Literature Conference at the Nairobi School and later published in a book, *Teaching of Literature in Schools* edited by Eddah W. Gachukia and S.K. Akivaga.

In March 1995, I started a debate in *The Sunday Nation Lifestyle* magazine. The premise of my paper was that it was common for a student who enjoyed literature at Secondary School levels to change his or her mind about studying it at degree levels as soon as the student learned that poetry was an integral part of literary studies. Secondary school teachers of literature are not comfortable with poetry as a sub-genre of literature. In 1974, Ngugi wa Thiong'o recorded what he and Okot p'Bitek went through in a school:

One afternoon, Okot p'Bitek and I went to a school where one of our former students was teaching. The children hated poetry, she told us: couldn't we convince them that though poetry was difficult, it was a distillation of human wisdom and thought? A gigantic request since we had only one hour between us, but we could do our best. Thereupon they told us about a poem of fourteen lines called a sonnet written by one William Shakespeare comparing old age to winter (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1974, Mimeograph, p. 2).

Ngugi had to tell these anecdotes to create effect. But his comments show the predicament of the East African student of literature when faced with poetry. When I was an undergraduate student at the college, many books of poetry had been published. John Povey wrote his article, "How do you make a course in African literature?" (*Transition* IV 1965

No. 18 pp. 38-42). He initiated a course in African literature to freshmen, Los Angeles, USA. He wanted to use literature to teach about Africa in a manner history and anthropology could not. He wanted a course which appreciated universalism in literature, and universal human concerns. He argued that literature had value to all human beings of intelligence and sympathy and that there were human reactions in works of art. But what worried him in launching the course in African literature were the literary traditions (African subjects, styles and customs) of Africa. He wanted to expose "the best that has been thought and said." (*a la* Mathew Arnold).

In the 1970s we used to blame the lack of interest in poetry among secondary school students on Western views of education which some of our poets had embraced. According to these views, poetry is a craft of the elect, an esoteric craft which interests only madmen and specialists. This view is still held by Taban Lo Liyong, Jared Angira, and David Rubadiri. In the 1960s, it was expressed by Christopher Okigbo and John Nagenda. This view was promoted when we were teaching African poetry in its European context. In 1973, this is how we described the course:

One half course is devoted to the study of outstanding poetry from Africa. The second covers contemporary European poetry, seen as a background to African poetry. Poets selected for detailed study: Senghor, Soyinka, Clark, Okigbo, Echeruo and Brutus, Cesaire (French speaking West Indies); Yeats (Anglo-Irish); Eliot and Pound (Anglo-American); Owen and Lawrence (English); Brecht (German); Neruda (Chilean). All writers are studied in English.

It was not clear to us at this time that the African poet was also rooted in oral literature, and that he was influenced by the songs of his or her society. We did not realize that the African poet was the student of oral poetry. We believe, in this essay, that seen in the oral poetry context, written poetry can prove relevant and useful for the literary growth of the student. The poet is a performer. His effectiveness is judged by how much she or he has internalized the text. Poetry has a cultural significance. It encompasses a people's culture. Poetry and communities are dynamic. This dynamism must be considered in the context of culture. Poets must

create from and reinstate culture. They should not subtract from it, and render it impotent.

From Senoga Zake's book, *Folk Music of Kenya* (1986) we see scripts of dances and poems which accompany them. The book is a data bank, available to the director of the dance, the choreographer, the choir master and the conductor. All departments have to play their roles in presenting the dance and the music. Leopold Sedar Senghor insists that his poetry has to be performed to bring out their word magic. All public universities should have a Records Office or an archive in which texts of poems are stored. When I was Director of the Institute of African Studies, we acquired the building at the Chiromo Campus of the University, which used to belong to the British East African Society. The idea was to turn this into a material and non-material cultural holdings centre. The ethnomusicologists and the literary scholars who study performances would archive their materials here for study and classification.

George Senoga – Zake did his research, came back with videos and cassettes, and explained his findings on a Voice of Kenya (KBC) programme, the Department of Music at Kenyatta University College, and use it to teach dance and songs at the Bomas of Kenya where he was the advisor. The experience I have had with the teaching of *RLT 203: The Oral Literature of Kenya* shows me that the University of Nairobi should have its own culture village comparable to the Kenyatta University Culture Village. Right now, I have to take my students to the Bomas of Kenya, or to the countryside to see performances of songs. The minutes of the Literature Department Staff, held on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1973, show that, when we created the Department of Literature at this University, it was not to teach poetry as an armchair activity. Apart from the public lecture programme we had, we had *Busara*, a journal. We booked funds for research to sustain research projects, and had a drama society. In these minutes we read about Okot p'Bitek asking for assistance from his colleagues (volunteers) "in the fortnightly poetry festivals to be held (on) alternate Sundays." (Mimeograph, p. 4).

The Kenyatta University Culture Village creates a different scenery from the world of lectures, practicals and tutorials. It was created for that purpose and to give Kenyatta University Students a taste of culture and awareness of culture. The place was meant to be self-sustaining, a fact lost to the Bomas of Kenya which goes to the Ministry of Information and Tourism, bowl-in-hand for subventions. Like the Bomas of Kenya, the Kenyatta University Culture Village created a dancing troupe. A dog runneth to a house where it eateth. The dancers thrive where they are taken care of. How do you keep your dancers? Do not make them run away. How motivated are they? Are they happy with their allowances? Travelling motivates dancers a lot.

I am neither a musician nor an ethno-musicologist. But talking to Dr. Kitheka wa Mberia of the University of Nairobi and Mr. Henry Wanjala of Kenyatta on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2002, and 26<sup>th</sup> June 2002, respectively, proved to me that there is lack of patience in choreography in Kenya. We view our dances and poetry performances with concern. But we are not critical of the way people dance and sing in Kenya. People trot instead of dancing. People behave like intelligent machines. They do not get emotionally involved into the text. You should see poets reading their poems at the British Council or at the Goethe Institute. They do it as routine work. They make the audience go to sleep.

Choreographers and poets should appreciate crowds of University and school parties who throng auditoriums to see and hear them. Our dances and songs come from our different communities. One literary scholar or musicologist cannot explain them appreciatively. We need objectivity in the study of our songs. We need to do away with our ethnocentric preoccupations and appreciate the idiom of every dance. A grounding into the dance traditions of one ethnic group will help us to appreciate other dance traditions. *Kamabeka* (shaking of shoulders among Babukusu), or swinging of your lady in *Mwomboko*, are examples of the dance idiom. Examples of dance idioms are *Isukuti* from Idakho and *Isukha*, discussed in Mr. Senoga – Zake's book.

Songs and poems are used in drama just as they are in narratives. In our oral traditions, songs help to repeat the theme of the narrative and create rhythm or musical quality. The oral literature materials are being transplanted from their ritual context which emphasize the occasion to drama where they are used as stylistic or structural features. A drama artist and a dance artist will name the dance according to the occasion. Cultural dances represent communities. There is no way a circumcision dance can be merged with a wedding dance by an African ethnomusicologist. But the drama producer can do it.

