

# African Literature

## INTRODUCTION |

African Literature, oral and written literature produced on the African continent. Africa has a long literary tradition, although very little of this literature was written down until the 20th century. In the absence of widespread literacy, African literature was primarily oral and passed from one generation to the next through memorization and recitation.

Most of Africa's written literature is in European languages, owing to European colonization of the continent from the 16th century to the mid-20th century. During that period European languages supplanted African languages in government, education, business, and, to a great extent, in daily communication. By far the most widely used European language in African literature is English, followed by French and Portuguese, respectively. Works written in African languages and traditional oral texts went virtually unacknowledged until the late 20th century, but today they are receiving increased recognition. Many scholars prefer to speak of African literatures, rather than African literature, to emphasize the many different literary traditions the term encompasses.

This survey covers only African literatures south of the Sahara. The literatures of North Africa are not included because North African cultures share greater affinities with the Arab world than with sub-Saharan peoples and cultures (for more information, see Arabic Literature). The literature of white South Africa is similarly excluded, as it is more closely linked with the European literary heritage (see South Africa, Republic of: *Literature*).

## ORAL TRADITIONS ||

Modern African literatures have been influenced to a remarkable degree by the continent's long tradition of oral artistry. Before the spread of literacy in the 20th century, texts were preserved in memory and performed or recited. These traditional texts served many of the same purposes that written texts serve in literate societies—entertainment, instruction, and commemoration, for example. However, no distinctions were made between works composed for enjoyment and works that had a more utilitarian function. Africa's oral literature takes the form of prose, verse, and proverb, and texts vary in length from the epic, which might be performed over the course of several days, to single-sentence formulations such as the proverb. The collective body of oral texts is variously described as folklore, verbal art, oral literature, or (more recently) orature.

Foremost among prose forms in African literature is the myth. Like myths everywhere, African myths typically explain the creation of the universe, the activities of the gods at the beginning of creation, the essence of all creatures, and the nature of their interrelationships. Next in importance is the legend, intended to enhance a listener's understanding of the constitution of the universe. Legends, which deal with events that occurred after the era of the gods, describe such heroic human feats as establishing dynasties or single-handedly preventing disaster. The African legend has much in common with the epic, in that both focus on heroism. However, unlike epics, legends are less elaborate and are not performed on special occasions or in formal settings. Instead, these prose works are shared in the context of everyday life.

The folktale, another prose form, is usually told for nighttime entertainment. Folktales feature human beings and animals, either separately or together. They are often employed for social commentary and instruction and also serve as a potent means of affirming group values and discouraging antisocial behavior. A popular type is the trickster tale, which features a small but wily animal that employs its cunning to protect itself against much larger and more powerful animals. Examples of animal tricksters are Anansi, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; Àjàpá, a tortoise in Yoruba folklore of Nigeria; and Sungura, a hare found in central and East African folklore.

The epic is not prevalent in Africa, and scholars disagree on whether the term should even be applied to African texts. What is beyond question is that the African texts described as epics are extended celebrations of heroic figures. A good example available in print is *The Mwindo Epic* (1969) of the Nyanga of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire).

When the integrity of a text is important, it is cast in verse. Certain myths, for example, must be recited exactly as part of the sacred cult of a divinity or chanted in the process of *divination* (foretelling future events or interpreting omens). Texts in verse form are more easily committed to memory and recalled. Various devices to aid recall are embedded in the text, as in the Zulu *izibongo* performed in praise of chiefs.

Finally, several African cultures possess a rich repertoire of epigrams, including proverbs and riddles. In many African societies effective speech and social success depend on a good command of proverbs. These treasured

sayings convey the demonstrated wisdom of the ages and therefore serve as a reliable authority in arguments or discussion. Closely related to proverbs are riddles—both are based on principles of analogy that require the listener to decipher the intended meaning. American linguist Albert Scheven's *Swahili Proverbs* (1981) offers examples of proverbs from East Africa.

