

based on the 1971 Cerisy-la-Salle colloquium. However, instead of exploring the problems relating to the New Novel, such as the relationship of the "nouveau roman" to film, criticism, phenomenology, politics, and so forth, the New York colloquium delineates the present situation of the New Novel within a retrospective framework. It is an excellent addition to the library of all readers interested in the "nouveau roman," innovative fiction, and the "trans-Atlantic refraction"--the name Harry Levin once gave to French-American literary connections.

George M. Gugelberger

MARXISM AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

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Reviewed by Gerald Moore

This is the first selection of essays on African literature written from any clearly stated and consistent ideological viewpoint. Criticism of African literature has remained curiously innocent of the fierce debates raging elsewhere. It has ranged between the conservative and somewhat Eurocentric contributions of critics like Dan Izevbaye of Nigeria or Eustace Palmer of Freetown, the black nationalism of Chinweizu and his collaborators (which is really a substitute for a proper ideology) and the lonely excursions into structuralism by Sunday Anozie.

In his introduction, Professor Gugelberger writes of the maturing of the radical alternative in criticism with the work of Ngugi, Okot p'Bitek, Peter Nazareth and others appearing over the past decade. Within African universities, significant contributions to Marxist criticism are being made by scholars like Claude Aké, Onafume Onoge, Grant Kamenju, Biodun Jeyifo, and Tunde Fatunde. The time is therefore ripe for a volume which pulls together some of this work for the first time and which situates it historically both in the developing stream of Marxist interpretation and in that of African literary criticism.

These tasks are performed respectively in Professor Gugelberger's introduction and in his essay on "Marxist Literary Debates and Their Continuity in African Literary Criticism." He highlights the relevance of Brecht's critical writings to this debate. These are probably still too little known in Africa, having only recently come in for proper attention in Europe, where they have been overshadowed by Brecht's huge contribution to modern theatre practice. Their neglect in Africa is evidenced by Grant Kamenju's essay on '*Petals of Blood* as a mirror of the African Revolution.' This verges most closely of any here upon "crude Marxism" and it is notable that Kamenju's references to Marxist authority are confined to Marx himself and to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*, both a little "old hat" so far as contemporary intellectual debate is concerned. Interestingly, Kamenju singles out for praise a passage in *Petals of Blood* (1976) which is condemned by Peter Nazareth in his own essay on the book for thrusting highly improbable and uncharacteristic thoughts into the mind of the old guerilla fighter Abdulla; Nazareth points out that this is one of several places in a generally impressive novel where Ngugi has intruded into the book to make sure that the reader gets the right ideological message. This suggests that Ngugi is not as confident as he should be that the book contains its own powerfully integrated meaning; a meaning which, as with all true works of art, cannot be filleted and preached directly to the reader without damage to the fabric of the work itself. This is a mistake that Ngugi never makes in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), a less ambitious but more completely achieved work of art.

If Ngugi wa Thing'o is something of a socialist hero for many of these authors, Wole Soyinka emerges as something of a bugbear. In one of the most profound and carefully-argued essays, Geoffrey Hunt demonstrates the romantic individualism which lies at the

heart of Soyinka's aesthetics. He contrasts this adversely with the liberationist aesthetics of Amílcar Cabral of Guinea Bisau, as elaborated in *Return to the Source*. Both Soyinka's tendency to lapse into black nationalism as a substitute for class analysis and his setting up of a falsely simplistic African v. European dichotomy (most notably in the play *Death and the King's Horseman*) are tellingly exposed here; and their ultimate similarity to Senghor's type of negritude is noted.

Whilst being a courageous and redoubtable opponent of black dictatorships, Soyinka does often seem to ignore the nature of the system, both local and international, which produces and sustains them. Bukassa was, after all, both installed and toppled by the French. Mobutu has been a loyal and not *too* embarrassing servant of the American interests which put him in power. Slenderly educated soldiers of the former colonial armies have also come to power in rather suspicious coups in countries such as Mali, Togo, and Uganda. The sort of sweeping transformation of the social and economic systems inherited from colonialism which might make this sort of leadership impossible do not always seem to be those which Soyinka would welcome. Where he does appear to address the problem, as in his post-Civil War novel *Season of Anomy* (1973), romantic individualism soon crops up again in the solution. Through a historical accident which is certainly not his fault, Soyinka is the product of a colonial and elitist education, whilst Cabral was the product of an education through struggle in the field, which forced him to think much more radically about the possible lines of a new order.

The number of attacks on Soyinka in these pages, however, which include those in an impressive essay by Biodun Jeyifo on "Tragedy, History and Ideology", are perhaps best explained by the sheer size of the target he presents, since increased by the award of the Nobel Prize. His domination of the literary scene and his polemical style in debate place him in a position in which he inevitably disappoints the expectations of younger writers, whilst inspiring them by the scope of his creative achievement.

Onafume Onoge contributes a thoughtful outline for a Marxist sociology of African literature, singling out Frantz Fanon as the pioneer in this endeavor and building upon his insights into the true nature of post-colonial (or neo-colonial) societies. What Onoge calls "the Festac metaphor" (Festac was an extravagant international jamboree celebrating the heights of African cultural achievement) is attacked for creating "the illusion of a classless, cultural consensus in contemporary African societies." Against this, Onoge argues that a recognizable class conflict not only exists now but always has existed in African societies. To argue otherwise is to indulge in a romantic mystification which is used to justify the present distribution of power, wealth, and privilege on the continent. It is for this type of mystification that Jeyifo reproaches Soyinka, for by seeking to restore the integrity of the Yoruba past, he appears to deny its feudal aspect; an aspect in which the nobility were seen, or strove to be seen, as acting for the spiritual good of the whole community, and hence earning their inordinate share of its benefits. Such interpretations of the African past are highly attractive to the one-man, one-party leaderships predominating in Africa today.

The continental scope of the collection is increased by informative essays on the composition of the Angolan revolutionary elite, which was surprisingly lacking in any racial divide and was more the product of a particular generation than of a particular ethnic group, and on the revolutionary poetry of Mozambique. There is also an analysis by Michael Vaughan of the ideological stance of the South African writers associated with the populist magazine *Staffrider*. This proves to be long on black nationalism but short on the sort of material which would help its readers to perceive the South African conflict as also a class one, whose class aspects are consistently disguised by the official rhetoric which presents it simply as racial.

There is, however, one weakness in the scope of the volume and that is the absence of a Francophone perspective. One looks in vain for an essay on a figure as significant--for the concerns of these critics--as Sembène Ousmane of Senegal or Mongo Beti of Cameroun. The former's work in film as well as fiction is of particular interest because of

its accessibility to an audience undivided by either education or language (since his films are shot in one of the major languages of Senegal but are subtitled in French). Likewise, if the editor believes that class and the neo-colonial tactics of international capitalism are more significant than the more immediately visible differences of race, why do we have nothing here from the vast northern segment of Africa, stretching from Mauritania to Ethiopia, which has likewise experienced colonial conquest, exploitation, and expropriation; which has likewise fought wars of liberation; and likewise striven to preserve its revolutionary ideals in the less simple world which follows victory? An article on the novels and plays of Kateb Yacine of Algeria, for instance, would have struck points of illumination in many parts of this collection. Professor Gugelberger would be well advised to work on a second edition which offers these extra perspectives upon his major theme.