CREATING POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

African Writers and British Publishers

Caroline Davis

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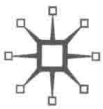

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List of Abbreviations

AOUP	Archives of the Oxford University Press, Oxford
CTAR	Cape Town Archives Repository
CTU	Cape Town University Libraries
LUL	Leeds University Library Special Collections
NELM	The National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown
OUP	Oxford University Press

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Introduction

> To represent Africa is to enter the battle over Africa.
> – Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 80

This is a book about a largely forgotten series of postcolonial literature, Three Crowns, which was one of the earliest attempts by a British publisher to establish a list of African creative writing. Established by Oxford University Press in 1962 and continuing until 1976, it was the vehicle for the international publication of Wole Soyinka and Athol Fugard as well as Lewis Nkosi, John Pepper Clark, Obi Egbuna, Oswald Mtshali, Joe de Graft and Léopold Sédar Senghor, amongst other African writers. Although small, controversial, financially unsuccessful and short lived, the series provides a unique insight into the process of postcolonial literary production and transnational cultural relations.

While the main focus is the Three Crowns series, it also raises important questions about the history, politics and economics of publishing postcolonial literature in general. In the 1960s and 1970s, the publication of African literature in English was dominated by British commercial publishers. Faber & Faber published novels by Amos Tutuola, Peter Abrahams and Ezekiel Mphahlele in the 1950s. Heinemann published Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 and, through Heinemann Educational Books, founded the African Writers Series in the same year as Three Crowns, which quickly became the market leader in the field, publishing 360 titles in total.[1] In the early 1960s, many other British publishers were keen to obtain manuscripts from novelists, poets and playwrights from the newly independent states now emerging in Africa. The London office of André Deutsch published several works of African literature from 1964, and in 1967 went on to become a partner in the East Africa Publishing House in Nairobi, which published African literature for the Kenyan market through its Modern African Library. Longman published the work of several African authors from 1965, including Mbella Dipoko, Ama Ata Aidoo and Efua Sutherland, and then established the Drumbeat series from 1979 to 1985, in which they published

the work of Ben Okri and Miriam Tlali amongst others. By the late 1960s there was a growing trend for African literature in many London publishing houses: Allen & Unwin, Cape, Collins, Evans, Gollancz, Hutchinson, Macmillan, Murray, Methuen, Michael Joseph, Museum Press, Nelson, Penguin, Thames & Hudson and the University of London Press.[2] This study aims to contribute to two broader questions: how did Britain impose and maintain its cultural dominance over anglophone African literature beyond the end of formal colonisation in the continent; and what role was played by British publishers in the creation of African literature in this period of decolonisation?

The literature of the Three Crowns series exemplified the 'literary activity of self-making and nation-building', which was described by Elleke Boehmer as a response to decolonisation: 'Writers ... were involved as the beacons, soothsayers, and seers of political movements. It was seen as a writer's role to reinterpret the world, to grasp the initiative in cultural self-definition.'[3] Part of a wider intellectual search for an identity independent of the European colonial powers, these new African authors in the series narrated the new nations and sought to modify, subvert or reverse the prevailing discourse about Africa. They readdressed African history and culture, and focused on the formerly silenced and marginalised from a wide variety of perspectives: Nkosi, Mtshali and Fugard dealt with the struggles and oppression of black and coloured South Africans; Egbuna wrote of the cultural dislocation of colonialism, in terms of religious conflict, disputes over medical practice and conflicts caused by white settlers in East Africa; de Graft explored intergenerational conflicts in Ghanaian society; Clark wrote of cultural transitions in rural Nigeria, while Kimenye wrote of village life in Buganda; Easmon satirised postcolonial elites in decadent, independent West African society; Soyinka assumed a lead role as critic of his new nation, denouncing the regime's betrayal of the ideals of the national liberation movements. The literature in the Three Crowns series was part of an intellectual process of resistance against colonialism and apartheid, as well as a critical engagement with the post-independence nations. However, it was mediated by a British publisher which not only had a long history of colonial publishing, but also had a continued commercial involvement with the postcolonial African governments as well as the South African regime under apartheid. This study investigates how this paradoxical situation came about, and what its implications were for African literature. It explores the nature of the publisher's interventions in the literature of this series, both institutionally and in terms of the text and paratext of the published books.

Constituting African literature

There are two prevailing models that have been used to explain the relationship between the Western publisher and the African writer: one which

presents the publisher as a benign influence, 'a necessary mid-wife to the author's prose' to use the metaphor employed by Juliet Gardiner,[4] and another that presents the publisher as an agent of cultural imperialism.