The theme of the dance may be *buyanzi* (joy or happiness). As far as the dance artist is concerned, *buyanzi* may only be expressed in a wedding song. Themes of dances are emphasized for marketing the performing artist. The Kenyan who goes to the Bomas of Kenya wants to appreciate the themes of the dances. The foreigners who do not understand the language will go in for the choreography and the dance styles.

The Song School in East Africa was pioneered by Okot p'Bitek, the Ugandan poet, literary giant, and scholar. He was one of the lecturers who caused a cultural revolution in East Africa in the 1970s. In the academic year 1993/4, Okot p'Bitek, Eddah Gachukia, and Chris L. Wanjala were part-time Lecturers and Tutors in the Department of Literature. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1973, Eddah Gachukia, Chris Wanjala, Micere Githae-Mugo, and Gacheche Wariunge joined the Department on a full-time basis. By July 10, 1973, Okot p'Bitek and Farouk Topan were teaching in the Department. The minutes of staff meeting held on Tuesday 10 July 1973 say:

Okot (p'Bitek) pointed out that students must research in their home culture because of language difficulties, and because there was advantage in learning from home. But he accepted the need for post-graduate students to do research in neglected areas which might not be their own society.

At the time the Department asked itself about the content and value of Western imaginative literature, Africans were using European paradigms to analyse African literature. The stress in the European paradigms was

on how the mind of the writer operated. African literary scholars wanted to understand how poetry educated and how it gave values. The specific images like the rose in William Blake's poem, "The Sick Rose," and "the Invisible worm" came from the cultural experience of the poet, which was not emphasized to the learners. East African literary critics wanted to appreciate the poet's ability to recreate an experience from well-known social realities.

Professor George Senoga-Zake led fellow East Africans to interpret the dance styles of Kenya, the foot and body movement of the dancers. His team filmed the dances. It assembled knowledgeable people from each province of their study to get accurate information on traditional dance styles. Films, tapes, dance styles, formed the body of authentic material for use by teachers and instructors in African Music and Dance.

If Okot p'Bitek were alive, he would have to do with what the popular musicians are doing. He would have to use the electronic media to transmit his songs to the audience. The newspapers and the electronic media are full of commentaries on reggae music and jazz. Nothing is more sensational in Nairobi than a musician arriving there either from the Democratic Republic of Congo or from a neighbouring country like Tanzania. The music from such traditional instruments as *siyilili*, and *litungu* are being discussed, but not the literary value of such music.

If modern poetry is not that significant, why are books of poems being banned from school syllabuses? Why are poets thrown into prison or even forced to leave their countries for good? We have Swahili religious poetry which my friend and colleague, Dr. Farouk Topan always wanted to teach at this University in the early 1970s. The man this University honoured with a doctorate in the early 1990s, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, is a religious poet, Mr. Chairman. The poet presents basic emotions in free verse. He uses extensive abstractions like "compassion," "freedom," "truth," and "wisdom" to reach across to his many religious followers.

Daisaku Ikeda is a diarist who uses the poetic tradition; "it has been my custom to record in the form of poems various ideas and emotions that come to me giving them as free expression as possible." He warns us against expecting poetry with obscure imagery from him. His poetry is an excellent vehicle of theology, not necessarily dabbled in obscure imagery.

Literature is such great power that even the businessmen want to buy it. Poets in the English Romantic Tradition viewed it as the work of genius flowing out of the supernatural. Alternatively as we see from Okot Oculi's, it can be regarded as a skilled art and craft that functions strictly by its rules.

The British critic and poet, S.T. Coleridge, has argued that literature is the correlation of passion with form. It comes out on paper in a certain format which, so to speak, organizes it. Literature is thus a spontaneous gift coming from the artists. This is where the rules of writing well come in. Speech and oratory are the domains of the politicians. Speech and writing use language persuasively. The beauty of eloquence, the power of the word, are the possible means of persuasion in any circumstance. Both the politician and the poet have the task of changing society; in Africa, they are charged with the task of transforming the social structure that suited the colonialist to one of independence and self-determination. A feeling of self-assertion empowers the African writer to write about his people. Okot p'Bitek operated within the concrete environment of the Acoli people, manipulated the ways of his people and set a vision of a new condition, a new environment, not only for his people ethnically, but for the world at large. He created a song tradition in East Africa which can only compare with the Negritude Movement in West Africa.

He created a character called Lawino, a powerful Acoli village woman, modest in her criticism of her husband, Ocol, but at the same time not ingratiating to the white man. In what she says, we see the African concepts of beauty, modes of attraction amongst the youth and the grace of objects which Western values prejudice new Africans to ignore. Okot has shown



attempts to go around the problem of bilingualism by first writing some of his works, in his mother-tongue and then translating them into English. He harnesses the Acoli imagery and speech styles, for a didactic and aesthetic effect.

Lawino embodies her criticism of Ocol and Clementine in the criticism of modernity. She ridicules elites who turn their backs on traditional values in pursuit of Western culture. We may argue that her jealousy against Clementine is a whetstone of her virile criticism of Western values. She attacks the sterility that comes with Western values, and disgustingly dismisses Clementine as phoney and clumsy in her new robes and hairstyles. It is however the portrait of Clementine that reminds us so vividly of the woman in *Return of the Bridewealth* where Okot, in narrative verse, delineates the tragedy that faces modern African families where somehow the couples get entangled in materialistic ethics. The poet captures the anguish of old African parents who happen to have children who divert into new easy ways and forget their responsibilities in the African traditional sense.

East African poets show traditional life as full of harmony, peace and order. It is the life where a woman is earmarked for one man, and lives in abundant moral rectitude. But with Western education and urbanisation, these African women are detracted into loose living and prostitution. In *Return of the Bridewealth* there is an element of loss in the family with the death of some children. The grim silence of the father succeeded by reference to the grave that he is looking at when we first see him forms the tragic mood of the poem.

This is one of the longest poems we have in Cook and Rubadiri's collection ostensibly because as I have pointed out it is narrative. The decrepit picture of the old parents, especially the portrait of the father as a dilapidated man, remains of old harmony represented by 'broken cups of his withered hands', heightens the tragedy of this family. There is a gross lack of communication between the parents and the child. About the father, the poet-protagonist says:

'My old father does not answer me, only two large clotting tears', and about the mother he says:

She walks past me

She does not greet me.

Thus there are two ways in which we can look at adultery in this poem. In the first place the army man takes over the wife of the young man. The army man is a minor detail in the poem, but he is part of the new world that has cuckolded the young man. The woman has been lured away by the soft tongue of materialist values, whilst his lascivious tendencies are characteristic of the luring urge that comes with money. The poem creates a tragic sense in that the story of disintegration in the young couple breaks their marriage, and as a result their children die. They are "no longer at ease" because the kind of harmony that existed before the rupture of the marriage has faded away. The woman is now a prostitute. Like Clementine in *Song of Lawino* she is now a ghostly figure, emaciated and wrecked morally, such that when she flings the money of dowry back into the hands of her husband, we know that she is throwing away the ethics of traditional African world and daring the half-world of Western materialism all by herself.

