

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

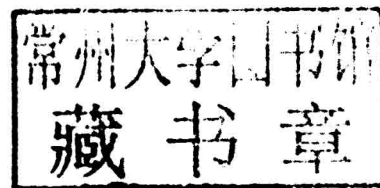
CLC 380

Volume 380

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short-Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers

Lawrence J. Trudeau
EDITOR



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Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 3,000 authors from 91 countries now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Before the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially necessary to today’s reader.

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CLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors of the twenty-first century. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 covered authors who died after December 31, 1959. Since January 2000, the series has covered authors who are living or who died after December 31, 1999; those who died between 1959 and 2000 are now included in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. There is minimal duplication of content between series.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science-fiction writers, literary and social critics, world authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews selected from hundreds of review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning an author’s career from its inception to current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other works that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

CLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale’s *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*.

Organization of the Book

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author’s name.

- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication information of each work is given. In the case of works not published in English, a translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. As a further aid to the reader, a list of **Principal English Translations** is provided for authors who did not publish in English; the list selects those translations most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, plays are dated by first performance, not first publication, and the location of the first performance is given, if known. Lists of **Representative Works** discussed in the entry appear with topic entries.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
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Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hébert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82. Print.

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Mongo Beti

1932-2001

(Pseudonym of Alexandre Biyidi Awala; also wrote under the pseudonym Eza Boto) Cameroonian novelist, essayist, editor, journalist, and short-story writer.

The following entry provides criticism of Beti's life and works. For additional information about Beti, see *CLC*, Volume 27.

INTRODUCTION

Mongo Beti is known for novels that expose the damaging influence of colonialism in his native Cameroon. His works chronicle the history of Cameroon from the years leading up to independence in 1960 through the repressive, French-backed regimes of President Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-82) and his successor, Paul Biya (1982-). Beti often satirizes the dysfunctions of political and social structures that have been torn apart by imperialist exploitation and the conflict between European and African values. A sympathizer with the nationalist rebellion of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), Beti lived and worked in self-imposed exile in France for thirty-two years following the military suppression of the UPC in 1958 and the assassination of its leader, Ruben Um Nyobé. Outside of his fiction, Beti expressed his political opinions in polemical tracts and newspaper articles and in the pages of the journal he founded in Paris, *Peuples noirs/Peuples africains* (1978-91; may be translated as *Black Peoples/African Peoples*).

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Alexandre Biyidi Awala was born on 30 June 1932 in the village of Akometam. He attended a Catholic mission school from 1939 to 1943, after which he worked for a time on the family cocoa farm before returning to his studies at a public high school in Yaoundé, the capital of then-French Cameroon. Biyidi Awala's studies in Yaoundé coincided with the birth of the UPC, which advocated independence from France and was the first indigenous political party in Cameroon. He attended UPC meetings and was profoundly influenced by the Marxist teachings of Nyobé.

In 1951, Biyidi Awala moved to France after earning a scholarship to attend the University of Aix-en-Provence. His first work of fiction, the short story "Sans haine et sans amour" (may be translated as "Without Hatred and without Love"), was published in 1953 under the pseudonym Eza

Boto. It appeared in a journal founded by the Senegalese writer Alioune Diop, *Présence Africaine*, an important outlet for the dissemination of African writing in Europe. Biyidi Awala also contributed several essays to *Présence Africaine* in which he called for a literature of realism that frankly addressed the crimes of colonialism. Like "Without Hatred and without Love," his first novel, *Ville cruelle* (1954; published as *Cruel City*), was also published under the name Eza Boto. He subsequently adopted the pseudonym Mongo Beti, which translates in the Ewondo language to "Son of the Beti people." The first novel he published under the new name, *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956; published as *The Poor Christ of Bomba*), was banned in Cameroon under pressure from the archbishop of Yaoundé for its satirical view of the French Catholic missionary project.

In February 1959, on one of his return visits to Cameroon, Beti was temporarily jailed for his connections to the UPC. On his release, he returned to France, where he taught classical letters, first at the Lycée de Henri Avril in Lamballe and then, following studies at the Sorbonne, at the Lycée Corneille in Rouen. Devastated by the suppression of the UPC in Cameroon, Beti stopped writing for more than a decade. He returned to literature in 1972 with *Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation* (may be translated as *Takeover in Cameroon: Autopsy of a Decolonization*), a book-length essay inspired by the public execution, on 15 January 1971, of UPC founder Ernest Ouandié on charges of plotting against the Ahidjo government. A skewering of Cameroon's first independent government and France's hold on Cameroonian affairs, *Takeover in Cameroon* was confiscated by authorities in Cameroon and France. The controversy sparked Beti's creativity, and he responded with a trilogy of novels that recreated the material of *Takeover in Cameroon* in a form less likely to cause problems with the censors: *Remember Ruben* (1974), *Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur* (1974; published as *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*), and *La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle* (1979; published as *Lament for an African Pol*).