In the first model, the residual rhetoric of the 'civilising mission' persists. The European publisher is depicted as an important patron, offering vital support for African writers and bringing books, and thereby education and enlightenment, to the continent. Publishers' official histories tend to celebrate their achievements in disseminating books throughout Africa whilst underplaying the economic significance of these markets to themselves as publishers, for example in the official histories of Heinemann Educational, Longman and OUP.[5] In addition, Charles Larson argues that European publishers were crucial in supporting African writers in the late twentieth century, and considers that authors in former British- or French-ruled countries were given far more opportunities to be published than those in countries without a colonial history, for example, Liberia.[6] Phaswane Mpe's review of the African Writers Series also reflects on the positive benefits of the European–African literary interchange, in particular in providing a means of publication to authors whose work would be censored in their own countries.[7] Hans Zell regards publishers' investment in literature and books for the general market as compensation for their involvement in the 'lucrative educational book market'. He credits Western publishers, and Heinemann in particular, with the development and growth of a literary culture in Africa.[8]

However, a second, contrasting view of postcolonial publishing has been expounded by African Marxists. It identifies enduring structures of cultural domination in postcolonial literary institutions. For example, although Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Ihechukwu's critique relates specifically to Western critics and academics rather than publishers, they maintain that African literature was expected to conform to European literary canons and that African writers sought to supply the European literary tourist with 'new supplies of exotica'.[9] Similarly, Aijaz Ahmad writes, again in very broad terms, of the impact of Western literary institutions on postcolonial literature:

> Third world literature ... comes to us not directly or autonomously but through grids of accumulation, interpretation and relocation, which are governed from the metropolitan countries ... it has been selected, translated, published, reviewed, explicated and allotted a place in the burgeoning archive of 'Third World Literature' through a complex set of metropolitan mediations.[10]

It is my intention to test some of these more abstract models and speculations that cast Western publishers as either agents of a 'civilising mission' or agents of 'cultural imperialism' with reference to a detailed case-study of

the publishing strategy of the Three Crowns series. Based on evidence from previously unexplored archives and extensive oral testimonies, I seek to understand how the literature in the series was selected, which literature was excluded and how the texts were produced, marketed and disseminated.

This investigation is related to the tradition of 'the sociology of the text' formulated by Don McKenzie and Jerome McGann, by which texts are studied in relation to the social conditions of their production, circulation and consumption.[11] Robert Darnton's influential model of the 'Communications Circuit' is adopted, and adapted, here, whereby the role of each agent in the life-cycle of the book is considered in turn. Darnton argues that, 'Book history concerns each phase of this process and the process as a whole, in all its variations over space and time and in all its relations with other systems, economic, social, political, and cultural.' This is, as Darnton concedes, a 'large undertaking', but he argues that 'the parts do not take on their full significance unless they are related to the whole'.[12] Yet, Darnton's model does not register the hierarchies and power relations that define each stage in the communications circuit, although these seem fundamental to an understanding of colonial and postcolonial book production. In examining these various stages in the communications circuit of postcolonial African literature this book aims to foreground the impact of the globalised publishing industry on literature and authorship and address the role of the publisher in the commodification of postcolonial literature. My investigation is particularly concerned with the production end of the communications circuit and with the effect of local and international literary marketplaces on the creation of the literature in the series; a detailed investigation of the reading and reception of the literature in Africa is, however, beyond the scope of this study.[13]

Concerning authorship, I examine the patterns of assimilation and resistance in author–publisher relations, and propose that an understanding of the publisher's interventions in the other stages of the circuit shed light on the relationship between the African author and the British publisher. This relates to the long-standing debate about the 'profoundly complicit and compromised figure' of the postcolonial author,[14] a debate that dates back to the writing of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral and Albert Memmi during the anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s.[15] In a postcolonial context, Ngũgĩ reflects on the alienating impact of international publication for the African writer. He argues that they face the dilemma of being cut off from their communities when they adopt European languages, or marginalised if they choose to write in their mother tongue.[16] Chidi Amuta also identifies the exclusionary practices in Western literature, the pressure on African writers to produce African exotica and the collusion of the writer in the process.[17]

