

# Prospective Commitment in African Literature

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## ABSTRACT

African literature's close, even organic link with the society that generates it settles a pathfinder role on that literature: Africa goes where its literature takes it. This fact does not seem to have been the object of enough awareness on the part of the writers themselves as they have tended to construe their role mainly in terms of rescuing their past from oblivion and/or denigration. And yet a more urgent mission awaits them: that of providers of constructive alternatives susceptible not only of cleansing the continent's image but even more importantly of moving the society forward in the right direction. Retrospection in the service of prospection ought to be the new creative order.

*Keywords: Pilgrimage, Prospection, Retrospection, School*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The time has now come when the African writer must have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity*

This opening statement is almost four decades old. It was made by Wole Soyinka in 1968 (1968: 20), but it has not lost any of its validity over the years; on the contrary. Midway into the first decade of the third millennium, African literature is still to turn from retrospection to prospection, to use de Man's coinage.

In an essay on John Keats (1795–1821), Paul de Man suggests that this English poet should be regarded as a 'prospective' writer. He contrasts Keats with poets like William Wordsworth (1770–1850), whose work is 'retrospective'. To de Man, Keats's work "consists of hopeful preparations, anticipations of future power rather than meditative reflections on past moments of insight and harmony" (Royle 2003: 103). Keats's work, de Man further suggests, is "totally oriented towards the future."

De Man's view of Keats seems to us a particularly attractive finding, and one which stands African literature in good stead. Arguing for greater concern with the future in African writing will be the main thrust of our effort here.

The tradition among the great majority of African writers to undertake a curative pilgrimage into their society's past has come to be viewed as self-evident. That return seems to be validated by no other reason than that Africa needs to redeem its shattered past, a consensus having been reached that

awkward Europeans damaged that (beautiful) past in the process of scooping up material and spiritual wealth for themselves in the continent.

Soyinka's cautionary note alerts the modern consciousness to a totally different reality. That the African past deserves attention is in no doubt. But what should be the focus of that attention has continued to generate quite some controversy. The dominant view, ever since Achebe's ground-breaking novel *Things Fall Apart*, holds western civilization responsible for the African predicament. This view sanctifies the African past, makes of it a venerable age of great achievements and entente, then indicts European explorers for abruptly and in certain cases brutally bringing that great age to an end. The need is felt, therefore, to chronicle the disintegrative process with a view to restoring the grandeur of old.

This exercise in clinical historiography Soyinka condemns. And his position situates itself on a road travelled earlier by the likes of T.S. Eliot. Among the many insights with which the latter mind has studded the landscape of modern thought belongs his view of contemporary history as an immense panorama of futility and anarchy (Kermode 1975: 177). Eliot was a scholar of anarchy, reader of a world ordered by chaos and meaninglessness, of which *The Waste Land* constitutes the finest poetic epitome.

Eliot's essential nihilism was suggested to him by humanity's track record, bleak and chaotic in the main. He looked around him into the prime movers of human action and discovered that only very rarely did man dedicate himself to the welfare of his species. This discovery, however, did not dull his optimism. He nurtured the hope that the chaos could be defeated, basically through a continuous exploitation of the parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. He saw in a structural awareness of this kind the best means of giving shape and significance to history, the responsibility for such a task lying ideally with the writer, whose powers of constructive retrospection would invest history with a new role, that of wellspring of human valor.

Writing much later in the day, but in the footsteps of his English predecessor, Nkosi (1981: 32) also views history as "a conspiracy of malevolent forces." And just like Eliot, he ascribes to the writer a redemptive mission: "Out of the raw materials of history the novelists construct for us 'fictions'; in so doing they create patterns of meaning out of a jumble of meaningless chaos" (Nkosi 1981: 31-32).

What Eliot calls shape and significance, and Nkosi patterns of meaning are redeeming strengths that underline history's ability to wrest itself from chaotic negativity and transform into source material for human worth. History incessantly confronts the writer with a jumble of meaningless chaos. His duty is now to extract from this jumble, such elements as can restore meaning to existence, now and tomorrow, and to craft such elements into works for the vivification of his society. This is the road Soyinka invites the African writer to ply in advocating informed selectivism in regard to the source material that is African history.

