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Cheikh Anta Diop's paradigm. . . . Koffi Kwahule (qtd. p. 174) laments the lack of formal creativity: his severity is very pertinent. Reading Rashi's work makes one wonder about the reception of the plays: What was presented in Ivory Coast, apart from Ivoirian authors? Hugo, Anouilh, or Jarry? What was the place of the Institut des Arts in the pedagogy? A comparison with Ghana would certainly be useful. What were the self-imposed limits of the "ricerca"? Were they more rigid than those of the "teatro da leggere"?

The work of Natasa Rashi is that of a convincing, concerned, and thorough scholar. We would like to engage the researcher more in some problematics of the African scene that may find some echoes in Italy and elsewhere: for instance, Dario Fo the recent Italian Nobel Prize winner, is a man of orality and of the theater, who plays with dialects. The book is informed by the drama of the theater. Despite an official peaceful façade, conflicts in Ivory Coast have been very violent, but were not publicized in the French and international press. For instance, the "fake" plots of the early sixties led to traumatic "purges" that affected theater, especially one of its founders, Coffi Gadeau, jailed for many years, released and forgotten. In the seventies Ahmadou Kourouma had to go away in exile after his first play was presented. The close relationship between theater and politics made of Bernard Bottey Zadi Zaourou, a brilliant playwright and theoretician, "genio ecclético"—a Minister of culture. What is happening today, when the worst crisis of Ivory Coast's young history is raging? What are the theater people saying about Ivoirité, an absurdly racist subcategory on the "African" scene?

Natasa Raschi picks up good examples: WereWere Liking wants to "rêver grand" 'dream large.' That is wonderful and she is right. A certain hubris on the stage is much better than an uncertain delirium in the streets. We hope Natasa Raschi's excellent work will be made available to readers unfamiliar with the language of Pirandello. . . .

—Alain Ricard

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The Hunter Thinks the Monkey Is Not Wise . . ., by Ulli Beier. Ed. Wole Ogundele. Bayreuth African Studies 59. Bayreuth: Eckhard Breiterger, 2001. 230 pp. ISBN 3-92751071-8.

Yoruba humour is baroque and earthy, never vicious. It is playful banter that knows about the weaknesses of human beings, but it never despises them. (144)

The above quotation nearly totally summarizes the tone that runs through this selection of essays with such varied time references and, perhaps, a measure of ambivalence. Some of the essays were written as early as 1955 and others as recently as 1998. It is not only the time sequence that is staggered; the themes and the concerns themselves reflect such a diversity of interests that factual elements dovetail into myth, fantasies, and enchantment. The essays are grouped under three broad themes, but even within one subgrouping, "Myth, Magic and Children," there appear topics dealing

with the history and statistical genealogy of a Yoruba town, Okuku, as well as the magical art of Yoruba hunters.

It is this unmanageable diversity as characterized by the complex interests and genius of Ulli Beier that gives the collection its peculiar polyphony. That complexity of character derives from the unusual layering of templates in the subconscious of ancient civilizations. Many a time the weft and woof of this texturing give a touch of ambivalence, if not perplexity, to the outlook of archaic societies and their philosophies. Ulli Beier himself is obviously in his element when exploring those apparent ambiguities, those gray areas in the cultural spawns of Yoruba stories. The philosophies can be as complementary as they are seemingly contradictory. Some of the more complex philosophies and wisdom of the ancient communities explored here are reflected in the *oriki* of the ubiquitous godling Esu Elegbara:

When we think of you as big,
 You appear as a dwarf.
 When we think of you as small
 You appear as a giant . . .
 Lying down, your head hits the ceiling.
 Standing up you cannot look into the cooking pot.

Old man
 Fresh like a baby
 Shimmering
 Like a colourful chameleon
 Elusive like smoke
 You carry water in a basket. (30)

This is the same spirit phenomenon who “throws a stone today to kill a bird yesterday”!

I seek to explore this phenomenon of ambiguity to provoke introspection on the mystifying logic that history—contemporary history, conquest, and colonization—makes of the tufts and residue of “primitive” culture that it seeks to placate. As in the subtitle of this anthology (“The Monkey Is Wise but He Has His Own Logic”), peculiarities in cultural logic often prevent a façade that leads the presumptuous to perplexing humility and “apotheosis.” Lest we think that this ambiguity is restricted to the more chauvinistic deities, here is the chanted quality of a water goddess, Osun:

White cowrie shells
 On black buttocks
 Her eyes sparkle in the forest
 Like the sun on the river.
 She is the wisdom of the forest
 She is the wisdom of the river.
 Where the doctor failed
 She cures with fresh water.
 Where medicine is impotent
 She cures with cool water. (21)

