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**Special Issue On
Africa: Literature and Politics**

**Guest Editor
Claire L. Dehon**

Contents—Winter 1991

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‘Boy!’: The Hinge of Colonial Double Talk

Anne M. Menke

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Abstract. The French colonial enterprise in Africa enforced racial segregation, yet encouraged Africans to assimilate the French language, culture, and religion. The essay questions these contradictory policies through readings of Ferdinand Oyono’s novels. It argues that a figure that embodies undecidability—the colonial servant known as the “boy”—is the locus of the denaturalization of the identities that were simultaneously institutionalized and denied by the Manichaeian colonial world. (AMM)

Chinua Achebe and the Post-colonial Esthetic: Writing, Identity, and National Formation

Simon Gikandi

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Abstract. Chinua Achebe is recognized as one of Africa’s most important and influential writers, and his novels have focused on the ways in which the European tradition of the novel and African modes of expression relate to each other in both complementary and contesting ways. Achebe’s novels are informed

by an important theory of writing which tries to mediate the politics of the novel as a form of commentary on the emergence and transformation of nationalism which constitutes the African writer's epistemological context. Achebe's esthetic has been overdetermined by the changing discourse on representation and national identity in colonial and post-colonial Africa. His anxious quest for a post-colonial esthetic is predicated on the belief that narrative can enable the writer to express an alternative order of things opposed to realities imprisoned by imperialism and Western domination. (SG)

Reflections on Linguistic and Literary Colonization and Decolonization in Africa

Eric Sellin

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Abstract. Despite the cultural diversity found in Africa and the complexity of the psychology of the colonizer and the colonized, several fundamental facts emerge regarding the function of language and literature in recent African history. The colonizer sought to instill a sense of inferiority in the colonized as part of the dynamics of conquest, placing special emphasis on education and language. These notions, lucidly discussed by such social thinkers as O. Mannoni, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi, have analogues in the defense of language everywhere where lingua-political oppression occurs, be it in colonial Africa or on an Arapaho reservation in the American West. What is especially significant about the forced acquisition of a European language is the fact that this very tool of oppression tended to become the total of unity and rebellion for the oppressed. From a political viewpoint, the acquisition of a European lingua-franca entailed such logistics of liberation as communication and collective identity which overrode regional and tribal differences. From a cultural viewpoint, the language which had been used to colonize the minds of Africans knew two phases: first, one of simple acquisition of both language and attendant literary forms and second, one in which the European language was warped or "bullied" to fit the author's African cultural impulses. In the second instance we have, as a result of code-mixing and the transfer of cultural factors, the emergence of a unique and vigorous literature. In itself, this literature may be appreciated *qua* literature, but we should not forget that the code-mixing is often as concerned with the rejection of the language of oppression and the restauration of indigenous values as it is with traditional literary self-expression, as, for example, in the two poems by Algerian poet Youcef Sebti which bear the titles "La Soleil" and "Le Lune," thereby pooh-pooing sacrosanct French grammar by reversing the genders of "sun" and "moon" even as the articles reinstate the respective feminine and masculine genders of "sun" and "moon" found in Arabic. (ES)

The Dialectics of the Archaic and the Post-Modern in Maghrebian Literature Written in French

Hédi Abdel-Jaouad

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Abstract. Maghrebian literature written in French has been since its inception a literature of and about the abyss. For the Maghrebian the abyss is essentially the space of modernity, that forbidden citadel of art, science and technology from which s/he was excluded and marginalized. Recently, writing of/in French has become the site/scene of a *polemos* between the archaic (identity) and the post-modern (difference).

Our study of the archaic focuses on cultural, literary and critical knowledge and centers around two main themes: that of a beginning, that is a search for events in the past that explain the abyss (or retardation vis-à-vis the West), and that of an excavation, mainly of the collective unconscious, through the revamping of traditional and oral materials. On the other hand, the post-modern is not only that “moment” of delegitimization of modernity, as expounded by J.-F. Lyotard and other social theorists of post-modern knowledge; it is also a project, an esthetics and a theory to be, an epistemology of the future. In short, Maghrebian literature written in French, because it makes use of the Other’s alphabet, is faced with a formidable challenge: can/will the alliance of the archaic and the post-modern bridge the abyss of modernity? (HA-J)

Autobiographical Authority and the Politics of Narrative

Renée Larrier

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Abstract. Autobiographical narratives, which include autobiography, autobiographical novel, memoir, and chronicle, constitute a major genre in African francophone literature. Informed by history, they do not celebrate personal accomplishment, but rather accentuate the group experience. These self-stories rely on realistic representation in order to document events for future generations and function to correct stereotypical misconceptions—therein lies their political consciousness. (RL)

Oligarchy and Orature in the Novels of Nuruddin Farah

Derek Wright

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Abstract. In Farah’s fiction Somali oral traditions are shown to possess a resilient strength and even a revolutionary vitality. Yet they are not envisaged polemically, as unsullied alternatives and sources of counter-discourse to post-colonial realities: rather, they are shown to be implicated in their evils and corruptions.

