tion. Without resorting to theoretical jargon, her sensitive editing has made for a valuable addition to current debate on postcolonialism in that it reveals Selvon's continuing relevance to this issue, given what Nasta sees as his keen awareness of important postcolonial issues such as that of identity. In the light of this kind of relevance, it is surprising to see that in a work published in 1988, the bibliography stops at 1984. A quick check of the MLA listings reveals, however, that little has been published on Selvon since that date. With the arrival of this stimulating compilation, this oversight should now begin to be rectified.

JOHN LEBLANC

Yemi Ogunbiyi, ed. *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present.* Vols. I and II. Lagos, Nigeria: Guardian Books, 1988. pp. 203 and 359. $3.00 and $4.50, respectively.

These volumes bring together between them seventy-nine articles selected from *The Guardian* newspaper's weekly literary column spread over the period of two years under Yemi Ogunbiyi's editorial advice. Yemi Ogunbiyi, better known for his work in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (1981), which a reviewer justifiably describes as "a welcome aid to Nigerian theatre scholarship,"[1] now includes in the present volumes essays on nearly all of Nigeria's important writers to date by some of Nigeria's most renowned scholars.

If the significance of *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* lay primarily in the diligence with which papers scattered in journals around the world on Nigeria's performance traditions were for the first time so ably brought together and made accessible with a piquant introduction to students and all others interested in those aspects of Nigeria's culture, the weight of the present volumes lies in the declared objective of *The Guardian*'s literary column, which was designed "to step in where the book publishing companies could not, and offer a series of critical appraisals of the work of Nigerian writers" for "an entire generation of Nigerian youths" growing up in times of economic slump and "severe decline of the book publishing industry" (viii). This original goal, to arrest ignorance among young Nigerians about their rich tradition should be commended, although the decision to publish the essays in book form with "very little effort . . . to further re-edit the material" is unfortunate, since the main shortcomings of the collections derive from the "freer journalistic slant of some of the articles" which are found not to have been able to combine a qualitative "sustained, intellectual" (xi) debate that was envisaged with the popular taste that is being cultivated for literature.

One searches in vain for a justification for the exclusion of footnotes and cross-references from the books. Although many people wrongly feel that footnotes, in particular, are diversionary and inessential aspects of scholarship (and Ogunbiyi is a victim of this fallacy, at least in these volumes), footnotes and cross-references are certainly crucial to the demands of clarity and complete accuracy, more so for books directed at students who ought to be taught the correct way. Added to this is the unevenness of the papers, which a more careful guide that focused on only developed interests could have remedied.

Not surprisingly, the first volume, which is theoretical in focus, suffers less from the absence of rigorous documentation, since the essays are generalized in nature. Divided into two sections, part one contains fourteen stimulating papers beginning with a lucid, radical, and exhaustive general review of literary developments in the Nigerian nation by G. G. Darah, followed by ethnic surveys of the Hausa (by Ibrahim Yaro), the Yoruba (an article each by Toyin Falola and Akinwumi Isola), and the Igbo (represented by an incisive article by Emenyonu). There are papers on specialized areas such as drama (by Olu Obafemi), the contribution of women in Nigerian literature (by Okonjo Ogunyemi), and the literature on the Nigerian civil war (adequately covered by Chidi Amuta). The consensus among the writers is that literature in Nigeria did not begin with colonialism, but has its roots in orature practices of the various people constituting the Nigerian nation. This is not a new observation but the writers demonstrate the view with much persuasion and throw new light on the topic. In this part of the book, cross-references are used to good effect. The writers ably chronicle the ways in which Nigerian writing reflects the socio-historical changes in the society. The most regrettable omission, which the editor happily promises to rectify possibly in the future, is the non-representation of Nigeria's ethnic minorities, a situation which lends tacit support to the wrong impression held in some quarters that the size of a community is an indicator of the quality of creative endeavour among the population.

Abiola Irele's essay entitled "Literary Criticism in the Nigerian Context" (93-105) indirectly touches on this matter. After worrying away about the function of criticism in contemporary Nigeria where "other pressing requirements of national development" (93) make the profession of a literature teacher appear rather like an expensive joke, Irele then asks for a revision in Nigerian critical practice of the emphasis on "a canon of great works" bequeathed to us by I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis (96). Dan Izevbaye's response to Irele's paper is more optimistic. In "Literary Criticism in the Nigerian Context: Another View" (106-11), Izevbaye sends a timely reminder to intellectuals in Nigeria to keep their heads in these agitated times. Using evidence from Irele's total output as a scholar, Izevbaye proves

that the current note of despair in Irele is an indication of the level of the mental uncertainty and frustration following Nigeria's economic misfortunes in the hands of self-serving politicians and military rogues who have mis-ruled the nation since independence. In restating the social value of literature, Izevbaye argues: "The failure of civilized values is at the root of our failure to utilize our once fantastic oil wealth in ways that should have brought research in molecular biology within our reach" (109). What all critics "are out to do, what no critic should refuse to do, is find some means of reducing the apparent chaos of literary works into a manageable and meaningful order" (111). To approach all writings indiscriminately, Izevbaye warns, "would threaten the literary reinforcement of those values that each culture shores up against the collapse of the civilization that it is trying to build" (111).