I do not want to give an impression that all poems in East Africa talk about cultural conflict, or for that matter that the poems selected for study from East Africa must reflect the African experience. I am aware, however, of the fact that most of our students are puzzled by the place of African poetry in world literature. The study of literature can be seen as it reflects themes like *society, people, birth, time and death, and environment* because our concern in literature is man wherever he is. The contributions of poets like D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Hardy, W.B. Yeats are equally important for our understanding of man's nature as those of African poets. African poets have often-times started as imitators of European poets. In East Africa the poet who has confessed this influence is Jonathan Kariara. Himself an avid reader, he discovered that through the study of T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence, Europe did not stand for that grand civilization that it is always purported to do. In T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* we are confronted with a volley of human voices trapped in a sordid

physical environment, caught in a material civilization without any hope for regeneration. D.H. Lawrence himself was once so dissatisfied with the moral decomposition of Europe that he eagerly left the continent on invitation of New Mexico by Mabel Dodge Sterne in 1921.

Nature is an amorphous subject, but Lawrence seeks to capture it in vivid forceful images. In his poem, *The storm in the black forest*, he describes the behaviour of the sky when there is lightning and thunder. He uses a concrete scene where a thunderous noise is heard at the heavy parturating clouds crouch powerfully across the sky. He writes:

And as the electric liquid pours out, sometimes a still brighter white snake wriggles among it, spilled and tumbling wriggling down the sky: and then the heavens cackle with uncouth sounds.

Images are chosen by D.H. Lawrence deliberately to disturb our minds and to evoke the picture of the situation that he wants to capture. The snake represents lightning in the sky, and we see the poet striving to capture the movement of lighting, that to him is strange and fascinating. Even the very reference to clouds as 'jugfull after jugfull of pure white liquid fire' is a conscious effort by the poet to talk about the volume of water in the clouds in familiar domestic images. Thus Lawrence gives nature a personality, a capacity to decide and act:

And the rain won't come, the rain refuses to come! This is the electricity than man is supposed to have mastered chained, subjugated to his use!

Supposed to!

With this vicious mockery on man's inability to harness the physical forces of the universe, Lawrence etches the sublimity of nature, and retorts that nature cannot be fully tamed by man.

From what we have said it is our argument that the poet selects images from life to create a picture that is complete and memorable to the reader. He represents true features of life, nature and objects, to sound a familiar picture in the mind of the readers. A poem is a single experience put down in regulated length in the vivid language possible. We see the unity of a poem after dismantling its individual images that form its spar parts

to create a single organic picture. When poetry is related to ordinary life then we can react to it with ordinary life in mind. Every image in the poem reflects its main theme and adds to its whole weight. At his best, the poet is a student of his society, in that he recognizes the myths, the hopes and aspirations of his people and strives to recreate them imaginatively to reflect the inner meaning of the society about which and for whom he speaks.

It is not exhaustive to talk about all the genres of East African literature within such a short session as this, Mr. Chairman. The subject is treated in several units of the undergraduate programme in the University. Courses in creative writing, too, teach students about writing poetry and poetic imagination.

No genre lends itself to the teaching of Practical Criticism like poetry. As in creative writing and in Stylistics, students are taught the craft of poetry, intention, writing from experience, paths of poetry; style and techniques, perspective, composition, anatomy, language, imagery, compression, influence from other poets, symbols and images. In studying African literature we are interested in the use of oral tradition in African literature in English. We trace the influence of English literary traditions in African poetry, its musicality, diction, rhythm, rhyme, imagery and symbolism. We also go into the nature and function of poetry, its orality. We study selected works by Wole Soyinka, Clark, Okigbo, Okara, Awoonor, Brutus, Sipho Sepamla and Wally Mungane Sarote.

East African literature in English is studied in terms of its trends, development. We study the influences of oral traditions on East African Poetry. It has traveled from *Penpoint*, where David Rubadiri wrote his poem, *Stanley Meets Mutesa*, in the English Department Magazine, through the difficult times of *Ghala*, *Zuka*, *Nexus*, (*Busara*), *Darlite* (*Umma*) and the present volumes of poetry edited by David Cook and David Rubadiri, Arthur Luvai and Kisa Amateshe and to the present volumes of poetry by poets who have published personal volumes are Jared Angira and Taban Lo Liyong.

Jared Angira is easily the best gifted poet who from East Africa who was first discovered by *Busara* in 1969 with Angus Calder's "Postscript on Eight Poems." The lines which first met readers of *Busara*, came from the poet's "The Undressing."

They  
(who I knew not)  
called me to Kisumu  
with my oily face  
reflecting the lakeshore sun  
my rainbow beads  
singing around my waist  
better than love songs  
better than the songs  
of Victoria Nyanza

His style is summarized by Adrian Roscoe in *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South* (1977): (p. 94). He is the author of *Juices* (1970) *Silent Voices* (1970) *Soft Corals* (1973) *Cascades* (1975), *Years Go by* (1980), *Ode to the Beautiful Nyakiemo*, *God Howls in Hell* and *Generation*. He was born in Nyanza in 1947. He went to Kitale School, in Trans Nzoia District, Kenya, then at Maseno Secondary School in Nyanza, Shimo La Tewa High School, in the Coast Province, before doing his B.Com degree at the University of Nairobi. He graduated in 1971, and worked with the East African Harbours Corporation between 1972 and 1974. He spent two years at the London School of Economics (1975-1976). He graduated with a Masters in Industrial Psychology. When he returned to Kenya in 1976, the East African Community had died. He was absorbed in the Kenya Ports Authority. He worked with the firm in Mombasa up to 1986. He now works with the Agricultural Finance Corporation as the Personnel Manager. He owns a private office at the Nairobi City Centre, Menta Consultants. His daughter, A B Comm graduate, is the Chief Executive of the office. Mr. Angira's first son is a painter and a poet. He is a student of Electrical Engineering at Exeter, U.K.

Angira draws his writing from his cultural background. He uses whatever he has learnt. These are the same philosophies expressed differently by people. The poet keeps them afloat. He thinks in Dholuo. He translates his thoughts into English. What he has translated goes through another mill and then he works on the translated forms.

## WHO IS AFRAID OF FEMALE WRITERS?

African literatures, like most literatures of the South are based on indigenous languages, Kiswahili and English. This lecture cannot go into the merits of individual works published in Kenya, nor the wealth of the literature available in local languages. It has mainly used the experience of a few creative writers and critics to discuss the evolution of an East African literary literature culture. The issue of language has not been examined. But the role of oral literature in creating an indigenous literary traditions has been emphasized. The University of Nairobi is at the forefront in the research and development of East African Literature. I believe that the Department of Linguistics and Literature can do a lot to promote the study of literature, drama and the performance arts.