Beti founded the bimonthly journal *Peuples noirs/Peuples africains* in 1978 with the help of his wife, Odile Tobner, also a professor of literature. In *Lettre ouverte aux Camerounais, ou La deuxième mort de Ruben Um Nyobé* (1986; may be translated as *Open Letter to the Cameroonians; or, The Second Death of Ruben Um Nyobé*), Beti described the sabotage of his editorial activities by the secret police of Biya's regime. By 1991, subscriptions to *Peuples noirs/*

Peuples africains had so dwindled that Beti was forced to cease publication of the journal. That same year, after an absence of more than three decades, he traveled back to Cameroon to attend a writers' conference and visit his ailing mother. He documented his return in the intellectual diary *La France contre l'Afrique: Retour au Cameroun* (1993; may be translated as *France against Africa: Return to Cameroon*).

Beti retired from teaching in 1994. Amid the gradual liberalizations of the Biya government, he and his wife relocated to Yaoundé. He established a peoples' bookstore there devoted to African subjects, the Librairie des Peuples Noirs. Beti continued to write fiction, and he contributed as a columnist to Cameroonian newspapers. These pieces were collected posthumously as *Mongo Beti à Yaoundé, 1991-2001* (2005; may be translated as *Mongo Beti in Yaoundé, 1991-2001*). Beti died of kidney failure on 7 October 2001.

MAJOR WORKS

Beti's literary career is often divided into three periods. The first spans his student days in France, from 1953 to 1958, and includes his four early novels concerned with the colonial period in Cameroon. Many of the central characters in these novels are outsiders, ordinary Africans caught between the forces of tradition and progress, too paralyzed by self-doubt and confusion to alter their situations for the better. The protagonist of *Cruel City* is a peasant cocoa farmer, Banda, who gets swindled by a Greek businessman when he tries to sell his produce in the city. *Mission terminée* (1957; published as *Mission to Kala*) is a satire of the colonial education system and features a young protagonist, Jean-Marie Medza, who returns to his village after failing his exams at a French secondary school. Expecting humiliation, Medza is instead celebrated as a great scholar and sent on an important mission to Kala, a village in the interior, to retrieve a runaway bride. Thinking he will impress the Kala rustics with his superior knowledge, Medza ends up being educated by his backwoods hosts, and in the process discovers the limits of his Western schooling.

The Poor Christ of Bomba depicts the failures of the Catholic missionary enterprise in Cameroon through the figure of the Reverend Father Superior Drumont, a hot-tempered zealot intent on converting the Tala people to Christianity by any means, including physical abuse. Drumont's complete lack of understanding of Tala social systems, mores, and religious practices is described by the narrator, Drumont's naive fifteen-year-old houseboy and loyal follower, Denis. Drumont finally admits defeat and is utterly disillusioned to discover that his mission doubles as a brothel that serves the local catechists. *Le roi miraculé* (1958; published as *King Lazarus*) is the story of a polygamous tribal chief who agrees to be baptized to save his soul.

When the chief divests himself of all but his youngest bride, the scorned wives retaliate, setting off a general riot.

The second phase of Beti's career covers his years of exile in France and the more radical postcolonial works that began with the publication of *Takeover in Cameroon*. That novel details the political situation in Cameroon from 1948 to 1972, implicating France and the local postcolonial leadership in the undermining of the independence movement. In his Ruben trilogy, Beti denounced what he described as abuses of power that turned the process of decolonization into a form of recolonization, designed to limit the freedoms of the African people. Inspired by the myth of the nationalist leader Nyobé, these novels—*Remember Ruben*, *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, and *Lament for an African Pol*—portray the anticolonialist fight and the failure of the independence movement.