Beier is a literary ethnologist with the eyes of an eagle and the precocity of a parrot. His vision is broad, his mind is deep, for in the colonial era when many of his contemporaries cast aspersions on religious objects, regarding them as mementos, he already felt the pull of the sacred in unfamiliar terrain. This would seem to be the *élan vital* for which he had been waiting all along, away from his native Germany:

Suddenly I understood what colonialism meant: arrogance based on ignorance, sniggering condescension towards people one had come to 'help', an arrogance which reduced whole cultures to the level of curios. (204)

What really produced the serendipity with which Ulli Beier accounted for his artistic and cultural discoveries across Yoruba land was the challenge evinced by his latent, Europeanized view of art. The "difference" in the levels of aesthetic perception gave rise to his new discovery, which he experienced in the literary characterization of Yoruba gods and goddesses as a merciless expropriation of divine message in the saying that without the enthusiasm and zest of human devotees, there would have been no subject of worship: this guarantees that the sacred and the profane are contiguous.

The preoccupation with the ambiguous, the gray, and the perplexing leads to a compelling analogy with another profoundly perceptive ethnology, Ahmadou Hampaté Ba (as introduced by Abiola Irele—see his "Introduction" to *The Fortunes of Wangrin*) written texts represent a reordering of the categories of African oral narratives. There is a sense in which writing becomes a conceptual mediation of the process of knowledge acquisition and transfer in postcolonial literary discourse.

In the same way, Ulli Beier's representation of cultural coda and icons from their native contexts represent a systematic reordering through a sympathetic narrator. He thus brings an ingenious freshness to it that an indigenous or native "reader" or interpreter might take for granted. To further buttress this point, we may derive some inspiration from the historical significance of his adoptive town, Osogbo. But why Osogbo? What led Ulli to Osogbo, and his helping to found the Mbari Mbayo club there in the early 1960s? Osogbo, for him, certainly became a haunt where he was lucky to have discovered Oba Adeleye Adenle I, the mysteries of Osun, and the theater of Duro Ladipo. It was also from that vantage point that he was able to reach Ede, where he struck up a lifelong friendship with Oba Laoye, the Yoruba classical musicologist, and devotees and mystagogues of the Sango cult who feed the intellectual genie of the Duro Ladipo theater. It was also from Osogbo that he was able to gain a foothold in Ilobu, only five miles away, where he had access to the shrines of Erinle and Sango (56) as well as the secrets of Yoruba dogs and hunters. Still, Osun and Osogbo were captivating factors for Ulli and Susan Wenger. But he himself has an extraordinary explanation:

Why Osogbo? Why not Ibadan or any other big Yoruba town? It is, of course, an unanswerable question ultimately. But I feel that

Osogbo had a special identity, a special character. It was a very tolerant and open-minded town. Here strangers always felt at ease, and it is not surprising that the town attracted many interesting strangers: E. K. Ogunmola came to settle there from Ekiti; Twins Seven-Seven from Kabba; Bisi Fabunmi from Oke-Mesi; Muraina Oyelami from Iragbiji; Lere Paimo from Ogbomoso; Tijamni Mayakiri from Ilorin; Rufus Ogundele from Aramoko. . . . Nobody can be entirely certain of his motives, but I believe that what attracted me to Osogbo were three people: Oba Adenle, Bakare Gbadamsosi and Duro Ladipo. (55–56)

My own explanation is predicated on other historical factors. Osogbo had become a significant Yoruba nationalist town late in the nineteenth century because just outside its northern boundaries lies Ikirun, where the Yoruba army put a stop to the advance of Fulani Jihadists. Various reasons were adduced for that success, including those recorded by Ulli Beier. Historically, we all refer to the fact that the formidable Ibadan army routed the Fulani army and later liberated Erin-Ile and Offa (see Johnson). But there is, as always, a mythical reference to the protection rendered by the river deity Osun through the period of those expeditions (39–40). An incident in her central shrine had provided a clue to the secret plans of the Fulani. The Ibadan army swiftly moved in and marched on the Fulani. So renowned were the protective powers of Osun that another story went round that she had disguised herself as a food seller in the enemy camp, selling them poisoned foods to facilitate the victory of the Yoruba army. According to Beier:

Oba Adenle readily admitted that the powerful Ibadan army, encamped outside the walls of Osogbo, played an important part in the victory, but ultimately it was Osun who had saved Osogbo from the fate of Oyo, Offa, Erinle, and so many other northern Yoruba towns. (40)

Rather than explain this report as an ambiguous, ideological representation of a mythic consciousness, we might as well take it to be a holistic way of recounting history in an actively oral culture that sees beyond the literal art of cold print.