There is a new spirit of criticism in East Africa which seeks to depart from the sweeping thematic overview of literature and the stock general comments about the role of the writer in an African society which come as pronouncements from creative writers. The job of the critic has been outlined. His form, the critical essay, does not talk in images. The critic yearns for conceptuality and intellectuality. Through the critical essay he can ask questions about life as he reviews a book, a painting, a piece of music. A text on its own is an archival artifact. Criticism enlivens the text into the present. Criticism, at its best, belongs to the present. It struggles for articulation and for definition. Criticism prepares us for judgement and evaluation. Critics create values by which literature and art have to be judged. The critic, through his analytical process and placing of the text into a context, gives art relevance.

A novel has little value until it has been read and discussed. The moment a work has been published it is the property of the commonwealth. In the words of Oscar Wilde, criticism "treats the work of art as a starting point for a new creation, "and the practicality of craft have to be answered. It is not enough for a critic to make sociological or political statements

using literary symbols and characters in novels. The entire process of creativity which Eliot, Okot, and Mphahlele discuss in their essays must be explained to show the way the critic employs language and makes his artistic choices.

In the criticism of literature here in East Africa, we have given women writers due attention. There are works about love which involve man-woman relationships. A young poet, Walter Odame, who many people think is mad as he wanders the main campus, laughing and shaking hands and coming for tea at the University's Senior Common room in the Gandhi Wing writes.

*When will you stop  
sitting on the edge  
of the sofa rock  
pulling down your dress  
of ocean waves  
that keep etching  
up your thighs*

*When will you stop  
shying away  
at corners, sideways  
like a crab  
in the ocean*

*Oh  
when will you stop  
sitting on the fence  
fencing love strokes  
of hide-and-seeK  
glowing up smiles  
and putting them out*



*And to I  
the lonely boatman  
like the big ship  
the waves  
the rocks*

*In your innocence  
white  
you stand  
my heart's high priest  
my heart's politician  
shepherd to me*

But issues at a glance include growing up in East Africa, the stockpiling of weapons and nuclear technology into Africa, escalating epidemics of wars and civil conflict causing many deaths, vast refugee populations in the Great Lakes Region, ethnic strife, land alienation, street children, deaths on the roads, HIV/AIDS, religious fundamentalism, ethnic bigotry, and tribalism. Apartheid has been abolished, but a democratic revolution is taking place in South Africa.

Literary critics in Plato's school of thought and its variant came across a new economic order defined by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The KANU regime thought it would be rescued by the Dream Team that was a part of the new international ruling class, superseding national and local forms of governance. The dominance of the profit motive has replaced all intellectual and spiritual goals as the prime reason for human existence.

You may hear someone saying, "Money speaks," or "No money (for rent and maintenance), no honey!" The money values bring about concepts of the rich and the poor in East Africa. The subject matter in East Africa of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the global monoculture that exalts sex violence, purchasing power, portraying women as commodities.

In the secular view of culture, there is conflict between modernity on the one hand and the religious culture on the other. We are crying out for “a culture” based on the Universal Bill of Rights to combat moral decay, and bad governance.

If I am going to be free as an East African writer, then Virginia Woolf ought to be free too. Writers argue that Independence did not bring freedom from alienation. East African writers, musicians, painters and poets are persecuted. Women writers are ignored by literary scholars, book and newspaper editors, and publishers. They are humiliated by political demagogues and cultural and religious bigots. We cannot objectively discuss writers of the colonial yesteryear without a pinch of racism. If we want to be true to the multicultural reality of the East African literary scene, why do we ignore East African Asian and white writers in our literary criticism?

Our major women writers on the continental scene include Eflia Morgue Sutherland, Asenath. Bole Odaga, Ama Ata Aidoo, Grace A.E. Ogot, Rebeka Njau, Barbara Kimenye, Elvania Zirimu, Evelyn Accad, Aicha Lemsine, Nawal el Saadani, Micere Githae Mugo, Miriam Were, Muthoni Likimani and Penina Mlama. The issues we have to tackle in African literature are summarized in the book, *The Power of the Word: Culture, Censorship and Voice* (1995). They include African nationalism, the global crisis, competing visions of the future, culture and why it matters, cultural domination and censorship, gender-based censorship, and why censorship must be fought. They also include the accelerating destruction of the environment, the catastrophic subsistence crisis in Africa, Asia and Latin America, brought about by the failure of the growth model of development and the imposition of structural adjustment policies, aided by corruption of the local ruling elite.

As we see in the study of novels and short stories which are based on rural and urban realities, the other integral theme is the movement of populations from the countryside to the city. Works which portray cultural alienation show the movement of the individual from the South to the

North in search of an education, and also the movements of populations from the South to the South in search of a livelihood. The other popular theme is the end of the Cold War and the concomitant uneasy equilibrium between the socialist and the capitalist camps.

War is waged on women and ethnic/religious minorities by tradition and national dictatorships. There is a call for female emancipation. African women make the vast majority of the disenfranchised population in Africa, the starving and the wretched.

The discussion of culture in the emancipation of women is critical. Tradition is the cardinal source of women's expression and slavery. To emancipate them means a struggle over culture. This is shown by the case of Female Genital Mutilation discussed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his novel *The River Between* and Rebecka Njau, in her play, *The Scar*. There is also the case of inheritance discussed by Grace Ogot in her short story, "The Bamboo Hut."

Ama Ata Aidoo is perhaps the most articulate African Woman writer who has expressed herself in many fora about the lot of female writers in Africa and beyond. She was born in Ghana in 1942. In an interview with Maxine McGregor (nee Leutre) at the Harvard International Seminar in the U.S.A she articulated her position against colonialism and emancipation from colonialism. She defined the culture of a community as "the totality of the ways in which that community conducts its life: its birth, growth, study, work, entertainment and death." (Aido, 1994)

Her definition has been compared with that of Marjorie Agosin who says, "Culture is who we are and who we are becoming." (Marjorie Agosin, 1995). Culture has been defined as:

The food we put on the table, the way we cook it, the utensils in which we eat it, relations between the people who sit at the table and the people who cook and serve, what is done with the leftovers, what is discussed during the meal, what music, what dancing, poetry or theatre accompany it, and the social and spiritual

values of those present - for when we say culture, we include the visions, dreams and aspirations of humanity (Meredith Tax, et.al. 1995:10).

Ama Ata Aidoo's paper, "To be an African Woman Writer - an overview and a Detail," which appears in *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference* (1986), edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen, is a big point of reference to what she says about literary criticism. Her own books include *Our Sister Killjoy*, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), Anowa and Short stories, entitled, *No Sweetness Here* (1970). Whether Aidoo is writing short stories, poems, plays, she remains a dramatist. She explains the contents of her play, *Anowa*, in the following terms:

(It's) set in the latter part of the nineteenth century in what was then the Gold Coast, and it's more or less my own rendering of a kind of ... legend, because, according to my mother, who told me the story, it is supposed to have happened. The ending is my own and the interpretation I give to the events that happen is mine ... a girl married a man her people did not approve of; she helped him become fantastically rich, and then he turns round to sort of drive her away. The original story I heard, which in a way was in the form of a song, didn't say why he did this, and I myself provide and answer to this, a clue, you know, a kind of pseudo-Freudian answer (Aidoo 1967:23).