Remember Ruben follows the lives of Mor-Zamba and his half-brother, Abena, revolutionaries who continue the struggle during the dictatorial regime of Baba Toura le Bituré, a thinly veiled stand-in for Ahidjo. At the end of the novel, Wendelin Essola, another Rubenist, renounces his beliefs in exchange for his liberation from one of Bituré's concentration camps. In *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, Essola returns to his village after an absence of nearly a decade. He discovers that his sister, Perpetua, has died as a result of the combined forces of neocolonialist greed and backward tribal customs. *Lament for an African Pol*, focuses again on Mor-Zamba and Abena as they successfully fight to free a village from the hands of the puppet regime.

The third period of Beti's output encompasses the writings he produced after his return to his homeland. In addition to his journalism, he wrote three novels that provide perspectives on modern Cameroonian society. *L'histoire du fou* (1994; published as *The Story of the Madman*) describes the chaos that befalls a fictional African republic under a rapid succession of military regimes. *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* (1999; may be translated as *Too Much Sun Kills Love*) and its sequel, *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* (1999; may be translated as *Commotion in Black and White*), are detective novels with complicated plots set in an underdeveloped African country crippled by political intrigues involving Africans and Europeans.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Among writers of the independence generation in Africa, Beti is recognized as the most influential voice in the struggle against French domination in Cameroon. Given that he cast his objectives in plainly political terms and insisted that African literature accurately reflect historical realities, it is not surprising that many scholars have analyzed Beti's work from an ideological perspective, taking for granted that he was far more concerned about politics than art. However, more recent commentary has challenged this assumption.

Much of the scholarship on Beti seeks to illuminate the intimate connection between his aesthetics and the political and social problems he grappled with. Many critics have shown Beti's polemics to be built upon a complex web of individual and family experience that reflects the general condition of Cameroon and the heterogeneous and ambiguous influences at play in its twentieth-century transition and decline. Stressing the metaphoric significance of family structures in Beti's fiction, Laurie Corbin (2003) explored the implications of father-son conflict as it contributes to Beti's critique of patriarchal power in many forms, including the oppressive constraints of the male-dominated traditional African household and the authoritarian control of colonies by metropolitan powers, including the French.

Critics have emphasized the prominence of the theme of the orphan in Beti's work, a figure common to Cameroonian oral literature, as it reflects the African's isolation from competing cultural values and the failures of France's paternalistic mission in Cameroon. Wangari wa Nyatetū-Waigwa (1996) examined Beti's revisions to the bildungsroman form, focusing on the youthful protagonist of *Mission to Kala*, whose education is so complicated by warring influences, African and European, that he fails to mature into adulthood. In an afterword to *The Story of the Madman*, Patricia-Pia Célérrier (2001) discussed Beti's experiments with language as a vital element of his subversive critique: "From the beginning of his career as a novelist, Beti has played on different linguistic and semantic registers. He has made use of Latin, Bantu, and Pidgin expressions, together with a system of echoing (and ironic) footnotes, to problematize the linguistic situation of his country as well as the restrictive nature of his narrative tool: French."

Beti's novels have also invited commentary on the relationship between literature and historical memory. Critics have recognized the complex dynamics of his earliest novels—where Africans are to varying degrees complicit in and resistant to the colonial order—as a direct challenge to the idealized version of Africa found in the writings of his contemporaries associated with Négritude, a literary movement that protested French-colonial rule and the policy of assimilation. More recently, critics have explored Beti's contributions to postcolonial theory. Boniface Mongo-Mboussa (2002) and Phyllis Taoua (2003) interpreted the later novels as a counterhistory to prevalent accounts that include decolonization in a paradigm of progress and modernity. Reflecting on the dynamics of dispossession in Beti's works, Taoua remarked, "This author's passionate denunciation, in essays, novels and deeds, of the way in which the historical process of decolonization was hijacked in Cameroon, presents postcolonial theory with a provocative challenge. How useful is it to approach his literary writings today with a backward-looking paradigm that effaces the politics of anti-colonial protest?"