If this preoccupation with the ambiguous is to be roundly applied or wholly conceptualized, we must not fail to note that the author's fascinating reportage is sometimes marred by his mild prejudice in representing Yoruba stories of origins as an extension of Semitic patrimony. These stories of heroes, immolation, floods, etc. are, as he himself admitted elsewhere, matters of cultural correspondence among races across the world. It certainly would be no use trying to find the sources of the famous Ori Olokun bronze heads of Ile-Ife outside of their archeological origins. There may have been bronze figures of comparable artistry in ancient Greece, Rome, or Mesopotamia, but this does not mean that Yoruba, the Bini, or the Bariba need to find their patrimony among such civilizations.

Ulli Beier has long represented himself as an ethnologist of great sensitivity, not only in the freshness and originality of his ideas, but also in his penetrating and perspicacious observations as well as in his razor-sharp analyses. The present collection epitomizes this representation most succinctly in his documentation on dogs, children, and their place in Yoruba society: he not only represents them as magical companions of patrons and older relations, respectively, but he relates their totemic significance in a civilization where worlds merge and collapse in captivating ambiguity. Because of the ring of innocence around the tone of presentation, the essays on pets and children appear as an original, path-breaking anthropological survey and a chronicle of day-to-day living in the culture under discussion. Beier is so frank and often objectively naïve in the presentation of his opinions on the topic that one is bound to believe all he says. For instance, he writes of Yoruba children:

Since Yoruba children assumed responsibilities and participated in adult life early, they were much more mature than Western children of a comparable age. Since children were respected by adults and because they had rights as well as duties, there was no conflict between generations. (84)

Now, this certainly can't be true of only Yoruba, or non-Western children for that matter. His frankness, however, cannot be gainsaid in his ability to say things as he sees or feels them. He knows Yoruba society and culture like the lines of his own palm and he applies that knowledge as he deems best.

It is the same when he presents Yoruba folk heroes and the tales of their wanderings as he found them in traditional poetry and recitation. His simple, graphic presentation and his honest intellectual approach often lend to them the effects that native speakers of the language may not have thought of or conjured. What separates Ulli Beier as a pioneer from the latter-day dilettantes is that intellectual honesty and childlike simplicity in the presentation of his findings. A great deal of the originality he evinces, for instance, in such path-breaking research in that seminal essay "Before Oduduwa" (1955) or in "On Translating Yoruba Poetry" (1970) is due to this benign simplicity. In the former essay, some of his pronouncements on Yoruba, Borgu, Nupe, Fon, and Bini settlements are still among the most up-to-date Nigerian ethnographic data. Without denigrating his written medium, his depictions of those civilizations in their eponymous heroes, enchanting tales, and hunters' poetry remind one of D. S. Izevbaye's comment on Fagunwa's writings, that "the author is only a scribe recording directly from the mouth of the traditional story-teller whose real livelihood is hunting, and whose encounter with spirits is merely part of the hazard of his work."

In a postcolonial situation, Ulli Beier, with his general ethnographic interest in African value systems, leaves us a legacy in this unique collection that is otherwise difficult to retrieve. The compiler and editor of the essays, Wole Ogundele, has performed a rare feat in that a homologous section

from the pouch of an inimitable “poacher” of Beier’s caliber is bound to be problematic: which do you exclude without guilt feelings or editorial doubts? It takes quite some patience or nerve to travel through Ulli Beier’s forested and profound imagination without battling with the thickets and high points of those cultures, which now seem lost or forever abrogated. Beier, for his imaginative eureka, will continue to rank with such Africanists as Leo Frobenius, Pierre Fatumbi Verger, and Michael Crowther.

—Dele Layiwola
University of Ibadan

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Bulletin from the Land of the Living Ghosts: Romance in the Reign of Commander Cobra, by Adebayo Williams. Xlibris, 2002.

Funso Aiyejina—born in Nigeria but presently living in Trinidad, where he is a senior lecturer at the University of the West Indies—is best known as a poet. His first collection, *A Letter to Lynda and Other Poems*, won the Association of Nigerian Authors’ prize in 1989. His poems also can be found in a number of anthologies, including *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, wherein he is described by editors as “one of Nigeria’s finest satirists” (413).

Now Aiyejina has turned his keen, penetrating vision to another genre, the short story, with an auspicious debut, *The Legend of the Rockhills*, which won the Best First Book award for Africa in the 2000 Commonwealth Writers competition. Aiyejina has characterized his own upbringing as “a combination of the rural and the cosmopolitan” (“I Am Interested in Words”) and this is evident in *The Legend of the Rockhills*. Written in clear, straightforward style, these stories highlight some of the contradictions still haunting Africa in the period long after things ostensibly fell apart, even after the following heady moment of independence when things were going to be put right. Like a number of other contemporary African authors, Aiyejina shows us that while, on one level, things keep falling apart, deeper down, at the bedrock of culture, they stubbornly endure.