What she says about silencing of women writers has formed a basis of a book by Florence Stratton, entitled, *Contemporary African Literature and Politics of Gender* (1994). She says:

It is especially pathetic to keep on writing without having any consistent, active, critical intelligence that is interested in you as an artist (or creator) (In Petersen 1988).

She complains that critics of African literature are more interested in the male African writer:

These include African, non-African male and female literary critics, different categories of publishers, editors, anthropologists, translators, librarians, sundry academic analysts and all other zealous collectors of treasures (Aidoo in Petersen 1988:158).

This sin of omission claimed by Aidoo is committed by expatriate literary experts and the indigenous *literati* who have written on African literature

since the 1960s. Chinweizu in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* mentions Ama Ata Aidoo and Flora Nwapa in passing. Emmanuel Ngara's *Art and Ideology in the African Novel* (1985) is criticized.

Quite clearly Emmanuel Ngara did not mention a single African woman writer even in passing because he did not think anything African women are writing is of any relevance to the ideological debate. Unless of course we learn to accept that a study of Nadine Gordimer (again) answers all such queries (Aidoo in Petersen 1988:162).

She is committed to issues of colonialism and Neocolonialism like her male counterparts. She cannot conceive herself writing about lovers in Accra, "because you see, there are so many other problems." (Aidoo 1967:21). She cannot see herself engaged in Art for Art's sake. In her pronouncements on criticism of African literature written by women, she mentions such writers and critics as Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, and Micere Githae Mugo.

From the scholarly point of view, an article that brought the view of African women writers to the greatest heights came from Katherine Frank. In her article, "Feminist criticism and African Novel," is one of the issues of *African Literature Today* (14, 1984: 34-38). She starts her essay by referring to the theme of culture. She concerns herself with the decolonisation of African literature. She deals with the paucity of criticism on African Women Writers. She refers to token articles written on Flora Nwapa in *African Literature Today* and *Research in African Literatures*. Nwapa is mentioned alongside Grace Ogot, Buchi Emecheta, Rebeka Njau, and Bessie Head. These are women writers who "are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field." (L. Brown 1981:3).

She defines feminist literary criticism and indicates that in taking it as a theory we concern ourselves with highlighting women-related issues. We also show an interest in women writers and their works. The theory dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century literary criticism which came from the study

of novels by Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. In its rudimentary forms, it concerned itself with images of women in literature, referring to sexist, reductive images of women. The approach was largely sociological and moral. It did not use aesthetic criteria to analyse literature. In this approach the images of women highlighted in British literature are coquettes, femme fatales and hags.

Are there short stories by African women in anthologies? How are they interpreted? In the fiction from the African continent dealing with women, the latter are a part of people who are culturally beleaguered. Typical of this approach to African literature is Abioseh M. Porter's study entitled, "Ideology and the Image of Women: Kenyan Women in Njau and Ngugi," in *Ariel* 12, No. 3, July 1981. She refers to the different archetypes in African literature: girlfriends, good time girls, wives, free women, mothers, workers, political women, courtesans and prostitutes.

But what are the stylistic, generic, archetypal approaches to African literature written by African women? In the archetypal mode it is revealed that the Nigerian female writer, Buchi Emecheta gives detailed descriptions of cloth patterns and colours. She gives images of womanhood. Emecheta and Nwapa capture a domestic realism in their texts. They are concerned with women's private and family lives. In Nwapa's works we have cooking and gossiping going on for a very long time. There is courtship, marriage and child-bearing. African women know about cloth and food and the lives of their neighbours.

In Katherine Frank's study, the Kenyan writer, Rebecka Njau and the South African, Bessie Head, are compared. She refers to their works as "psychological gothics." According to her, the two writers write, "mind bending books about the psychic entrapment, madness and flight of African women profoundly alienated from the domestic worlds of Emecheta's and Nwapa's novels." (*African Literature Today*. 14:38). In this debate Karen Blixien, Beryl Markham and Elspeth Huxley are not mentioned. Even Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye has been denigrated by literary critics. But if you want to learn about the Black and White relations in East

Africa, you have to study *Out of Africa* by Karen Blixen, and her letters from Africa, *Something of Value* and *Uhuru* by Robert Ruark, and Elspeth Huxley's novels. You will be advised to read Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels and other "neo-African writers." In this case you would refer to Eneriko Seruma's *The Experience*, and his short stories in the *Heart Seller*. You would study Beryl Markham's reminiscences and her oral narratives (Reisch 3 September 1980).

Frank argues that the African world is sexually defined and polarized. She therefore prescribes a historical/socialological/recovery and re-evaluative methods for studying African literature - especially the African novel. She outlines the questions to be asked:

Why are there so few women writers in Africa? Should we swell their ranks by including white figures such as Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing, and Nadine Gordimer? In other words, is gender or race the most significant defining character of a writer? What educational, marital and familial circumstances foster and thwart writing by African women? Who do African women writers read and seek to emulate as literary models? Why have so many of them ceased to publish after writing only a novel or two (Rebeka Njau is a notable example of this phenomenon)? Can we trace a woman's African literary history in the two brief decades that have elapsed since Nwapa, the first widely-known woman novelist in Africa, brought out *Efuru*? Is there, that is, some sort of development stretching from Nwapa's early work to recent novels by Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head? How can we go about recovering pre-Nwapa 'lost lives' in African literary history - women writers such as Adelaide and Gladys Gasely, Hayford, Mabel Doye Danquah and others whose work is out of print or still in manuscript in University archives? And how do we rescue and re-evaluate people like Nwapa and Aidoo and Ogot from the parentheses of footnotes of male-oriented, male-authored African literary history? (*African Literature Today* 1984:43-46).

Of all these female writers, except, perhaps, Nadine Gordimer and Grace Ogot, there is no marital stability to talk of. In this list, Grace Ogot and Rebeka Njau are East Africans of African descent. The "white figures" excluded from Frank's list of female authors from East Africa are Elspeth Huxley, Karen Blixen, Beryl Markham, and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. I call them Euro-African authors. They are included in the study of African writers not for "swelling the ranks of African authors." Their works belong

to this continent. In her book, *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing* (n.d.) Nadine Gordimer says:

My own definition is that African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather anywhere else in the world. One must look at the world *From Africa*, to be an African writer, *Not Look Upon Africa* from the World. Given this Africa-centered consciousness, the African writer can write about what he releases, and even about other countries and still his work will belong to African literature (Gordimer n.d.:5).

