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European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa by Albert S. Gérard

Review by: James Booth

Research in African Literatures, Vol. 19, No. 3, Special Issue on Language and Style (Autumn, 1988), pp. 374-377

Published by: [Indiana University Press](http://www.indiana.edu/~iupress/)

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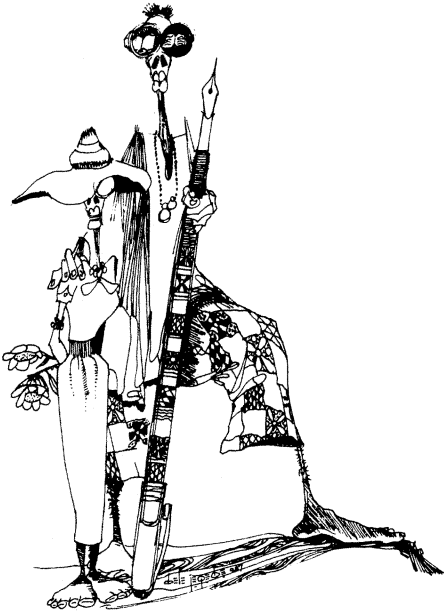
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BOOK REVIEWS

Albert S. Gérard, ed. *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986. 2 vols. 1,288 pages.

This monumental book, written in English, edited by a Belgian, and published in Budapest with the financial assistance of UNESCO, forms part of the ongoing *Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*. It brings together essays by sixty-two scholars and critics from sixteen countries in Africa, North America, and Europe (West and East). Presumably the wide spread of the contributors, rather than UNESCO's financial and political problems, lies behind the delay in its appearance. Its effective date seems to be 1979, with an occasional "stop-press" reference to 1980. In its compendious framework it resembles a medieval *summa*: a *Summa Africae*, attempting "a survey and a synthesis of the historical development" of all African literatures in European languages (14). To some extent it is a conscious attempt to give the "subject" academic definition and respectability. The first three sections are historical: "Under Western Eyes," "Black Consciousness," and "Black Power," while the fourth, "Comparative Vistas," attempts to counter the curse of babelism through a comparative approach.

One of its chief uses will be to provide bibliographical and other information,

particularly about the earlier centuries and the less familiar regions of the continent. The first chapters constitute an invaluable introduction to early African writing, treating Portuguese literary contacts (Gerald Moser), Latin writing (Albert Gérard), and eighteenth-century writing in English (Paul Edwards). A somber picture emerges of false dawns followed by long periods of sterility. One *negro ladino* of the late sixteenth century, the celebrated Juan Latino, even became a professor of Latin at Granada University and was happily married to a white woman. All this was changed by the slave trade: "As far as black writing in European languages is concerned, the seventeenth century, an intellectual golden age for so many nations, was one of deathly silence" (54). With the humanitarianism of the Enlightenment, another hesitant start was made, only to be thwarted by growing imperialism with its romantic and "scientific" superstitions about race.

Particularly useful are the essays on Lusophone writing by Gerald Moser, Norman Araujo, and Manuel Ferreira. The breadth of Portuguese African literature will surprise many Anglophone readers, and the characteristics of *luso-tropicalismo* and *caboverdeanidade* offer fascinating contrasts with French and English perspectives. Other essays range in approach from the brilliant to the baldly bibliographical. Mohamed Bakari and Ali A. Mazrui on the early phase of East African writing offer stimulating, if sometimes quirky perspectives: "It is often far easier to be converted to the ethics of a conquering power than to its aesthetics. . . . That may perhaps be one reason, among many, as to why 'pure' black people have already produced four winners of the Nobel Prize for Peace, and not a single Miss World" (864). Particularly incisive is Femi Osofisan's essay, which argues that despite its "almost unrelieved lack of distinction" (782), postwar Nigerian literature does show a healthy reaction against "negritudist exotica" which encumbered the works of the previous generation. John Reed's analysis of Rhodesian, counter-Rhodesian, and Zimbabwean literature provides subtle discussions of Lessing and Mungoshi, while Martin Steins gives a meticulous account of black migrants in Paris and shows how close Césaire came to "a black version of German national socialism" (369). Femi Ojo-Ade's piece on Liberia, Mukala Kadima-Nzuji's on the Belgian territories, A. J. Coetzee's on Afrikaans literature, P. Ngandu's on the golden years of the Francophone novel, and Fernando Lambert's on Cameroon are only a few among the many other essays which effectively combine information with wider analysis.

There are also some more routine, if still useful pieces, in which explication tends to predominate, such as Dieter Riemenschneider's essay on the recent Nigerian novel, Nyembwe Tshikumambila's rather elementary treatment of folktale techniques, and Joel 'Yinka Adedeji's clumsy account of Nigerian drama, which depicts Soyinka breaking "out of his cocoon of rites and rituals to delve into the contemporary cesspit of life and death produced by politicians" (724). As the book's preface warns, there are some omissions: recent South African drama and poetry, for instance. More seriously, the broad survey treatment given to the nations of Francophone Africa, though understandable in view of the massive centripetal pull of Paris, does tend to underplay the literary value of such masters as Oyono and Beti. By contrast the lightweight Anglophone figures Ekwensi and Aluko have separate chapters bearing their names.