Despite the major transformations that have taken place in Africa in the past few centuries, a large number of people remain in close contact with traditional cultures and institutions. Oral traditions continue to play important roles in their lives. For the westernized elite, oral traditions are useful resources for placing an authentic African stamp on writings and they can aid in reconstructions of traditional life.

## WRITTEN LITERATURE III

With a few exceptions, literacy came to sub-Saharan Africa from elsewhere. In a handful of instances, rudimentary forms of writing were developed and used by secret societies and other exclusive groups. The major exception to this rule is Amharic, which for centuries has been used in written form in the Horn of Africa.

Literacy in Arabic came to Africa with the introduction of the Islamic religion into the kingdom of Ghana in the 11th century by the Tuaregs, a tribal people of the Sahara. As Islam spread into other parts of West Africa through *jihads* (holy wars), literacy spread as well. Islam depended on the Qur'an (Koran), its sacred scripture, and required converts to memorize passages from it. From the 7th century on, Arab influence was also prevalent on the east coast of Africa, where Arab traders and slavers were active. The Arabic script was eventually adapted for Swahili, which in central and East Africa served as the *lingua franca* (language for trade and other cross-cultural communication).

Christianity was a second means for introducing literacy to sub-Saharan Africa. Christian missionaries became active on the continent in the second half of the 19th century, especially after the abolition of the slave trade and the rise of interest among Europeans in other types of trade. The schools that they established were intended to train local helpers for the missionaries, but they later served European colonial administrations and commercial concerns by preparing low-level functionaries. In the areas where Muslims introduced literacy, the literature produced is mainly in African languages. In countries where literacy was introduced by Christian missionaries, the majority of literature is in English, French, or Portuguese.

## Literatures in African Languages A

Literatures in African languages have received little scholarly attention, in part because of a Western bias in favor of literature in European languages. Another barrier is that few scholars of African culture know any African languages, and few Africans know an African language other than their own. The best-known literatures in African languages include those in Yoruba and Hausa in West Africa; Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu in southern Africa; and Amharic, Somali, and Swahili in East Africa.

In West Africa, Yoruba writing emerged after Bishop Ajayi Crowther, a former slave, developed a script for the language and in 1900 published the first Yoruba translation of the Bible. Isaac Babalola Thomas published the first work of fiction in Yoruba, *Sègilolá eléyinjú egé* (Segilola of the Seductive Eyes, 1929). It appeared in serial form in *Akéde Èkó*, a newspaper in Lagos, Nigeria, and warns of the woes in store for women who live a life of prostitution. The most important Yoruba writer, Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa, used his writings to commend Christian virtues to the public. His first work is also the first full-length novel published in Yoruba: *Ògbójú ode nínú igbó irúnmalé* (1938) was translated by Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga* (1968). It tells of the exploits of Akara-Ogun, a fearless hunter in a forest infested with a myriad of unnatural creatures, and draws extensively on Yoruba folklore. Writing emerged in the Hausa language earlier than in the Yoruba language, with such works as *Wakar Muhammadu* (Song of Muhammad, 1845?), a portrait of the prophet Muhammad by poet Asim Degel.

In southern Africa as well, writing was introduced by missionaries who established themselves in the 1820s at Lovedale, near Alice (now in Eastern Cape Province). In addition to the Bible, one of the texts the missionaries translated for instruction was *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678 and 1684) by English author John Bunyan. This work provided the model for the first South African work of fiction, Thomas Mofolo's *Moeti Oa Bochabella* (1906; translated as *The Traveller of the East*, 1934). Like Bunyan's book, this Sotho-language work uses allegory to tell the story of a man's spiritual journey after converting to Christianity. Also associated with the Lovedale mission is Samuel Edward Krune Loliwe Mqhayi, whose Xhosa-language novel *Ityala lamawele* (The Case of the Two Brothers, 1914) recreates the legal proceedings he observed at the court of his great-uncle, a chief. He is also known for his poetry, for which admirers named him *Imbongi yesizwe jikelele* (the poet of the whole nation). In the Zulu language, *Abantu abamnyama lapha bavela ngakhona* (1922; *The Black People and Whence They*

*Came*, 1979), by Magema ka Magwaza Fuze, tells of Zulu history and presents an early plea for black unity in Africa.