In East Africa, female writers in the English expression include Grace Ogot, the author of *Land Without Thunder*, *The Promised Land*, *The Other Woman*, *The Island of Tears*, *The Graduate* and *The Strange Bride*. Her writings are known abroad and at home. They have been studied by both local and international critics. In Katherine Frank's article in *African Literature Today* (14, 1984: 34-38), she is discussed alongside Rebeka Njau among East African authors. Rebeka Njau is the author of *Ripples in the Pool* (1972), *The Scar* and *The Sacred Seed* (2003).

Micere Githae Mugo is a poet, playwright and literary scholar. She is the author of *The Long Illness of Chief Kifi*, *Mother sing* and *Visions of Africa: A critical work* (1980). She has co-authored a play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* with Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Charity Waciuma falls into the category of African writers who "ceased to publish after writing only a novel or two." She is the author of *Daughter of Mumbi* a work of very little literary value. Muthoni Likimani is the author of *They Shall Be Chastised* (1977). The Ugandan, Barbara Kimenye is the author of *Kasalanda* and *Kasalanda Revisited* and numerous books for children. Her story "The Winner," is a set piece in the Kenya Secondary Schools Examinations Syllabus.

Asenath Bole Odaga is in creative and scholarly writing. A fine artist, Elizabeth Orchardson Mazrui is the author of *The Adventures of Mekatilili* (1999). The medical doctor, Margaret A. Ogola, is the author



of *The River and the Source*. Penina Muhando Mlama, formerly Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Dar-es-Salaam, is the author of *Pambo*, a play.

Grace Ogot is very much an age-mate of Flora Mwanzuruaha Nwapa. She was born in 1930 while Flora Nwapa was born in 1931 (Anna Githaiga 1979:2), Nwapa's *Efuru* and Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* were published in 1966. Nwapa followed *Efuru* with *Idu* (1970) and *This is Lagos and Other Short Stories* (1971). There is no mention of Flora Nwapa's books in the literary criticism by men. It is only in 1979 that we read about Flora Nwapa in an HEB Students Guide: *Notes on Flora Nwapa's Efuru*. Anna Githaiga says:

Flora Nwapa, married, was the first woman novelist to come out of Nigeria. Her first book *Efuru*, which was published by Heinemann in 1966, is about an elegant beautiful woman whose two marriages are unsuccessful because Uhamiri, the Woman of the Lake, has chosen her to be her worshiper. It gives insight into the traditional life of an Igbo community and particularly exposes their hopes and fears regarding child-bearing in marriage (Githaiga 1979:2).

## A FOOTNOTE ON THEORY

Our purpose here is not to study the traditions of West African literature. However, the literary tradition of West African literature is dominated by Negritude. The task ahead here is a response to what Professor Oladele Taiwo outlined in 1967. He said about his book, *An Introduction to West African Literature*:

We have concentrated on West Africa to the exclusion of other literally fertile areas of Africa. Such specialization has become necessary in view of the large number of books produced in recent years. Africa is experiencing a cultural rebirth which is reflected in the feverish literary activities of her writers. To try to describe all these activities in one volume would be to attempt the impossible. Regionalism in this matter, as in other continental matters, is desirable. Two other parts of Africa-East and South Africa - call for immediate attention. It is to be hoped that some literary critics will soon write descriptive analyses of the literary output of these areas which will further the cause of African literature (Taiwo 1967:179).

From what I have said above, it is now clear that there is a little uneasiness in East African literary circles about the theory of literature of the 1970s. Critics dismiss writers and critics of the 1970s with a wave of the hand. They say their literary theories are old and useless. But let me tell this convocation that: no one has done for literary theory in East Africa more than these early men of letters.

Let me focus on myself. Ever since I was a literary novice in the 1960s, Mr. Chairman, I have had a knack for unravelling literary, ideological and political movements. As a child, I showed peculiar interest in Pan-Africanism and Negritude. When I came to the University, I studied under James E. Stewart who later became the supervisor for my PhD. He worked with me until time came for him to take a Chair at the University of Malawi. This man taught me classical literary criticism and I settled down to Realism and Socialist Realism. I ended up studying alienation and am now trying to evolve a more unifying literary theory.

What James E. Stewart also taught me, Mr. Chairman, is Practical criticism, a course I teach my First Year students who come to the Department to do literature. In this course I teach students the discipline of English, helping them to find meaning in literature, both general and detailed, capture the intention of the writer, and the means of the writer to communicate. I follow the footsteps of Plato, Aristotle, F.R. Leavis, I.A. Richards, Northrop Frye, Gerald Moore and Izerbaye (Chidi Amuta, 1989: VIII). I teach undergraduates to understand that a text is more than meets the eye. There is music in poetry and there is a striking way in which a poet uses words. Every poem is unique, although poems have common properties and special individual qualities. They employ devices which are structural. They also employ sounds and sense. I ask my students to answer the question: how does the poet fulfil his intentions? I talk about *Myth* and metaphor in literature.

Ever since my undergraduate days, my interest has been in conducting a dialectical synthesis of the two traditions of thought about literature and language, namely, the Plato School and the Aristotle School. I like to refer to myself as a critic. I enjoy criticizing things although, as I mention in this lecture, this makes so many enemies for me. I tell my students that the word criterion is important if they want to become literary critics (plural being *Criteria*). To me this word has to become very important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It comes from the word *Kriterion*, a Greek word which means judging. I have since learnt that in Greek, *Krites* means *Judge*. *Kriterion* or *Criterion* means a standard by which something is judged. *Criterion* is a text of truth or reality. The critic must prepare his/her critical apparatus. The famous English Literary critic, I.A. Richards, had the following to say about critics:

The qualifications of a good critic are three. He must be an adept at experiencing, without eccentricity, the state of mind relevant to the work he is judging. Secondly, he must be able to distinguish experiences from one another as regards their less superficial features. Thirdly, he must be a sound judge of values.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Matigari* and Charles Mangua in *Kenyatta's Jiggers* are titles which refer to freedom fighters. But Ngugi is authentic, serious, whilst Charles Mangua is trite and superficial.

Critics of African fiction give us story lines of African works of fiction. In the 1960s and 1970s, they tried to answer the question: “What are modern Africans writing about?” But today we have to demonstrate the qualities of a literary text which make it interesting to the reader. In oral literature for instance, repetition makes a work of literature interesting and memorable. These are repetitions of single lines, whole stanzas in poems and songs as they come at intervals, for emphasis and to create musical effects. We have to look for literary devices like simile, metaphor, myth, personification in the text. When unrelated ideas and objects are brought side by side what impact do they have on the reader? What happens when we juxtapose unrelated ideas? Our attention is on one subject, but it is compared to another subject. The poem *Sick Rose*, which I have discussed brings together unconnected ideas:

*O Rose, thou art sick  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night  
In the howling storm*

*Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy*

A rose is not by any name a rose in this poem. The rose in this poem is sick, affected by extraneous forces, symbolized by “the invisible worm,” which may be a germ, a virus, like HIV. The virus in this poem is monstrous. It works at odd times to destroy life, and hence the lines:

*That flies in the night  
In the howling storm*

Normally a rose is rich red like the clothes women wear on the Valentine’s Day in February. This is conjured by the word “Crimson” in the second

stanza of the poem. But in this poem, the rose does not carry its rich colour. It has withered.