## 2. THE AMBIGUOUS HERITAGE

The African continent provides lucid exemplifications of Eliot's, Nkosi's and Soyinka's illuminating historiographies. As far back as the mind can stretch, African history has been just a steady stream of woes sustained at different levels by man and nature.

Even the very notion of African history has been challenged more than once. Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, then Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, said in a TV broadcast in Britain in 1963: "Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history" (Achebe 1978: 74). Hegel before him had stated quite blandly that Africa had no history and therefore could not lay claim to any aesthetics.

Each historical moment in the African experience has thus produced its own (mainly western) interpreters, whose discourses, fortunately, have not gone unchallenged by Africans themselves, especially in more recent times. African writers have used the medium of creativity to articulate their own point of view on a matter that they see first and foremost as their concern. Achebe's famous statement in his 1964 Lecture to the Nigerian Library Association can be viewed in this respect as *the* manifesto to which each African writer must subscribe if he means to be relevant "It is inconceivable to me," he says in that Lecture, "that a serious writer could stand aside, or be indifferent to this argument which calls his full humanity in question" (Achebe 1978: 8). He rounds up the talk with a clear assignment for the African writer: "The writer's duty is to help (his people) regain (their dignity) by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost" (8).

Achebe's injunction has exercised a tremendous influence on African writing ever since; for writers on the continent have felt the urge to do battle for African culture, to restore it to its pre-colonial wholeness, especially in the face of western ideological distortions and the resultant effects of these distortions on the African image.

Attractive as Achebe's militant exhortation is, it also carries within it elements of ambiguity which, if not reined in, could defeat the very purpose of its utterance; namely, to restore the dignity of the African. The first such element is the naïve arrogance of the pronouncement, echoed in the claim that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans. Within the Darwinian logic that has always governed the world, and which informed the colonial enterprise in the first instance, such a claim credits African culture with more staying power than it demonstrated at the moment of contact with western culture. Whether Africans heard of culture for the first time from Europeans or not is really not the matter at issue. Was this African culture able to stem the tide of European invasion? That is the kind of relevant question we ought to be asking. Achebe's statement obviates the fact that Africans lost to Europeans in

the battle for cultural supremacy. A solid culture is one that stands its own against external attack, one that protects its people against exploitation, hunger and disease, but especially one that provides its people with the tools for qualitative existence along the norms of the moment. Nowhere in the history of the continent, particularly so in West Africa, is the African image painted in positive strokes. On the contrary, wherever one turns, one is confronted with narratives of betrayal and collusion on the part of African elders and chiefs. Innes and Lindfors (1978: 3) are basically right in maintaining that during the colonial times “Africa was seen as a dark continent, a symbol of the irrational, nourishing undifferentiated and childlike peoples governed by fear and superstition rather than reason, a people only too ready to welcome and indeed, worship, the white man.”

This is the Africa European explorers met, and the rigours of scientific empiricism barred the colonial men from sacrificing the real to romantic inventions. An exaggerated defence of African tradition by some well-meaning western anthropologists and writers has misled many Africans into thinking and upholding that there was more in the traditional African setting than colonialism relayed. As a result, such Africans have embarked on a crusade to restore the grandeur of an African past which contemporary experience has difficulty confirming. Hackneyed didacticism of the kind to be found in works like Nzekwu’s *Wand of Noble Wood*, with its classroom anthropological style, Konadu’s *A Woman in her Prime*, whose only merit seems to be that it is written by an African, and many other similar productions, pay tribute to an African past at variance with the historical accounts handed down by more impassionate chroniclers, and confirmed by happenings on the ground even today.

The failure to make the African past take full responsibility for the continent’s present predicament has been one of the major limitations of contemporary African literature. The impression is given quite often that colonialism is responsible for all of Africa’s ills, even though it must be said that if colonialism had not fallen on the fertile soil of cultural weakness, even backwardness, that it met in Africa, it would not have taken root and blossomed the way it did, and continues to do today in subtler, infinitely more devastating ways.