The current critical consensus continues to suggest that assimilation is inevitable for African authors seeking acceptance in a globalised media industry. Pascale Casanova, in *The World Republic of Letters*, defines literary

assimilation as 'a process of fusion and integration',[18] and contends that it as an intrinsic aspect of international literary relations, which may be taken as 'applying to the artistic and cultural productions of all colonized or otherwise dominated regions'.[19] For her, assimilation 'often represents the sole means of access to literature and literary existence'.[20] Similarly, Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* argues that: 'African writers through their dealings with western "agents of legitimation" are inevitably compromised, suckered into successive reinventions of an Africa that the white man has known all along.'[21] Brouillette's recent study, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, proposes that contemporary postcolonial authors no longer resist or oppose the process of commodification by publishers, but consciously interact with the interpretation and reception of their texts. She argues that 'strategic exoticism and ... general postcolonial authorial self-consciousness' now function as literary strategies and as marketable commodities in the global literary market.[22] I intend, through an investigation of the exact negotiations between Three Crowns authors and OUP, to reappraise these arguments in the light of close attention to publishing histories.

In terms of the editorial strategy for Three Crowns, my intention is to establish how OUP assumed a role as both gatekeeper and 'consecrator' of African literature in this period of decolonisation: how it attained the power to confer value on the literature, and what the implications of this were for the literature that was published. This study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of the literary field and specifically his study of the role of the publishing industry as a cultural agency, as outlined in *The Rules of Art*, and in his essay 'The Production of Belief'.[23] I analyse the institutional framework around postcolonial literary publishing, using original archival evidence to examine the strategies involved in the symbolic production of the literature, the publishing systems of exclusion and inclusion, accreditation and textual circulation, and the means by which cultural and economic capital was conferred.[24] Although Bourdieu's theory of cultural production forms an important part of the theoretical background for this book, my aim here is to examine the relevance of his model (which was based on French literary publishing practice) to the specific circumstances affecting British publishers and African writers in the second half of the twentieth century.

To understand the nature of the postcolonial symbolic economy – specifically the cultural hierarchies operating in the UK and Africa in this period – I turn to Pascale Casanova's theory of international literary production. She proposes a helpful revision of Bourdieu's model in the form of the 'literature-world': an international literary space, in which literary domination is exerted by 'consecrated' nations upon other nations which are normally – but not exclusively – in an economically subservient position. Making the important point that a nation's position in the literary hierarchy can be gauged according to its level of autonomy in the production of

literature, she argues that a text's symbolic value is dictated by its place of publication.[25] However, the hierarchies identified by Casanova in relation to literary production might also be extended to literary consumption: the value of postcolonial literature was evidently determined by its destination market. I examine how the racially and geographically 'segregated readership', to employ Shafquat Towheed's term, affected the editorial strategy for the literature of the series.[26]

With respect to the design, production and publicity processes in Three Crowns, I consider the ways in which ideological and economic structures are manifested in the books' paratext – what Gérard Genette describes as the *peritext* (the publisher's interventions within the books themselves) as well as the *epitext* (the publicity and marketing matter circulating beyond the printed book) – to appraise how the material form of the books and the accompanying publicity influenced the interpretation and reception of the Three Crowns literature.[27] I examine how Three Crowns texts were shaped by OUP by means of filtering through the publishing apparatus and how the extra-textual elements of this postcolonial literature created specific forms of meaning. Through case-studies of the publication of Soyinka, Fugard and other Three Crowns authors, I chart the negotiations between authors and publishers that were manifested in the books' paratexts, and compare the texts and paratexts of their printed books, and the reception of the plays as performances and as published products, to explore some of the contradictions and ambiguities that emerged.

Regarding the sales and distribution strategy for Three Crowns, I question the widely held assumption that the Western market was, and is, the only significant market for postcolonial literature. Graham Huggan's thesis rests on the assumption that the main market for African literature was in the West, in his depiction of the Western publisher as an intermediary between the African writer and the Anglo-American marketplace, who is complicit in reinforcing 'stereotypical views of a romantic Africa of "primitive", even primordial tribal existence for the Western touristic reader'.[28] In his study of literary prize culture, James English writes that 'global markets determine more and more the fate of local symbolic economies'.[29] Casanova makes no mention of the significance of the markets in the 'literarily dominated nations' – the assumption being that only the markets of the 'centres of consecration' (in her terms, New York, London and Paris) are worthy of consideration.[30] Sarah Brouillette examines the impact of local readers on the development of postcolonial literature, but she still situates the 'global literary marketplace' predominantly in the West. She argues that, 'It remains the case that the expansion of the market for English literatures has been mainly an Anglo-American phenomenon. Products from a plurality of locales are incorporated into the central metropolitan locations of New York and (decreasingly) London.'[31] There seems, therefore, to be a general assumption in postcolonial literary criticsm that the most significant readers

of postcolonial literature are situated in Europe and the United States. This study aims to examine this assumption more closely, and to pay attention to the impact of readers of African editions of African literature in African schools and universities in this particular period. For, as Nourdin Bejjit's research on the African Writers Series also demonstrates, the African educational marketplace had a decisive influence on the emergence of African literature.[32]