Janet Mullane

PRINCIPAL WORKS

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- Ville cruelle* [published as *Cruel City*]. As Boto. Paris: Editions Africaines, 1954. (Novel)
- Le pauvre Christ de Bomba: Roman* [published as *The Poor Christ of Bomba*]. Paris: Laffont, 1956. (Novel)
- Mission terminée* [published as *Mission to Kala*]. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1957. (Novel)
- Le roi miraculé: Chronique des Essazam. Roman* [published as *King Lazarus*]. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1958. (Novel)
- Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation* [may be translated as *Takeover in Cameroon: Autopsy of a Decolonization*]. Paris: Maspero, 1972. (Essay)
- Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur: Roman* [published as *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*]. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1974. (Novel)
- Remember Ruben*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1974. (Novel)
- Peuples noirs/Peuples africains* [may be translated as *Black Peoples/African Peoples*]. Ed. Mongo Beti. 80 issues. 1978-91. (Journal)
- La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle: Remember Ruben 2, Roman* [published as *Lament for an African Pol*]. Rouen: Editions des Peuples Noirs, 1979. (Novel)
- Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama, futur camionneur* [may be translated as *The Two Mothers of Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama, Future Trucker*]. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1982. (Novel)
- La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama* [may be translated as *Revenge of Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama*]. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1984. (Novel)
- Lettre ouverte aux Camerounais, ou La deuxième mort de Ruben Um Nyobé* [may be translated as *Open Letter to the Cameroonians; or, The Second Death of Ruben Um Nyobé*]. Rouen: Editions des Peuples Noirs, 1986. (Essay)
- Dictionnaire de la négritude* [may be translated as *Dictionary of Negritude*]. With Odile Tobner. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989. (Dictionary)
- La France contre l'Afrique: Retour au Cameroun* [may be translated as *France against Africa: Return to Cameroon*]. Paris: La Découverte, 1993. (Diary)

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Mongo Beti à Yaoundé, 1991-2001 [may be translated as *Mongo Beti in Yaoundé, 1991-2001*]. Ed. Philippe Bissek. Rouen: Editions des Peuples Noirs, 2005. (Journalism)

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The Poor Christ of Bomba. Trans. Gerald Moore. London: Heinemann, 1971. Print. Trans. of *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*.

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CRITICISM

Wole Soyinka (essay date 1963)

SOURCE: Soyinka, Wole. "From a Common Back Cloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image." *American Scholar* 32.3 (1963): 387-96. Print.

[In the following essay, Soyinka examines various renditions of what he labels the "common back cloth" of the

contemporary African novel: the conflict between tradition and change. Claiming that too many writers pander to Western tastes with primitive or exotic portraits of the African way of life, Soyinka praises Beti as "the archpriest of the African's humanity," describing his characters as realistic, dignified, and self-accepting.]

Only when the political creature who persistently emerged from the common back cloth of an imposed identity—primitivism—began to display evidence of will, of individuality, of localized social and historical causation, only then did the European observer begin seriously to accept the validity of a creative imagination for the African, outside folklore and ritual. Even so he still fights a rearguard action today. It has grown subtler. Accommodation is his new weapon, not dictation. The European critic, full of the burden of an alien tradition, appears to have brainwashed himself of existing standards. In some cases he has even undergone a deliberate mental retardation, a sort of: Takes a simpleton to understand a child.

In this, he has been confidently abetted by his subject, the African self-interpreter. He himself provides instances when European condescension is amply justified. Encountering Camara Laye's *Radiance of the King*, will the critic not say, Why has this man not stuck to the simple, straightforward narrative of his *Dark Child*? For presumably the Western critic knows his Kafka. The cultivated naïveté of *The Dark Child* charmed even the African reader. Even if it often grew precious, it carried an air of magic, of nostalgia, which worked through the transforming act of language. If the author was selective to the point of wish fulfillment, it was unimportant. That a reader could be so gracefully seduced into a village idyll is a tribute to the author.

But most intelligent readers like their Kafka straight, not geographically transposed. Even the character structure of Kafka's *Castle* has been most blatantly retained—Clarence for Mr. K.; Kafka's Barnabas the Messenger becomes the Beggar Intermediary; Arthur and Jeremiah, the unpredictable assistants, are turned into Nagoa and Noaga. We are not even spared the role of the landlord—or innkeeper—take your choice! 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 line 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.

At the conference of African writers in Kampala, last June, it was readily observed that the irreverence, the impatience that marked the critical sessions was the most memorable aspect of the entire conference. This attitude was natural. In order to condemn the European critic for his present

patronage, for—at the other end—his rigid sensibility, for his unavoidable exclusion from the African imagination, there was an obligation toward total rejection of all sub-standards, of pastiche and stereotype. The sessions were truly ruthless, often wrongheaded.

It was the same at an Afro-cultural conference in Europe not long ago, where a young French-speaking intellectual gathered all his intolerance into one sentence, “How can an African write like Kafka?” It was dishonest, he claimed. He pitted his sincerity against Camara Laye’s. In the end, he conceded after much argument that Kafka was probably a South African black who escaped to Germany after the treason trials! As a principle therefore, his protest was untenable. It belongs in the same restrictive ideology of regional art. Forgetting that the African is one of the inspirations of modern European art today, the black or white Africanist turns his back on an abstract canvas, protesting that he came to view an exhibition of paintings by Africans. In many instances, this is justified; for the contemporary interpreters of African themes have not truly assimilated the new idioms. It is merely naïve to transpose the castle to the hut.