The second element of ambiguity in Achebe’s call is its retrospective emphasis. The call invites the writer to reach back into history for pedagogical remedies to the people’s collective trauma. That is why he sees the writer’s duty as one intended to help the people regain their lost dignity by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. The danger in this attitude is that it fills the aggrieved with excessive, not to say unfounded, pride in their culture, and lures them into seeing strengths where they should deplore weaknesses. In emphasizing *what* Africa lost rather than *why* it lost what it lost, Achebe’s exhortation creates an obsession with a past that, either then or now, has really not given anyone much reason to defend it.

The bulk of African writing of the 60s and 70s has been the product of what we can term the retrospective school of Achebe, with his own pioneering work

*Things Fall Apart* as the flagbearer. Authors writing within this school have taken the strengths of traditional African culture for granted, and have gone on from there to show the damage done to this culture by western incursions. As Achebe says, “A writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated not only for the enlightenment of our detractors but even more for our own education. Because, as I said, the past with all its imperfections, never lacked dignity” (Achebe 1978: 9).

Even when they have attempted a critique of African culture, these authors have done so only to underline its social functionalism, not to excoriate its ethical inadequacies. In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, twins are abandoned in the Evil Forest and ransom children suffer ritual killing. Taken in isolation, these practices speak poorly of the culture that upholds them; but seen within the context of the fictional world in which they appear, they are little less than normal happenings, and therefore hardly deserving of condemnation. In fact the author does not subject the practices to any moral questioning. He presents them as normal acts of daily life in a given society, susceptible of condemnation, maybe, but also perfectly amenable to toleration.

Achebe strikes the necessary balance, however, when he states that “any serious African writer who wants to plead the cause of the past must not only be God’s advocate, he must also do duty for the devil” (Achebe 1978: 9). The uncritical glossing over by successive African writers, of their society’s cultural weaknesses has done a great deal to quagmire the continent in the paradoxes and ambiguities that today make take-off almost impossible.

It is such glossing over that prompts Oyegoke to the view that “orality in culture seems now to have attained a respectable status, having been newly rehabilitated after years of denigration at the hands of western anthropologists and ethnologists who found it convenient to equate orality with primitivism (Oyegoke 2000: 34–35). What is this newfangled rehabilitation premised on, one may ask. To the extent that orality is reflexive of culture, it is to be wondered what African culture, which continues to be oral in outlook, has done to suddenly gain acceptance as a useful part of world civilization. The same reasons that pushed western anthropologists and ethnologists to equate African culture with primitivism have not disappeared. In fact, they have become even more pronounced in comparison with the dazzling presence of western civilization, now made omnipresent by globalization. Oyegoke’s is therefore an emotional claim that is not endorsed by verifiable evolutionary data. One cannot, without falling prey to naivety, extract orality from the culture it articulates and claim that the one has been rehabilitated while the other is still waiting outside in the wings of primitivism. Nkosi does not say any less after his study of the themes and styles of modern African poetry, when he maintains that “the more serious question is whether the oral tradition and the poetic forms within that tradition can be made to yield models which can be mechanically repeated under new conditions of literary production” (Nkosi 1981: 151). These new conditions refer, one would imagine, to the changing circumstances ushered in by globalization, with its premium on western paradigms in the arts, science

and technology. The answer to Nkosi is self-evident: “For this reason we must treat with severe caution the new craze for the oral tradition in modern African literature. Nothing is so distracting as the whimsical, undigested use of the oral tradition in current African writing... I am not at all sure that tradition can ever be preserved; perhaps it can only be changed or challenged” (151).

That Nkosi construes change as a necessary factor in the continued survival of orality awakens its (orality’s) apologists to the need for dynamic adaptation. The way forward lies in the past, certainly, but a past revisited not for uncritical praise, but for pitfalls that must be eschewed if the future is to be less traumatic. To cite Soyinka once again,

It is about time that the African writer stopped being a mere chronicler and understood also that part of his essential purpose is to write with a very definite vision... he must at least begin by exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present (Soyinka 1968: 58).