The fourth, "exceedingly fragmentary" comparative section is very mixed in quality. To be genuinely illuminating the comparative approach needs to be based on wide cultural perspectives and aimed at eliciting significant parallels and differences. Too often however one finds merely broad thematic survey. Willfried F. Feuser's essay on the short story catalogs twenty-eight often overlapping "themes" ("childhood," "mother and child," "strains and stresses of adolescence"), culled from 497 stories and "arranged in order of frequency" (1110). Janis A. Mayes's "Ironic Stances in Cameroon and Nigeria" provides routine explications of various Francophone and Anglophone novels, while Daniel P. Kunene's article details the crudely moralistic plots of several Xhosa tales and their English-language equivalents. More genuinely thought-provoking are the essay by Michel Fabre on Richard Wright and *negritude* (which includes quotations from unpublished correspondence) and the essay by Jacqueline Leiner contrasting the "fulfilled" African *negritude* of Senghor with the dislocated West Indian *negritude* of Césaire, "which cries for fulfilment" (1152). The most lively comparative essay is that by Ali Mazrui and Mohamed Bakari, which makes the point that traditional African culture is itself fragmented: "The Chagga do not normally seek to learn the verse of the Kikuyu; nor are the Baganda qualified to evaluate the tales of the Acholi" (1046) and explores the interaction between "ethno-African," "Afro-European," and "Afro-Islamic" strands in East African culture.

The two essays on socialist scholarship are bibliographically informative, but otherwise disappointing. The Czech scholar Vladimír Klíma paints a dreary picture of "the achievement of socialist science" in this field: "Efficient team-work and consistent application of progressive scientific methods have been facilitated by strong institutional support" (1212). African works, he reassures us, are carefully ideologically vetted before translation is permitted, and in criticism "the methods are those that have been evolved by dialectical and historical materialism." "Specialists from the socialist countries refuse to be confined to . . . a limited aesthetic approach that disregards the social and ideological implications of literary production" (1212). In Klíma's formulations the concepts "scientific," "aesthetic," "progressive," and "ideological" take on all the intellectual complexity of a street guide. An essay by Elena Rjauzova follows, dealing with the study of Lusophone literature in the Soviet Union which, for obvious political reasons, anticipated that of British and French scholars by a decade and more.

Paradoxically, for all its diversity and contradictions, this book makes a remarkably coherent overall impression. The comprehensiveness of its framework means that, wherever a gap is left, the editor must intervene with a bibliographical or historical link passage, and frequently these interventions contain the most penetrating insights. The perspectives of Albert Gérard, humane, enthusiastic, and rigorous, inform the whole enterprise. He cites Bernth Lindfors's judgment that scholars of African literature are "still too young and unsophisticated to be regarded by our colleagues as peers" (1262) and pursues what he ruefully terms "the scholarly approach, ponderous, elitist, persistent and reliable" (20). We need to give ourselves "a good dose of history and anthropology" (1267) and to produce more and better biographies and bibliographies of African writers.

Intellectually, Gérard is a demystifier, characterizing as "ludicrously Utopian"

the proposal that Swahili should become *the* Panafrikan language (1014) and refusing to preoccupy himself with the question of whether literature in non-African languages can be truly "African." He observes that the key features of negritude: "group solidarity, including the dead; intimate knowledge of and contact with nature; belief in the supernatural—far from being a prerogative of the black man, are shared in fact by the majority of the world's societies"—especially he adds (with a spark of enlightened irritation) their "more derelict and impoverished" sections (1266). A reader familiar with Ngugi's account of the suppression of Gikuyu in Kenyan colonial schools will pause over Gérard's statement that almost all the vernacular works published in Africa "have been produced in countries that were once part of the British empire" (19). Unlike French Catholic missionaries, the Protestant British invented orthographies for local languages and encouraged literacy in them. There has been as yet no Francophone Ngugi to champion modern vernacular writing, David Diop being a minor and very isolated figure. This large contrast between Anglo-Saxon and Latin imperialisms forms one of Gérard's major historical themes, and on this level he is an original and creative scholar. The parallel that he draws between the position of the vernaculars in Dark Age Europe and in modern Africa is pregnant with insights, and as he himself remarks, the historian of early Europe may have as much to learn from the modern African experience as vice versa. Here, as throughout this impressive book, there is much food for thought.

James Booth

Seun Ige. *Comparative Literature as a Distinct Discipline: A Superfluity*. Ife Monographs on Literature and Criticism, 4th Series, No. 1. Ile-Ife: Department of Literature in English, University of Ife, 1986. 35 pages.

This short monograph, as its title all too clearly signifies, sets out to discredit and ultimately render redundant the theory and practice of comparative literature. It does so in two movements, corresponding to the two sections—apart from the conclusion—into which the essay is divided, namely, "The Western Genesis" and "The Crusade into Africa."

Among the godfathers of the "Western genesis" of comparative literature, the author mentions Paul Van Tieghem, Fernand Baldensperger, Louis Cazamian, Jean-Marie Carré, Marius-François Guyard on the French side and, apart from some minor comparatists, only the archconservative René Wellek on the American side. To make the discipline (which at any rate is slotted for elimination as a discipline) look uniformly Western, its leading Eastern European theoreticians, such as Władysław Falkierski, L. Sziklay, Alexandru Dima, Viktor M. Zimunskij, István Söter, and Dionyz Durisin, are totally omitted. The irrelevant bickerings of bygone decades between the so-called French and the so-called American school of comparative literature are unduly dwelt on, as if comparative literature were not something much bigger than either of them, while their central conflict, the only one worth mentioning, which focused on the Eurocentrism of Wellek and War-