There are, in fact, two kinds of offerings directed at the moment to the European palate. One is for acceptance in the Western creative idiom. I have mentioned the example of *Radiance of the King*. There is William Conton’s proper resolution in *The African* of a Durham-to-Jungle adventure by an outrageously imposed Christian forgiveness; and there are the new poets in Nigeria who regroup images of Ezra Pound around the oilbean and the nude spear. The prophets of negritude at least dared these and scorned them, substituting a forthright although strident reaffirmation of truly “African” values, but breeding only the second offering, the burnt offering, image of the charred skin on a defiant platter. It is futile now to knock negritude; it is far more useful to view it as a historical phenomenon and to preserve the few truly creative pieces that somehow emerged in spite of its philosophical straitjacket.

But it is not so easy to ignore the facile exploiters of the fallacy, since they, even more than the muscular emblem-bearers of negritude, have been welcomed most readily into the bosom of the foreign critic. In a special issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*, a critic, reviewing a novel by a Nigerian writer, Nzekwu, says: “. . . but he cannot help presenting the traditional Ibo religion and culture in the more attractive light. It is this that will be the main attraction to the European reader: the masquerades, the prayers, the charms and the tribal social structure are described from within and with a luminous comprehension.” And, to substantiate his intercultural awareness? “He is also old-fashioned enough to tell a straight story with a moral. This is the kind of story his people like.” Obviously, a book that has something both for the European and for the African reader cannot help but be successful! Even the fumbling first novel of this writer is described as “very successful,”

and with two other Nigerian novelists the writer makes, “an unbeatable Treble Choice.”

A very long time ago the discerning African rejected the anthropological novel. Perhaps during the next twenty years his foreign counterpart will do the same. Since even now African writers work against a similar back cloth, it is on the level of interpretation that the individual artist, as in any other culture, must be judged. Overeffusiveness at obvious window dressing (loincloth only, preferably menstrual) has created a most unfortunate prejudice against truly imaginative writers like Amos Tutuola, and worse still dammed the man’s true creative channels. Of all his novels, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* remains the best, and the least impeachable. This book, apart from the work of D. O. Fagunwa who writes in Yoruba, is the earliest instance of the new Nigerian writer gathering multifarious experiences under, if you like, the two cultures and exploiting them in one extravagant, confident whole. A study of his material, his imagery reveals this. But of course Tutuola has little in common with his African, even his Nigerian counterparts. The African writer-intellectual chooses often to dramatize his dilemma and the hollowness of his anguish indicates only too clearly that he first of all created it. A society, an intrusion, an all too predictable conflict—this was the formula, compounded in near equal proportions. Some laughed, full of hysteria; others, full of the dignity of tragedy, invoked the entire catastrophe and died. From a distance, the cultural intruders felt themselves rebuked, sympathized with and praised.

This theme is not for Tutuola, but the legacy, the imaginative duality is. The deistic approach of the Yoruba is to absorb every new experience, departmentalize it and carry on with life. Thus *Sango* (Dispenser of Lightning) now chairmans the Electricity Corporation, *Ogun* (God of Iron) is the primal motor-mechanic. Those who consider the modern imagery of Amos Tutuola a sign of impurity represent the diminishing minority of the African primevalists. And even the more accommodating ones find only charm and quaintness in Tutuola’s shotgun image-weddings. Unfortunately, in attempting to interpret his symbolism, little attention has been paid to his modern experience; after all Tutuola lives *now*, and he responds to change and phenomenon. Not, in fact, except for indefatigable American scholarship, that it serves any useful purpose to reduce a writer’s symbols even to events of spiritual exploration (and I have read a thesis that turned three of Tutuola’s Ghostesses into the three regions of Nigeria!), but it is a useful corrective to bear in mind the appreciative approach of a similar intuition—the poetic, that is.

“. . . a brief, thronged, grisly, and bewitching story . . . nothing is too prodigious or too trivial to put down in this tall, devilish story.” This was by Dylan Thomas. Here now is one of Tutuola’s physical struggles with Nature at its most humanly thwarting: “But as we were going on and when it was time that we wanted to branch to our