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# AFRICAN POETRY: PART 1




# Introduction

- The composition and publication of Anglophone poetry in Black Africa has a long but disjointed history. In one form or another, poetry has been and is being written in English in all areas of the continent and has been composed for well over one hundred years. Because of these factors of time and space, it is useful to think of this poetry as having several interrelated regional "histories" and to consider its development in terms of generations.
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# The Pioneers

- In the nineteenth century anglophone poetry was composed in places as widely separated as Sierra Leone and the Cape Colony.
  - Most of this verse was religious. Hymns and verse expressions of religious sentiment and moral instruction were encouraged by Christian missions.
  - An unsophisticated piety expressed in a prosody modeled on that of the Protestant hymnals.
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# Twentieth century

- These religious verses were augmented by expressions of racial pride and assertions of continental destiny.
- Ghanaian resident of Sierra Leone, Gladys Casely-Hayford ( 1904-50):

Rejoice and shout with laughter

Throw all your burdens down

If God has been so gracious

As to make you black or brown.

# The Ghanaian R. E. G. Armattoe.

- Armattoe ( 1913-53) is more of a transitional figure than the other pioneers, closer in spirit to the ironists of the succeeding generation.
- His two dominant
  - the meaning and uses of the African past
  - the nature and meaning of the modern African's life and experience.

I am not sure of anything  
here


No known values hold,  
nothing certain

Save uncertainty, nothing  
expected

Save the unexpected.



# Criticism


- O. R. Dathorne said of the pioneer poets:  
They have proved to be not pioneers at all but rather the last inheritors of a dying tradition. The important poets of the following generations have learned not from them but from encounters—at Ibadan, Legon, and elsewhere—with the major English and American poets of the Euromodernist tradition and from their determined return to the forms and figures of African oral poetry.
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# West Africa


## First Modern Generation

While most of the pioneers were born between 1910 and 1920 and published their work in the 1940s and early 1950s. The poets of the first modern generation were born between 1926 and 1936. The major poets of this generation are Lenrie Peters of The Gambia, Kwesi Brew and Kofi Awoonor of Ghana, and Gabriel Okara, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark Bekederemo, and Christopher Okigbo of Nigeria.






# Mid-twentieth century

- Poets encountered the Anglo-American expression of the Euromodernist poetic tradition. They read Hopkins and Yeats, Eliot and Pound. Their early poetry, which began to appear in the late 1950s, is often imitative of those masters.
  - The primacy of the individual voice.
  - Working their way back to their own indigenous oral poetry.
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# Thematic Concerns


- The meaning of African history
  - The significance of their own experiences as modern Africans.
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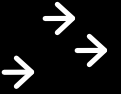
# Paradigm of African history

- The historical paradigm is the conjugation of a long historical process consisting originally of five "tenses":
  1. A rich traditional past that is both pastoral and romantic and is made up of both villages and empires.
  2. A ruthless European conquest against heroic resistance.
  3. A period of oppression and exploitation in which Black character was purified through suffering.
  4. A determined struggle for liberation culminating in triumphant independence.
  5. A returning glory to independent Africa.



# The Psychological Myth of the Cyclical Journey

- The psychological myth casts the experience of the westernized African into the pattern of a cyclical journey. Born into the tradition of hearth and village, the African is pulled away in the disorienting world of the West. Through schools and universities and often extended periods of time spent in Western countries, he is transformed into a modern African. But in the process he finds himself rejected by the West while, at the same time, he learns to see—and then see through—its racism, imperialism, and materialism. The cycle of this journey is completed as the altered African returns to an altered Africa, often to help in the attempt to build a meaningful future out of a usable past.
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Thank  
you