It is to this new responsibility that Ogunbesan points when he says:

Achebe has moved from criticizing his society to directly taking a hand in remoulding it. He claimed that, in addition to recording the past and the current revolutions and changes that are going on, the African writer has a great influence in determining Africa’s future” (Innes and Lindfors 1978: 40).

The writer is therefore not only a teacher in the retrospective sense of the word; he is also and especially a social seer who identifies and highlights the weaknesses of present-day society. He is someone like Ayi Kwei Armah (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Fragments, Two Thousand Seasons*) or Wole Soyinka (*The Interpreters, Season of Anomy*), someone who rips open the fetid boils of mismanagement and misdirection in today’s Africa, and causes the future to veer into sight on a cleansed pedestal.

### 3. THE AFRICAN WRITER’S PROSPECTIVE ROLE

As we have spent considerable time demonstrating, any return to the past is meaningless unless its ultimate intention is to illumine the future; for Africa’s persistent drama does not lie so much in the interest it takes in its past as in its inability to build a future away from the shortcomings of that past.

To say therefore that the African writer is first of all a social seer is to charge him with a new mission; at any rate, to press home more trenchantly, the prospective dimension of his art. If all along he has sought “to rediscover the African past through the undermining of colonial stereotypes” (Carroll 1980: 29), he is now being invited to show “the way in which the novelist as teacher can best get the people on feet” (26), how he can “rescue for his people their beautiful destiny” (Ogunbesan 1979: 6).

Getting the people on their feet tells with cryptic clarity where the people are, weighed down as they have been – and continue to be – by age-old stories of exploitation, first by others, then by their own, and now by both. It is the novelist's duty to lift the African out of these difficult conditions. And he can only do so by making proposals, by charting a course for the African to follow into future cultural freedom and pride.

His biggest challenge in this enterprise is linguistic. As Carroll laments, “we are faced with the paradox of a people describing and identifying themselves by means of a foreign language which embodies the values and categories from which they are seeking to free themselves” (23).

Carroll's lament is symptomatic of the real task facing the African writer in particular and the African world in general. It tells us that cultural independence passes necessarily through linguistic authority. Culture is therefore subsumed in language and there can be no cultural independence outside linguistic independence. “No man can understand another whose language he does not speak”, says Achebe, “and ‘language’ here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire world view” (Achebe 1978: 7).

African writers with prospective intentions have in different ways demonstrated concern with the importance of language to their cultural liberation effort. Jean-Paul Sartre (1948: xx) is on record for having urged African writers to take over this foreign language and do violence to it. “Since the oppressor is present even in the language that Africans speak,” he says, “they will use that language to destroy him... The black poet will strip words of their Frenchness, will shatter them, will destroy their traditional associations and will juxtapose them with violence”. It is possibly to this act of domestication that Achebe (1975: 62) refers when he says “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.” And in a more practical way he tells the African writer what his attitude to the English language should be: “For the rest of us it is important first to learn the rules of English and afterwards break them if we wish” (Achebe 1978: 12).

The domestication of the foreign (western) language points to the cultural ‘métissage’ that African reality can no longer escape from, by the simple fact of its recent history. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Achebe has not attempted works in his native Ibo dialect. Even if he has, such experiments have remained undisclosed to the wider public. Preferring the imported language to the local is maybe in fidelity to the dialectical mission of his work. Fiction being to Achebe an ideology, he uses it to review pictures, to dramatize prejudices, to overturn stereotypes, to heal wounds: “A writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusions that the past needs to be recreated not only for the enlightenment of our detractors but even more for our own education” (Achebe 1978: 9). He therefore heeds the Sartrean exhortation to challenge the wrongdoers in their own language, not in African dialects that are themselves mere victims of that wrong.

This is where he strikes a basic difference with Ngugi wa Thiongo, who for his part believes that a return to the expressive medium of his native Gikuyu is one fundamental way of asserting his cultural independence. His revolutionary play “I will marry when I want” (1982) was first published in Gikuyu in 1980; and the English edition is dedicated “To all those who have been at the forefront in the development of literature in Gikuyu language through songs and books... and to all the other Kenyans who have been developing literature in all the other Kenya national languages through songs and books.”