In East Africa, a system of writing for the Somali language was not developed until the early 20th century, long after writing in Arabic had become widespread among Somali-speaking peoples. Literature in Somali is predominantly in verse, and its greatest figure is Sayyid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, who was born in the mid-19th century and died in 1921. He criticized the European colonizers and their native collaborators in such poems as "Xuseenow caqligu kaa ma baxo idam Ilaahaye" (O Xuseen, God willing may good sense never leave you). The short novel "Qawdhan iyo Qoran" (Qawdhand and Qoran, 1967), by Somali writer Axmed Cartan Xaarge, is about two lovers who cannot marry because a marriage for the woman had already been arranged. Although literature in Amharic, now the official language of Ethiopia, did not flourish until the 20th century, much earlier writings do exist, including the anonymous 17th-century religious works *Mazmura Dāwit* (The Psalter of David) and *Waddasee Māryām* (Praises of Mary).

Literature in Swahili dates back to the 17th century. Early writings, by Muslim scholars and clerics, consist largely of celebrations in verse of religious figures. Modern Swahili literature, in prose and in verse, dates from 1925, when the countries then forming British East Africa (now Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) adopted Swahili as the only African language for use in their schools. The first important modern Swahili writer was Tanzania's Shaaban Robert, who wrote in prose and verse, praising his traditional culture. Very different in subject and style is the later *Simu ya kifo* (Phone Call to Death, 1965), a police thriller by Tanzanian writer Faraji Katalambulla.

## African Literatures in European Languages B

The European languages most commonly used in Africa are English, French, and Portuguese. Literature in the English language, known as Anglophone literature, is the African literature best known outside Africa, followed by Francophone (French-language) and Lusophone (Portuguese-language) literatures.

### Anglophone African Literature B1

The British began colonizing Africa in the early 19th century. Their holdings eventually grew to include what is now Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya in North and East Africa; Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria in West Africa; and in the southern part of the continent, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa. African literature in English is more extensive than African literatures in other European languages, but it generally made a later appearance than Lusophone or Francophone African literatures.

### Poetry B1a

The first collection of African poetry in English translation is *An Anthology of West African Verse* (1957), edited and compiled by the Nigerian Olumbe Bassir. It includes a large number of Francophone poems in English translation, which testifies to Anglophone literature's slower and later development. And whereas French-speaking writers in Africa tended to celebrate African culture and blackness in a movement called *négritude*, English-speaking writers and intellectuals in Africa generally disdained *négritude* as ostentatious and unnecessary. Despite this, some early Anglophone poems resembled *négritude* verse in their examination of the effects of European colonialism on Africa.

One of the first African poets to publish in English is Lenrie Peters of The Gambia, whose poems examine the disorienting discontinuities between past and present in Africa. His book *Poems* came out in 1964 and *Selected Poetry*, his third anthology, in 1981. Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka has published several volumes of poetry, including *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967). Fellow Nigerian Christopher Okigbo had established himself as one of the most important Anglophone poets in Africa before his death in 1967 during the Biafran war. His collected poems were published as *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder* (1971). Ghana's Kofi Anyidoho emerged in the 1980s as one of the most impressive African poets writing in English, earning critical praise for his treatment of both personal and political subjects. *A Harvest of Our Dreams* (1984) is regarded as his best work so far.

Writers in East Africa began producing significant poetry in the 1960s. Okot p'Bitek of Uganda published, among other volumes, *Song of Lawino* (1966), in which a woman derides her husband's European airs. The poetry of Okello Oculi of Kenya is included in the anthology *Words of My Groaning* (1976).