History helps us to reckon ideas. Obviously this poem was written neither in the 20<sup>th</sup> century nor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the AIDS pandemic was rampant. The use of “thou art,” “thy bed,” and “thy life,” give it some form of archaism. It was written in the language of the King James version of the Holy Bible.

Perhaps the most illuminating variant into the Aristotelian mode, in its characteristic accent on form, is the Russian Formalism school of the 1920s and its offshoot, structuralism, in France of 1950s and 1960s. The Aristotelian school and its variants dwell on what distinguishes literary art form from other forms of language use. But Plato’s school and its variants dwell on the way the subject matter of literature is different from the subject matter of history and philosophy.

The Aristotelian school stresses that the language which writers use is different from the language which ordinary people use. To illustrate this point, let us ask the question: what feeling does the poet arouse in you? What is the aim of the poet in this poem? Okot p’ Bitek’s poetry is the best example. In *Song of Lawino* there is a description of Klementina, Ocol’s educated wife. He says the beautiful one looks like a guinea fowl. He describes Ocol’s library and its impact on its user. The poet shows that Ocol is impotent. There is also a reference to dances. Lawino does not like Western dances. Finally there is a reference to western technology.

Some critics may accuse Okot p’ Bitek of being a propagandist for African culture because of his language use. This is on the basis of the feelings the poet arouses in them. The Aristotelian view of the language of poets sometimes mystifies the status of the aesthetic, linguistic creativity, and the creative activity of the speakers. Writer-politicians use literature to transform the ideological meaning and values that confront them as they interact with the western world. Those in the Negritudist school, and

even its admirers like Okello Oculi use a Surrealistic form to capture the carnivorous nature of life as it relates to man. Exposition of the neurosis of the educated African is part of the objective of Negritude poetry. The strength of the Surrealism of Negritude poetry is attributable to the political stance, and its concomitant rhetoric, which the poets show.

The protest which committed African writers make, has led to the banning of their books. This, according to the Plato school of thought and its variants, is on the account of the context of the work. The literature has taken the form of letters, petitions and auto-biographies, "as a catharsis for the sufferings of second-class citizens with first-class brains." (Gordimer, n.d.:7). We have a prison literature which gives information on the freedom struggle. On the philosophical basis, literature provides values which change the society and cause it (literature) to grow in form, content, and variety. We have comedy, showing the degraded image of man, and tragedy coming in elevated language and elevated character.

Structuralism stresses "estrangement" and defamiliarization in literature. It is addressing itself to aspects of alienation - effects, which Bertolt Brecht talks about. Deconstruction belongs to the Aristotelian construct. It emphasizes the view of literature as a system of differences, in which there is no positive term, so that its full and definitive meaning is constantly deferred. It eschews dialecticism which is the major feature of Hegellian and Marxist aesthetics. In my study of literature, especially East African literature in the 1970s, I look at its content and form as inalienable bedfellows. I studied realism in Alex La Guma's fiction and 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian fiction, discussing especially the commitment of the writer to reality. I took the cue from Nadine Gordimer who argued that because of its overt realism, African literature showed weak signs of creativity. It was banal. She argues that African writers do not summon sufficient imagination when they are dealing with the African reality. They are committed to the African way of story telling. She says:

African fiction is committed in the most fundamental way, since its inspiration has been the expression and the assertion of the African personality as such, and this assertion underlies all political action and seek recognition primarily through political autonomy (Gordimer n.d.:13)

The African writer does not conjure adequate objective distance from the reality. One gets tired of her patronizing tone about African literature. But using her theoretical framework has shown me the influence of the Hungarian literary philosopher, Georg Lukass whose view of literature takes cognisance of its sociological, political, psychological and aesthetic manifestations.

Implicit in Gordimer's analysis is a glorification of Marxist aesthetics. The explosive social and political tensions in Africa precipitated by the partition of the continent in 1884 during the scramble for Africa, colonialism, neo-colonialism and the democratization of the same continent have caused profound social upheavals. These can only compare with the tensions in Europe which were caused by the World War I, and the Bolshevik Revolution which occurred in Russia in 1917 to provide the overwhelming sense of transfigurative power of the collective life. Marxism as the philosophy of historical materialism has greatly attracted many African scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. It sees the socio-historical ground as the basis of all action. It puts emphasis on the social and historical particularity of all actions, particularly linguistic and literary utterances.

The historical materialism of Marxism is founded on the historical reality of social class. The Marxist theoretical framework allowed critics of African Literature to make a historical evaluation of literary works for their aesthetic uniqueness and their historical significance. The importance of class as the ground of the account of the language of literature through the notion of "heteroglosia" is critical to them. The works were complete and wholesome and they sought to portray man's attempts towards self-expression, self-realization and self-fulfillment. The social division of society was critical in this paradigm. Utterances were made in a social context, and they were carriers of social meaning unique to the occasion in which they were made.

Writers like Ousmane Sembene, Alex La Guma, and Ngugi, have declared programmes governing their creative processes and their social and

political commitments. They address themselves to the isolating and alienating nature of capitalist social relations. There are others like Wole Soyinka and Leopold Sedar Senghor who reject the notion of the dialectic and its Hegelian inheritance in Marxism. They accept the social contradictions, but they do not recognize the Marxist prescription of 'transcendence' as their resolution. Other writers from this continent do not articulate what their programmes are, but they accomplish what they set out to achieve as creative writers. Alienation is the crisis they experience and they use the new psychology of Sigmund Freud to explain away their predicament. They ground human behaviour in fundamental biological terms rather than historical. To followers of Plato, the biological explanation of alienation should be related to the social life. Psychological life should be put within the social milieu, psychic life, the content of the psyche should be placed in its ideological framework. The content of the psyche is made up of multiple and contradictory speech material, that is the inner speech. Alienation is a personal crisis as well as a global crisis. Its analysis is an immersion of literary and psychological life in the ideological environment and the social milieu. The individual phenomena and the artistic and psychological life are complex refractions of realities that are social, value-laden and contested. Thus, to articulate the writer's alienation, one must show the reader one's alienation. We have lived in interesting times. Gold Coast was the first country to get Independence in 1957. Kenya got independence in 1963. Most of us lived through Nkrumah's rule up to his overthrow and the subsequent life in exile. We have lived through Kenyatta's, Nyerere's and Milton Obote's rule, the excitement of the 1960s and the 1970s, the imposition of one-party democracy and military dictatorships that followed, the purges in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the multiparty era of the 1990s which shook the nationalist leaders like Kenneth Kaunda of the roots, and the economic stagnation of the 1990s. I, personally, have had to reconcile my Christianity which came to the fore in the 1980s with the intellectual atheism and scientific currents of the day.