Ngugi’s avowed linguistic nationalism answers a yearning for expressive authenticity scattered here and there in African writing. In my recent play “The Will” (Nyamndi 2004: 11–12) for instance, the second dancer addresses this query to the male servant, Sabitout:

Grammar Sabitout!  
Where is your own language?  
The English language  
You butcher  
Is not your own  
It vomits you  
Like the hausaman vomits porkmeat!  
Where is your own language  
Grammar Sabitout?  
What has happened  
To the language  
Of your ancestors  
Grammar Sabitout?

The return to African modes of expression is therefore a prospective recommendation that has been articulated time and again. Finnegan and Okpewho make it clear in their different studies that oral poetry, or for that matter literature, is best in the language of its original composition. Oyegoke says “cultural expression in the colonial language should give way to literature in the indigenous African language” (Oyegoke 2000: 36).

One of the most outstanding African artists to have given pride of place to indigenous compositions remains Okot p’Bitek, the late Ugandan poet. He considered himself a poet only when he performed his compositions in his native Akoli. *Song of Ocol*, *Song of Lawino*, *Song of Prisoner*, *Song of Malaya*, enjoyed such productions during which privileged Akoli audiences felt the heartbeat of their creative medium, away from the distancing effects of translation and approximation.

But use of indigenous languages is not without its short-term limitations. For one thing, such use undermines the complex fabric of contemporary African reality. As Carroll (1980: 23) cautions, “there are several obvious reasons why these African writers use and need French and English. The chief of these is that



all formal education has been conducted in these languages for decades and so they provide a reading public larger than any of the vernacular languages.”

Use of the vernacular languages can therefore not be a short-term strategy unless it is accompanied – indeed preceded – by sustained formal education in these languages. If they do not supercede the foreign languages in the essential aspects of daily life, they cannot take root in literature. Ngugi himself seems all too aware of this conditionality. That is why he thought it wise to translate his play into English. It was only in so doing that he could carry the revolutionary message of the play to the country’s leadership, an objective which the limitations of his native Gikuyu would have defeated.

In this matter of language, Achebe and most African writers have acted with pragmatism, refusing to indulge in the ultimately futile exercise of producing works in parochial languages with little or no readership. While acknowledging the formative importance of foreign languages to their worldview, African writers have as much as possible striven to stretch these foreign languages to accommodate African expressive features. Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), Okara’s *The Voice* (1964), Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* (1977), even Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1954), these are all examples of how the foreign language can be made to exist with local languages in a manner reflective of social realities on the continent. That is why Oyegoke concludes that “the world of literature, the arts and culture is an open-ended and dynamic one involving an interplay of texts regardless of the times and climes, and that the traditional attempt to suggest the contrary, that the world of the literary text or product is fixed and hermetically sealed, is false” (Oyegoke 2000: 41–42).

Having discovered that a complete debunking of foreign languages is not feasible, the task for African writers now lies in fashioning a new synthesis out of the dual linguistic heritage, a synthesis capable of imparting colour and depth to African reality. The following three examples articulate the felicitous results that germinate from a crafted encounter of the western and the African.

My husband’s tongue  
Is bitter like the roots of the *lyonno* lily  
It is hot like the penis of the bee.  
Like the sting of the *kalang*!  
Ocol’s tongue is fierce like the arrow of the scorpion  
Deadly like the spear of the buffalo-hornet  
It is ferocious  
Like the poison of a barren woman  
And corrosive like the juice of the gourd.  
(p’Bitek 1968: 16)

So the three messengers, three messengers,  
Set forth on their timid road for Okolo's house. They walked slowly and  
then faster, and soon one of them hit his foot against a stone.

First messenger: 'My right foot has hit against a stone.'

Second messenger: 'Is it good or bad?'

First messenger (*Solemnly*): 'It's bad.'

Second messenger: 'Bad? My right foot is good to me.'

Third messenger: 'Your nonsense words stop. These things have meaning  
no more. So stop talking words that create nothing.'

First messenger: 'To me there is meaning. My right foot always warns  
me.'

Second messenger: 'To me too there is meaning. If my left foot against  
something hits as I walk, it's a warning be.'

Third messenger (*With contempt*): 'Nonsense.'