In South Africa *apartheid* (the government's policy of racial segregation) stimulated important protest verse, much of it written in exile. Prominent among the black South African poets are Dennis Brutus, who published *Letters to Martha* in 1968; Mazisi Kunene, author of *Zulu Poems* (1970); and Oswald Mtshali, author of *Sounds of a*

*Cowhide Drum* (1971). Later works include Brutus's *Stubborn Hope* (1978), Siphso Sepamla's *The Soweto I Love* (1977), and Frank Chipasula's *Whispers in the Wings* (1991).

## Fiction B1b

Anglophone fiction is the richest genre of African literatures in European languages. Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) revealed the future nature and preoccupation of Anglophone fiction in his novel *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (1911). Several years later his compatriot, R. E. Obeng, in *Eighteenpence* (1943), depicted the procedures of the different judicial systems in use in the Gold Coast.

The publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead's Town* (1952), by Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola, was a momentous event in the history of Anglophone African fiction. It is the story of a man who journeys to the land of the dead to retrieve his bartender. The book achieved tremendous success in Europe and the United States, in large part because European and American critics mistook its idiosyncratic English for bold experimentation. But the book's success also inspired African writers who were better educated than Tutuola to produce fiction. Soon after Tutuola's work appeared, Chinua Achebe published *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the first of five novels in which he chronicled the consequences of British colonialism in his country. Other Nigerian writers of mid-century include Cyprian Ekwensi, whose most popular work is *Jagua Nana* (1961), the life story of a charming Lagos prostitute, and Flora Nwapa, who writes of the social problems women in her culture face in *Efuru* (1966).

The Gambian William Conton published an improbable solution to South Africa's racial problems through a new political party in *The African* (1960), while Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah criticized political corruption in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Armah's compatriot Kofi Awoonor lamented the political woes of Ghana and their impact on individuals in *This Earth, My Brother* (1971). The Biafran War, a civil war that raged in Nigeria from 1966 to 1969, produced several works. They include Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973), Eddie Iroh's *Forty-Eight Guns for the General* (1976), and *Destination Biafra* (1982) by Buchi Emecheta.

Fiction developed later in the eastern and southern sections of English-speaking Africa than in the western part. Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o lamented the loss of land to colonizers in *Weep Not, Child* (1964). The novel describes the rift in the African community during the Mau Mau rebellion against colonial rule in Kenya in the mid-1950s, and was the first of several works to focus on that subject. With her novel *The Promised Land* (1966), Grace Ogot, also from Kenya, became the first woman from English-speaking East Africa to be published. Two other Kenyan female writers are Rebeka Njau, whose *Ripples in the Pool* (1975) discusses a woman's marital problems, and Lydia Nguya, who writes of the conflict in her country between rural and urban cultures and values in *The First Seed* (1975). The Tanzanian Ismael Mbise's *Blood on Our Land* (1974) dramatizes the importance of the land to Africans who lost their ancestral lands to colonizers. J. N. Mwaura's *Sky is the Limit* (1974) explores a troubled father-son relationship.

Discussions of racial conflict predictably dominate English-language fiction by black South Africans. Among the earliest works are *Tell Freedom* (1954) by Peter Abrahams, *Down Second Avenue* (1959) by Es'kia Mphahlele, and *A Walk in the Night* (1962) by Alex La Guma. Later works—including Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at Metropolitan* (1975), Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981), Mphahlele's *The Unbroken Song* (1981), and Siphso Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981)—provide literary testimony to the durability of the race problem.