In its concern to move beyond an exclusively textual reading of African literature, this book is thus part of a broader critical movement concerned with the institutions and processes behind postcolonial literary production, which seeks to reinsert the publisher as an essential part of the context for understanding postcolonial literature. Previous studies of publishers' interventions in the creation of African literature have, however, centred on the larger, more successful and enduring African Writers Series, for example by Bernth Lindfors (1995), Loretta Stec (1997), Camille Lizabarre (1998), Phaswane Mpe (1999), Graham Huggan (2001), Gail Low (2002) and James Currey (2008). Three Crowns, its poor relation, has been largely ignored.[33] This study demonstrates that the problems that inhibited the development of this parallel, albeit much smaller, series of African literature are themselves revealing, and in particular its turbulent editorial history offers an important insight into the pressures and constraints on African writers during this period. By focusing upon the publishing process for this series, the intention is not to diminish the agency of individual authors, or the influence of the individual literary texts. Instead, I aim to draw attention to the negotiations between African authors and their publishers, and the influence of transnational cultural and economic relations on the constitution of their literature.

Culture and commerce

Publishing is an industry that operates at the juncture between culture and commerce, or at the 'intersection of two axes of value', in Janice Radway's terms.[34] An essential and preliminary concern of this study is the relation between the commercial and the cultural in the work of Oxford University Press, and specifically in the Three Crowns series. How did the inherent tension between the literary expectations of the series and the economic imperative of OUP in Africa define the series?

Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between economic and cultural capital provides a useful vocabulary for understanding the work of the Press in respect to the 'culture/commerce dichotomy'. According to Bourdieu, publishers operate in one of two distinct fields: the restricted field of cultural production, 'oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital', or the large-scale field of economic production, which confers 'priority on distribution, on immediate and temporary success, measured for example by the print-run'.[35]

However, a more complex relationship between different markets, or hierarchies of value, is usual in British publishing practice, where both strategies tend to be integrated within a single company: large commercial publishers have traditionally supported their prestigious, uneconomical lists through their mass-market commercial lists.[36] This study charts the way in which OUP developed an interdependent system of generating economic and cultural capital, involving the subsidy of the academic, Oxford-based Clarendon Press by profits from the London-managed educational publishing wing, which sold large numbers of school textbooks to African and Asian markets.[37] The principle was gradually established that the centre would be economically supported by the periphery.

Alongside this commercial imperative for its colonial expansion, I attempt to discern the nature of OUP's cultural mission in Africa. I examine how, under British colonial rule, OUP's mission was aligned to the Native Education agenda to 'enlighten the native about Western civilisation'.[38] This 'civilising mission' is regarded by Edward Said as an intrinsic part of the imperial process:

> inscribed within the humanistic enterprise itself ... is the idea of Western salvation and redemption through its 'civilising mission'. Supported jointly by the experts in ideas (missionaries, teachers, advisers, scholars) and in modern industry and communication, the imperial idea of Westernising the backward achieved permanent status worldwide, but ... it was always accompanied by domination.[39]

How, then, was this 'civilising mission' altered after decolonisation in Africa? I propose here that it was ostensibly modified into a duty to support African literature, scholarship and education, for the success of OUP in the independent African states relied to a great degree on the successful presentation of itself as an investor in the new nations rather than as a commercial enterprise. To protect its position in the independent states, OUP engaged in a publicity campaign, constructing narratives of redemption to describe its cultural mission in Africa. Thus, the London Publisher of OUP, John Brown, announced in 1970: 'The Oxford University Press has one purpose only, to advance scholarship and education. It publishes works of learning, and educational books, in order to achieve this purpose.'[40] In Said's terms, such narratives serve to disguise or obscure economic and territorial domination, thereby creating 'a justificatory regime of self-aggrandising, self-originating authority'.[41]

This study examines how Three Crowns was positioned within this 'culture/commerce' dichotomy in OUP. The Three Crowns editor, Rex Collings, conceived of Three Crowns as a 'new departure' for OUP. Arguing his case for venturing into the publication of African literature in 1962, Collings described his cultural ambitions for the series: 'Why should we publish?