First messenger: 'Listen not to him. He speaks this way always because  
he passed standard six. Because he passed standard six his ears refuseth  
nothing, his inside refuseth nothing like a dustbin.'

Third messenger: 'Your spoken words I call nothing. What I say is,  
things have changed, so change.'

First messenger (*Spits on the ground*): 'Hear his creating words – things  
changeth. Ha, ha, ha... change, change. He always of change speaks. Ha,  
ha, ha. What is the whiteman's word, the parable you always say... "the  
old order changeth"? I forget the rest, you always...'

(Okara 1964: 24–25)

"I have come to you for help," (Okonkwo) said. "Perhaps you can  
already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I  
know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially  
these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of  
work. The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said  
that he would praise himself if no one else did. I began to fend for myself  
at an age when most people still suck at their mother's breasts. If you  
give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you."

Nwakibie cleared his throat. "It pleases me to see a young man like  
you these days when our youth has gone so soft. Many young men have  
come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I know they  
would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by  
weeds. When I say no to them they think I am hard-hearted. But it is not  
so. Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without  
missing, he has learnt to fly without perching. I have learnt to be stingy  
with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our  
fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice  
four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm."

(Achebe 1954: 18)

These three examples bring a western language, here English, into tune with African particularities, the final result being writing that exudes character, depth and colour. Each excerpt draws creative strength from the expressive storehouse of its particular linguistic tradition, so that it becomes possible, by merely depending on the lexical and syntactic mannerisms of each passage, to locate its possible origin.

For any prospective paradigm to be effective, it must be convincing in its comprehensiveness. A preoccupation with language alone will emphasize only one aspect of an otherwise complex assignment; for, ideally, such an assignment should encompass the totality of worldviews within the given cosmos. This is what Fanon (1967: 17–18) is driving at when he says “generally, the exploitation of language means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”

That Fanon equates culture with civilization is an interesting development. The elements of permanence, relevance and ascendancy which we know to be characteristic features of civilization are also made by him to shed their positive light on culture, any culture. Thanks to this salutary blend, African culture can now embark on a more forward-looking, more prospective existence. This new impetus challenges the African writer to the quest for and exposition of the root causes of Africa’s inability to measure up to the exigencies of its time. Retrospection and prospection enter here into a new alliance, one searching out the pitfalls, the other proposing the safe routs.

The great insights into African literature lie embedded in the critical statements of the 60s, when that literature was patently mirrored on the facts of African life, when body was more urgent than dress. Jahn, Sartre, Kesteloot, Wauthier, these pioneering critics made statements which, like good wine, only gain in richness the older they get, and which prompt us to the observation that criticism cannot run faster than the society which gives the criticized work its material. It is not because planes land and take off in Africa that aeronautic engineering becomes an equally commonplace field on the continent; after all, being present in today’s world does not necessarily mean being part of it. Making Africa part of today’s world: this is the final challenge that the prospective writer has to face up to. As Sartre questioned, “will the great Negro river colour the sea into which it runs?” (Wauthier 1967: 278).

In 1964 Claude Wauthier enriched the landscape of budding criticism on African literature with the seminal work *L’Afrique des Africains: Inventaire de la Négritude*, translated in 1966 under the title *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa*. The French title of the work is in itself the best exemplification of Wauthier’s wish of fulfillment for Africa, for it gives the continent back to its veritable owners. He went further inside the work to provide the ideal manner in which Africa could get back its own:

...independence has come to practically the whole of Africa, but it is a tenuous independence, especially in the economic field. Unity has still to come. Neutrality has suffered many compromises. Socialism – in most cases – has yet to be built. Although the foundations have been laid, there

is still a lot to do. In these circumstances, one might imagine that literature and scientific research would set their sights on completing the first conquests of emancipation and that this would determine the literary themes and direction of scientific research for the second generation of African intelligentsia (280).

Practically four decades later, this statement remains the most appropriate prescription for the African writer and the best way forward for his continent. Literature should be put at the service of society's future, and that future cannot be imagined away from the defining influence of science and technology; at least not in today's world. Ultimately, any culture that ignores this prescription also causes itself to be ignored.

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