

Words Words Words

Okyeame, published half-yearly from Accra, contains an unforgettable story, "The Late Bud", by Christina Ama Ata Aidoo (whose verse *The New African* has published) and a remarkably vivid haunting one by George Awoonor-Williams, "The Funeral", both in settings of Ghanaian village or town life but with universal themes. Christina Aidoo, in her early twenties, is on a five-year African Literature fellowship at the University of Ghana, Legon, and is teaching and writing. She has finished another play.

Like her *Dilemma of a Ghost* (Longmans), about a young Ghanaian graduate who brings his Afro-American wife home to his Clan house, it is in a village setting, but without such obvious contrasts.

With another able young Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah (whose story "Contact" will appear here in December), Christina Aidoo is highly sceptical of most European literary criticism (seen at its most vaunting and absurd in some London theatre critics' attitudes to J. P. Clark's and Soyinka's plays in September) when applied to modern African writing. Awoonor-Williams, whose Ghanaian film *Hamlet* superimposed European art on Africa and vice versa about as uncompromisingly as could be, bites the hands that would pat him on the head with his castigation of "the European intellectual approach (which) has until recently been bedevilled by a certain patronising and condescending hauteur that was repugnant to Africa. "Thank God," he writes, "the new interest in Africa will produce less and less of the pedantic academics and the seeming humility of the Jahns".

OF COURSE some of the wrong hands get bitten in the process, but it is an inevitable and healthy one. The African literature racketeers need this treatment as much as the pedants do. Since *Drum's* first *Darkness and Light* anthology, what sins have been committed in the name of African anthology. I would exclude in advance Ronald Dathorne's coming Penguin anthology of African prose, provided he does not take on trust too much about what someone who hadn't read any of it called "the Golden Age of Xhosa literature." *Black Orpheus* ran some South African verse "translations by Uys Krige" from Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and even the Khoisan languages, none of which he knows. Perhaps a poet may render another's work into his own language from a literal prose translation. A non-poet cannot, which is why Louise Friedmann's version of Vilakazi's verse was such a disaster. Certainly no one should pronounce on writings he cannot understand without considerable research, which I do not see taking place.

Monthly notes on books and the press.

IN AN INTERESTING REVIEW in the current *Nigeria Magazine* Robin Horton explores the errors of categorising African sculpture under European headings. Ironically, William Fagg and Margaret Plass in *African Sculpture; an Anthology* (Dutton Vista Paperbacks) tried to get away from "preconceptions about African art as an irreducibly different exotic thing-in-itself" by calling African sculptures naturalist, abstractionist, cubist, surrealist, grotesque, Gothic, baroque, rococo. They fail to make the labels apply and seem to know it. Mr. Horton, a gifted and dedicated anthropologist who lives on the Niger delta with the people whose lives and ways he tries to interpret, takes that correct middle position. He calls for "serious attempts to work out a purely formal geometrical scheme for the description and classification of African sculpture; and intensive ethnographic study of the cultural contexts of important sculptural styles . . ." Something of the same position should be taken by students of African oral traditional texts. Modern African writing calls for a different critical apparatus but one that must as determinedly acknowledge the African context of the work.

BILLY ORITSETSANOMI DUDLEY's telling article "Violence in Nigerian Politics" was written for *Transition's* special "Violence" issue (No. 21) before the Western Region's appalling and bloody election fiasco last month. The NNNDP showed that a party with 5% electoral support can rig an election and win two-thirds of the seats, by, in Dudley's phrase "breaking heads in order to count them." A saving grace was to hear Nigerians publicly debating the issues with no fear of secret police and informers. If there is fear it is among some newspapermen. The part-Thomson-owned *Daily Express* followed the bent of its pro-NNNDP editor, T. O. Adebajo. Less understandable was the concurrence in his policy of Lord Thomson's watchdogs on the administrative side of the paper, other than as long-term balance-sheet precautions. Certainly the *Express*, which was virtually boycotted in some UPGA strongholds after the elections, must have lost circulation in the short run. As some of the press becomes more partisan, and in the rest as fears erode responsibility, journals like Billy Dudley's *Nigerian Opinion* (Nigerian Current Affairs Society, University of Ibadan, monthly, £1 a year) will be needed to tell the whole truth about Nigeria.

Crisis & Change, Nana Mahomo's new monthly, has one of the best cover photographs ever. The standard is kept up in the text, which aims, among other things, ("to promote unity against white domination . . . rally inter-

national support . . . analyse African problems") to "provide a regular source of reliable information for those inside South Africa actively engaged in the revolution". Elsewhere *Crisis & Change* states that 2,500 copies are to be distributed free in southern Africa, thanks to "several organisations and individuals in Europe and Africa". Mahomo's address is 607A Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square, London, W.C.2.

HAVING READ WITH PLEASURE Vol. 1 No. 4 of *The African Review* (edited by Julian Mayfield for New Africa Publications Ltd., Accra), many must be waiting for Vol. 1, No. 3—the September issue—of this "monthly analytical review". It was held back because it contained an article seriously arguing the case for a reconstructed OAU, and it was felt that this would not be tactful reading matter to have round Accra during the Summit Conference there. The article expressed a view heard increasingly—that the OAU cannot succeed until all its members come to it freed from neo-colonialism: the progressive nations should form a nucleus around which the others could cohere as they shake off their colonial past or neo-colonial present. Certainly the OAU Summit Conference was attended by some shaky claimants to independence, above all by the representatives of the ruling parties in Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, while their nationalist, opposition counterparts were among the poor relations petitioning from outside the closed sessions. While the representatives of King Sobhuza's traditionalist ruling party, Imbokodvo, were within, the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress were busy circulating a scandalous letter written by Sobhuza's white South African settler ally, Mr. Carl Todd, laying detailed plans for rigging the elections to ensure that a sufficient number of the "right Europeans" were returned by Swazi voters under Sobhuza's orders.

While Chief Leabua's Basuto National Party representatives were within, Messrs. Mokhehle and Kolisang of the militant, pan-Africanist Basutoland Congress Party were attacking them (and their pro-Bantustan adviser, Professor Cowen) in their memorandum, complete with its own scandalous letter (from Chief Leabua to South Africa's Commissioner-General Papenfus: "We shall place this country and its people under the wise guidance of the government of the Republic of South Africa economically, politically and socially, so that you can lead us to true independence.").

Though it reads like rumour, our note about *The African Review* should be accurate—more accurate at least than their description of us as "the now defunct *New African*" in a note on Bessie Head, who contributed one of the best items to their Vol. 1, No. 4 from her place of exile in Bechuanaland. Our being banned in South Africa may have been to blame.

IN A RECENT RADIO TALK the moKgatla-by-adoption Naomi Mitchison called Bechuanaland "probably the poorest country in the world". Bessie Head whose £16-a-month teaching post there has come to an end is in great hardship. She has nothing in the world except her small son Howard, her friends (mostly political exiles like herself but elsewhere) and the soul of a true writer. A "black" South African, there has been so far no scholarship or travel grant for her—only misery, which is likely to break her if no peace to live and write is found for Mrs. B. Head, P.O. Box 130, Serowe, Bechuanaland, or through *The New African*.