Faced with a mode of reality built on oral discourse, where the written word is ruthlessly suppressed, written texts either retreat into secret cipher or are themselves infiltrated by the vaporous oral reality of public life and take on selected elements of oral literary conventions: notably, their fluid indeterminacy of meaning and interpretative openness, their reinventive capacities and vagaries of characterization, and the uncentredness of audience-oriented modes of discourse. Modern Somalia and the lives of its dissident intellectuals are portrayed as correspondingly uncentred entities whose meanings are not traceable to any single stable order of reality but float in a multiplicity of versions. The narrative plot of Loyaan's quest for the truth of his brother's death in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is finally unable to unravel the political-criminal plot to murder and mythologize Soyaan, which dissolves amid a welter of conflicting oral testimony and runs out, unresolved, in loose ends. (DW)

Writing Double: Politics and The African Narrative of French Expression

John D. Erickson

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Abstract. This essay studies two African narratives of French expression (*Le Temps de Tamango* of Boubacar Diop and *L'Enfant de sable* of Tahar ben Jelloun) to see how they create a discourse of difference that challenges and deconstructs the conventions of the discursive system of French, its signifying practices, and its ideological underpinnings. The tactics of these narratives, which mark them as post-colonial in a strict sense (as opposed to neo-colonial), are productive of a radical other-meaning, a new meaning that "speaks" to the concerns of and problems confronting the non-Western writer. (JDE)

The Political Alienation of the Intellectual in Recent Zairian Fiction

Janice Spleth

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Abstract. A high proportion of recent Zairian fiction features intellectuals—educators, priests, students, and professionals—as major characters who are in some way alienated from society. This study documents the extent of this occurrence in novels by Mwil a Mpang Ngal, V. Y. Mudimbe, Bolya Baenga, and Pius Ngandu Nkashama and, at the same time, relates the situation of the intellectual as seen in these works to some of the social and political factors peculiar to Zaire's colonial history and post-independence evolution. Analyses of individual novels provide the basis for a discussion of Belgian colonial policies regarding the *évolué*, the ambiguous role of the African priest in the Congo, the

growing corruption of the new governing elite since independence, and the ongoing political repression of intellectuals who oppose the status quo. While the characters in the works under examination suffer from different sorts of alienation, all of them are in some way victims of changes in class structure during the post-colonial period. (JS)

Agostinho Neto: Pure Poetic Discourse and Mobilization Rhetoric
Janis L. Pallister 137

Abstract. Neto's importance in relationship to the modern genre we will call militant or guerilla poetry and his considerable poetic gifts as well call for a mainstreaming of his literary contributions. "Protest poetry" might more aptly describe his oeuvre; the term is certainly a somewhat better representation of his content than "guerilla poetry" or "poetry of combat." But whatever word is used to sum up that content, in the article on Neto one sees contextually how this talented poet fuses his ideologies with his structures, and intertextually how he avoids the diatribes, the invective and the stereotypically strident rhetoric of most guerilla poetry in a way scarcely imitated by his poetic "counterparts." Selected details of his biography are also highlighted as they bear upon his poetry; e.g. his physician's *regard* which is at stake in certain passages of "Kinaxixi" and "Um aniversário." (JLP)

The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*
Gay Wilentz 159

Abstract. Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* or *Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* is a relentless attack on the notions of exile as relief from the societal constraints of national development and freedom to live in a cultural environment conducive to creativity. In this personalized prose/poem, Aidoo questions certain prescribed theories of exile (including the reasons for exile)—particularly among African men. The novel exposes a rarely heard viewpoint in literature in English—that of the African woman exile. Aidoo's protagonist Sissie, as the "eye" of her people, is a sojourner in the "civilized" world of the colonizers. In this article, I examine Aidoo's challenge to prevailing theories of exile, her questioning of the supposed superiority of European culture for the colonial subject, and her exposé of the politics of exile for African self-exile. Through a combination of prose, poetry, oral voicing and letter writing, Aidoo's Sissie reports back to her home community what she sees in the land of the colonizers and confronts those exiles who have forgotten their duty to their native land. (GW)

Nadine Gordimer: The White Artist as *A Sport of Nature*

Barbara Temple-Thurston

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Abstract. This article applies principles of new historicism to show that *A Sport of Nature* can be read as Gordimer's attempt to persuade South African artists to reject mere protest art and to shift art beyond the trap of oppositional forces in South Africa's history today. The text calls instead—via fiction and the imagination—for a new post-apartheid art that will generate creative possibilities for a future South Africa. Gordimer's protagonist, Hillela Capran, is read as a metaphor for the white South African artist who, like Hillela, struggles for an authentic identity and meaningful role in the evolving history of South Africa. This paper asserts that *A Sport of Nature* boldly proposes the mutation necessary for the South African artist and people to resolve the political, personal, or artistic fragmentation, beckoning other artists along the path. Hope of its assured success, however, remains as elusive and unpredictable as any "sport of nature" must be. (BT-T)

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