## Drama B1c

The first African play published in English was *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongquase the Liberator* (1935) by Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo of South Africa. Its subject of resistance to white oppressors foreshadowed Lewis Nkosi's *The Rhythm of Violence* (1964) and other later works from South Africa. Early drama from West Africa portrays conflicts between parents and children in such works as *Sons and Daughters* (1963) by Joe de Graft of Ghana and *Dear Parent and Ogre* (1965) by Sarif Easmon of Sierra Leone. Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana focuses on intercultural marriage in her *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1964). Her compatriot Efuia Sutherland also discusses marriage in *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), a play based on traditional lore. Nigeria's Wole Soyinka, who later dominated drama from the continent, also wrote on social themes in such plays as *The Swamp-Dwellers* (written 1957; published 1963).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The Black Hermit* (produced 1962; published 1968) marked East Africa's debut in drama. The play is concerned with stamping out *tribalism* (racism among African ethnic groups). A later work, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), written in collaboration with Micere Mugo, deals with the Mau Mau rebellion. The Tanzanian Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1970) received wide acclaim as a masterpiece meant to motivate

responsible social action. It is set during the Maji Maji uprising from 1905 to 1907 against German colonizers of East Africa.

The souring political atmosphere on the African continent had a profound impact on drama, as on other genres. Nigerian Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) bases its political commentary on the government's practice of publicly executing armed robbers. Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* (1984) ridicules Africa's flamboyant dictators. In South Africa, apartheid continued to generate powerful drama with such plays as Percy Mtwa's *Bopha!* (1986) and *Woza Albert!* (1986), written jointly by Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon. *Bopha!* deals with the differences between an African activist and his policeman father. *Woza Albert!* speculates on what would happen if Jesus Christ suddenly reappeared in South Africa.

## Other Works B1d

Discussions of African literature usually exclude essays and other nonfiction works, although some of these works constitute an important component of African writing. Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) combines anthropological, sociological, and mytho-historical information about the Kikuyu, Kenya's largest tribal group. Cape Verdean political leader Amílcar Cabral details his political vision in *Return to the Source* (1973). South Africa's Bessie Head explores the making of modern Botswana and its character in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Winds* (1981). Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981) is the first in a series of family memoirs.

Also noteworthy are autobiographies by women, especially those of South African women imprisoned during the apartheid period. Prominent among these are Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1985), Caesarina Kona Makhoere's *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid* (1988), and Emma Mashinini's *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* (1991).

## Francophone African Literature B2

The French began colonizing parts of Africa in the mid-19th century. The areas they occupied covered most of West Africa—including what is now Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal—as well as Madagascar. By the 1960s almost all the French territories had gained independence.

## Poetry B2a

Francophone African poetry became known internationally with the publication of *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language, 1948) in Paris. The volume was edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal. Senghor was one of a group of African and West Indian students in Paris who inaugurated a movement in the 1930s that was later dubbed *négritude*. The movement is characterized by its reversal of the colonialist portrayal of things African as evil, subhuman, or, at the least, inferior to all things European. *Négritude* proclaimed all things African superior to all things European. Even in color symbolism, *négritude* asserted that black is more beautiful than white, and soft, dark night is preferable to harsh daylight. For several decades this movement exercised a powerful influence over Francophone black literature.

Among the best-known African *négritude* poets, along with Senghor, is his compatriot David Diop. Diop's poetry is much more combative in tone than Senghor's conciliatory verse, which tends to favor a mixture of European and African cultures that assimilates the best of each. The title of Diop's anthology, *Coups de pilon* (1956; *Hammer Blows*, 1973), indicates the bitterness of his attitude toward colonialism. Another *négritude* writer of considerable importance is the Malagasy poet and playwright Jacques Rabémananjara, whose anthologies include *Antsa* (1956) and *Antidote* (1961).

After independence *négritude* came under severe criticism from young Francophone intellectuals who regarded its adulation of blackness as narcissistic and out of place. These critics felt that a continent beset with severe social, political, and economic problems was in need of self-criticism and calls to action instead. In response, the tone of Francophone poetry shifted to match a growing disillusionment and recognition of the need for change. This mood is reflected in the poems of Alpha Sow of Guinea, Emile Ologoudou of Benin, and others whose work is anthologized in *Nouvelle somme de poésie de monde noir* (New Sum of Poetry from the Negro World, 1966).