The variants of Plato's construct are Christianity, Existentialism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, the African personality, which, when overstated, lead to



totalitarianism. There are Aristotelian variants which dwell on form. In the anthropological context literary critics in East Africa have become impatient with Plato's theories of literature, stressing the beauty of African culture and extolling African cultural nationalism. I find Bakhtin attractive. He has written "Discourse in the Novel," where he talks about *Heteroglossia*, various languages, or *Multispeachedness*. He talks about large dialectal differences which lead to mutual unintelligibility, distinguishing slangs of one year to the next and slogans of the hour as examples of *Heteroglossia*.

The novel, for him, is a literary form which takes advantage of the multiplicity of language which he describes. He has also written "The problem of speech Genres," where he points out the inadequacy of works which are abstracted from the realities of real verbal (or written) interchange.

Like African aestheticians and writers, Bakhtin rejected the dialectic as a mode of thought. Dostoevsky's novels, which he studies, are understood by him as a process that never achieves a resolution. The process opens the future rather than explaining the past. Bakhtin equally rejects the dialectic as a way of conceiving the structure of the novel, for the dialectic is a way of recognizing conflict and contradiction only to resolve them ultimately.

Bakhtin emphasizes dialogue in his aesthetic theories. Utterance, for him, only acquires meaning in relation to an utterance of an *other*. He was a philosopher of language who wanted to see a typology of prose, and the principles that underlined them.

## CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, the search for an East African tradition is an arduous one. The presence of the expatriate expert created a literary culture for an elite which consumed English literature, and created literary values which did not have roots in the East African soil. The establishment of the University of East Africa and the mushrooming of multi-national and indigenous publishers, accelerated the birth of an East African culture, with the products of that University reversing the trend and putting oral literature and African written literature in the lime light. Whereas, Makerere University College, Kampala, helped to entrench the School of English, the University of Nairobi Department of Literature became the seat of the revolution in the East African literary tradition.

In the devolution of a new literature syllabus at the University of Nairobi, literary trends and theories of literature emerged. Writers who dominated the scene, and the literary critics who worked closely with them, emphasized themes in literature. They chose the texts for study with the subject matter in mind. They also evolved a geo-political map that provided the texts they studied. In this way they created a huge canvas of literary material, which trends in literary research show, is not adequately studied. In this approach works of political and social thought, like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth* and Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, took the centre stage.

A look at the literature syllabuses in East Africa's Literature Departments shows that questions of period and genre in African literature ought to be emphasized more. Introductory lectures in Literary Criticism, Language Use and Description, Stylistics and Theory of Literature help to equip the student with tools of analysis and the whole endeavour of literary criticism. But as the language teachers at Moi University and the University of Nairobi have shown, these lectures do not help to refine the student's self-expression. The emphasis on themes in the syllabus does not equip

the student with a sensitive response to the words which is a pre-requisite in literary studies. Translation is an integral part of studying oral literature. This aspect of 'anguage study is absent in the study of literature at university level. Indeed, although oral literature has been put at the centre of our curriculum, it is not being studied as adequately as it should be at university level.

Mr. Chairman, the English language is a second language in East Africa. The originality of expressing ourselves in it is not reflected entirely in writing and speaking it correctly. It also comes with infusing it with images and idiom from our indigenous languages and the African worldview. The issue of plagiarism has come into our writing as Africans, because we looked for strait jackets to fit in our African matter. To be original with the East African expression we must bring into English our self-expression. The English language, moreover, is not the only language we have. We have our own indigenous languages (besides Kiswahili) in which we can write more creatively.

From the time the Department of Literature was inaugurated in the early 1970s, Fasihi (Literature in Kiswahili) was in the Department of Literature. Dr. Farouk Topan, who is now at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, offered courses in Swahili Literature in the Department of Literature. Mr. Chairman, Professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o, at this stage said on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1973, "If we are going to truly and seriously place the literature of African peoples at the centre, then we must seriously consider making French or Swahili compulsory subsidiaries." Mr. Chairman, this was not to be. When Dr. Farouk Topan left the Department, we invited the late Mr. Kazungu to teach Kiswahili Literature in our Department. In the process he moved with Kiswahili Literature to the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, and literature students lost the option.

In recruiting lecturers for the Literature Departments, let us include specialists in Gikuyu, Dholuo, Lubukusu, who are also competent in literatures in English and French. Dr. Farouk Topan was an expert in Swahili Literature. He wrote his plays and works of criticism in Kiswahili.

But he also taught translation. He supervised M.A. and doctoral students in many fields. Specialists in literatures in indigenous languages will bring the idiom and experiences in the cultures of those languages and enrich the study of literature.

I do not want to give the impression that all lecturers in a Department of Literature should have one theoretical approach to literature. At PhD levels the literary scholars employ different approaches to literary texts. That is why Ngugi wa Thiongo's approach is different from that of Dr. Eddah Gachukia. When Ngugi wa Thiongo was arrested in December 1977, we thought that the literary revolution would stop. We thought that his vision of an African Literature Department would die. We held a special staff meeting of the Department of Literature on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1978, from 9.15 a.m. It was chaired by the late Dr. G.S. Were, the Kenyan Professor of History. A Mr. B.O. Wanyama took the minutes of the meeting. All staff were there, except Professor Arthur Luvai, who sent his apologies. The major item on the agenda was re-allocation of teaching responsibilities. For the expediency, the two members who had handled Ngugi wa Thiongo's classes when he was on sabbatical leave were considered for taking them over. Dr. Kimani Gecau took over West African Literature. Professor Micere Githae Mugo took over Caribbean Literature. Professor Henry K. Indangasi took Russian Literature which he teaches up to this period. There were 22 postgraduate students in the Department. The Davidson College, in the US had written to the Vice-Chancellor, advising on an offer of one scholarship to a University of Nairobi student, interested in American Studies, especially in the fields of Sociology, History and Literature. The meeting nominated Sister Agnes Wanjiku Kabira who had studied African American and Latin American Literature in the Department, for the award.

Following the Department's meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, we were advised that it would be advisable to adopt a cool attitude on the subject of Ngugi's arrest. In the 1980s, the majority of us concentrated on the study of oral literature. This has helped us in developing interest in diverse forms of expressive culture and the creative use of human imagination,

art materials, and participation in the production of art materials, definitions of culture, art, aesthetics and the relevance of our literature in our changing societies.

Mr. Chairman, my interest is popular literature of the world. This has exposed me to the Sociology of the novel, literature and morality, the writer and his audience, ethics and aesthetics, values and traditions in literature. Courses in literature and gender are being offered, starting with Feminism, Feminist Literary Criticism, a study of works of literature by women from Africa and the rest of the world. Whereas some PhD's are being done on content in literature, others are being conducted on the art of literature. The students of literature are exposed to themes, structural meaning, style and language of literature. They are exposed to diverse theories, but they choose their paths and perform very well.

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