## Fiction B2b

African fiction in French emerged in the 1920s, with the publication in Senegal of Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne's *Les trois volontés de Malik* (Malik's Three Wishes, 1920). The novel tells of a hard-working youth whose diligence,

combined with a benevolent colonial atmosphere, brings all his wishes to fruition. This book, like Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris* (Mirages of Paris, 1937), is typical of early Francophone fiction in its admiration of the French. These works were superseded in the years leading to independence by fiction with a markedly different attitude toward France, including *Une vie de Boy* (1956; *Houseboy*, 1966) by Ferdinand Oyono of Cameroon and *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956; *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, 1971) by another Cameroonian writer, Mongo Beti. Both books direct merciless satire at French colonialism.

In fiction as in poetry, writers turned their attention to social problems soon after independence. A good example of this shift is *Xala* (1973; translated 1976), by Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembène, which presents a denunciation of corrupt government officials. Other works attest to the increasing visibility of women on the Francophone literary scene. They include *Une si longue lettre* (1980; *So Long a Letter*, 1981) by Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ and *La grève des bàttu* (1979; *The Beggars' Strike*, 1981) by Aminata Sow Fall, also of Senegal.

## Drama B2c

During the 1930s, students at the École William-Ponty, a college for training teachers in Dakar, Senegal, improvised performances that were based on African tales and incorporated African songs. Similar activity took place at the École Primaire Supérieure at Bingerville in Côte d'Ivoire. Plays by graduates of these schools were later published and performed.

One of the most celebrated Francophone playwrights is the Cameroonian Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, whose best-known work is *Trois prétendants, un mari* (1964; *Three Suitors, One Husband*, 1968). *La mort de Chaka* (The Death of Chaka, 1961) by Saydou Badian of Mali and *Le zoulou* (The Zulu, 1977) by Tchicaya U Tam'si of the Republic of the Congo are also noteworthy plays in French. Cameroonian Werewere Liking attracts interest for experiments with traditional rituals, as in *Orphée Dafric: Théâtre-rituel* (African Orpheus: Ritual Theater, 1981), which places the Greek myth of Orpheus in an African setting.

## Lusophone African Literature B3

Writing from Portugal's former colonies—now Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Mozambique—is the least extensive and least known of the African literatures in European languages. Portugal's African empire was small compared with the empires of France and Great Britain, and Lusophone works are not as readily available in English translation as are Francophone works. Portugal's contact with Africa, the longest of any European country, dates back to the 15th century. It gave rise to an intellectual class constituted of European whites who lived in the urban centers, Africans, and *mestiços* (people of mixed African and European ancestry). Members of this class are responsible for African literature in Portuguese.

## Poetry B3a

Poetry was the first genre to thrive in Lusophone literature. As early as the 1930s, its blossoming marked the rise of political consciousness among intellectuals, who used poetry to celebrate a unique identity and experience. Notable among the poets of cultural authentication are the Cape Verdean Jorge Barbosa, whose volume *Arquipélago* (Archipelago) was published in 1935, and Mozambican Noémia de Sousa, the first female Lusophone poet in Africa, best known for the poem "Sangue Negro" (Black Blood, 1976).

The wars of liberation, which began in the 1960s in the Portuguese colonies, gave rise to a poetry that called for action. "Anti-evasão" (Anti-Evasion, 1962) by Cape Verdean Ovídio Martins exemplifies the poetry of this movement, which renounced the escapism of earlier poets in its insistence on addressing social, economic, and political issues. The end of colonialism in 1975 brought about a new type of poetry characterized by delight in language. Mozambican Luís Patraquim, whose best work appears in *A inadiável viagem* (The Urgent Voyage, 1985), represents this change.

## Prose B3b

Beginning in the 1940s, Lusophone prose writers sought to provide a more authentic image of Africa than that popularized by colonial writers, which tended toward racism. Their works typically borrow extensively from oral traditions. Cape Verdean Baltasar Lopes da Silva's novel *Chiquinho* (1947) tells of a man who leaves Cape Verde to follow his father to America. One of the few Lusophone works available in English is *Nós matamos o cão tinhoso* (1964; *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Stories*, 1969) by Mozambican Luís Bernardo Honwana. José Luandino Vieira, author of *Luuanda* (1964; *Luuanda: Short Stories of Angola*, 1980), and other Angolan

writers experimented with language by superimposing features of their native Kimbundu language on the Portuguese and by using Kimbundu words liberally.

## Drama B3c

Drama was the least developed of the literary genres in the colonial era because of strict Portuguese censorship of all mass media. The beginning of drama in the Portuguese territories is generally dated to a bilingual musical about *bride price*—a payment by a groom or his family to the bride's family—which was performed in Luanda, Angola's capital, in 1971. During the liberation struggle, however, freedom fighters encouraged performances of politically charged works in the areas they controlled. Theatrical performances began to flourish after the Angolans dislodged the Portuguese from urban centers, and independence brought about the establishment of urban theater groups. Noteworthy among Angolan plays is Henrique Guerra's *O círculo de giz de bombó* (The Manioc Chalk Circle, 1979), a children's play inspired by a play by German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. In Mozambique, Belo Marques inaugurated a series of radio dramas, structured after traditional storytelling sessions, in 1978.

## Contemporary African Literatures C

A preoccupation with current political and social problems is evident in a number of contemporary African writings. Among the more prominent are *Songs in A Time of War* (1985) by Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa; *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems* (1990) by another Nigerian, Tanure Ojaide; and *The Graveyard Also Has Teeth* (1980) by Sierra Leonean Syl Cheney-Coker. Somali writer Nuruddin Farah wrote of a family's struggles before and during the civil war that broke out in Somalia in the 1990s in the trilogy *Blood in the Sun*, which comprised the novels *Maps* (1986), *Gifts* (1992), and *Secrets* (1998). Other works are more oblique in their approach, causing some critics to brand them as escapist. These works include *The Famished Road* (1991) by Nigerian Ben Okri, Cheney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990), and South African novelist Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995).

The new trend in Lusophone African literature manifests itself mainly in poetry and combines an interest in issues of identity, ethnicity, alienation, and language with what one critic has described as tropical sensuousness. Examples appear in the works of two Angolan writers: *Ritos de Passagem* (Rites of Passage, 1985) by Paula Travares and *Sabores, odores & sonho* (Flavors, Scents & Reveries, 1985) by Ana de Santana. Other writers whose work exemplifies this trend include the Mozambicans Hélder Muteia, author of *Verdades dos mitos* (Truths of Myths, 1988), and Eduardo White, in *O país de mim* (The Country That Comes from Me, 1989).

Contemporary French poetry in Africa generally mirrors the concerns of Lusophone poetry. The Congolese writer J. B. Tati-Loutard, whose anthologies include *Le dialogue des plateaux* (The Dialogue of the Plateaus, 1982), is representative of Francophone poets. Social issues also continue to be addressed in fiction, as in *Le miroir bleu* (The Blue Mirror, 1990), a novel by the Cameroonian Victor Beti Benanga, which tells of a man who trades a rural life of farming for unemployment in the big city.

More and more women's voices are heard, continuing to correct the earlier male domination of the African literary scene. Prominent among female writers are Tsitsi Dangarembga of Zimbabwe, who made her debut with *Nervous Conditions* (1988); prolific Nigerian Buchi Emecheta, author of *The Family* (1989); and Kenyan Micere Githae Mugo, whose anthology of poems, *My Mother's Poem and Other Songs*, was published in 1994.

African literatures achieved an important milestone in 1986, when Wole Soyinka became the first African to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Indeed, the proliferation of international literary awards has offered a powerful incentive to African writers.