The section ends with an inspiring paper by Funso Aiyejina entitled "Recent Nigerian Poetry in English: An Alter-Native Tradition" (112-28), suggesting that the Nigerian civil war has decidedly altered the direction of Nigerian poetry tradition in both content and technique. Drawing extensively from the works of Paul Ndu, Obiora Udechukwu, Ossie Enekwe, Duben Okafor, Chinweizu, Acholonu, Ofeimun, Osundare, Ojaide, and others, Aiyejina demonstrates the change from the prewar "undue eurocentricism, obscurantism and private esotericism" (112) to an Africanized, socially-oriented poetry for which, Aiyejina upholds, the later Okigbo has served as the model.

Part two of the first volume, subtitled "Tributes," features appraisals of each other's works by such eminent Nigerian scholars as Wole Soyinka and Biodun Jeyifo (with an article each on Abiola Irele), Isidore Okpewho (on M. J. Echeruo), and Irele (on Anozie), while Irele, Jeyifo, and Osofisan celebrate Soyinka's 1986 Nobel prize in separate essays. These are generally spirited papers, characterized by industry, intellectual candour, and dedication, but it is Soyinka who introduces light-heartedness into the discussion. Soyinka's article "Abiola Irele: The Critic as 'Olohun-Iyo'" (136-38) fondly recalls memories of the time he and his colleagues were "a gang of fledgling poets, playwrights, radio and stage producers, critics, painters and musicians" (136) in the early sixties. Those were days of obscurity before the Nobel harvest but Soyinka's tongue-in-cheek recollection borders on nostalgia, and we see the master poet at play, having fun with words. The personality of Soyinka that manifests itself in this essay certainly refutes the view put forward by Jeyifo in his "What is the Will of Ogun?" (169-85) to the effect that Soyinka's attitude after his Nobel award indicates a "genuine humility in his moment of triumph" (172). Soyinka pointedly shows that gone are the days when he still needed to prove himself. Another superstitious irrele-

vance is that Jeyifo attributes Soyinka's success as a writer to Ogun's mythical powers.

In the second volume of *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature*, the problems of disjointed scholarship, half-digested ideas, and pedestrian expression rear their ugly heads. And disappointment sets in, since in these essays on individual Nigerian writers there is not the required academic rigour or the expected rich harvest of years of research by the writers.

Steve Ogude's "Olaudah Equiano" (1-18), which opens the collection, really deserves its first position among the fifty-three essays, not only because modern Nigerian writing in English began with Equiano but also for Ogude's thorough research on this subject, which has placed many scholars in his debt. Ogude's thesis, that the root of modern African literature is traceable to the slave narratives of the Nigerian-born Equiano, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Ottobah Cugoano, and Phillis Wheatley is actually condensed from his 1984 *African Literature Today* article which itself rehearses the views in the author's book *Genius in Bondage: A Study of the Origins of African Literature in English* (Ife, 1983), but he restates the old opinion with greater clarity and precision.

Similarly, Emenyonu draws heavily on his exhaustive work on Pita Nwana and Cyprian Ekwensi, in his two separate articles on these writers. After reading Emenyonu's laconic essay on Pita Nwana (9-13), I wanted to get back to the work of this classic writer of Igbo fiction, "truly the father of the Igbo novel." But it is in "Cyprian Ekwensi" (20-27) that Emenyonu actually brings to bear the power of his prose. Vigorously defending Ekwensi against charges of artlessness from his severe critics, Emenyonu declares that "many critics of African literature, often from the western world, have made their debut by shooting down Cyprian Ekwensi," because it "is so easy to criticize Cyprian Ekwensi, much more so by people who have not even read him" (20). Ekwensi's contribution to Nigerian fiction, Emenyonu reasons, lies in the many themes and situations he handles in his countless works. If one leaves the essay with an impression of having wandered into a personal quarrel between Emenyonu and Bernth Lindfors in the pages of an *African Literature Today*, at least Emenyonu allows himself a concessional final speculation: "Perhaps, if he had stuck to one genre, if he had focussed on one major theme, if he had concentrated on one segment of the society for his audience, Cyprian Ekwensi could have commanded, maybe, more followership among literary critics." This is the most sympathetic essay on Ekwensi that this reviewer has yet seen.

Other highlights are Charles Nnolim's paper on Aniebo and S. O. Asein's essay on J. P. Clark. Nnolim's is a succinct but one-sided exploration of Aniebo's work. Nnolim reverses the traditional view

which locates Aniebo's forte in the short story medium (as typified by Willfried Feuser in his *Jazz and Palm Wine* (Longman, 1981), and discusses the sandwich technique, the cinematic montage technique of multiple images, the close-up, the slow-up, and the technique of rackfocus (233-37), as the hallmark of Aniebo's novelistic narrative. The main problem with the exercise is that nothing is mentioned about the drawbacks in those features as they manifest themselves in Aniebo's writing.

Sam Asein faces a herculean task in "J. P. Clark's poetry" (66-74), where he identifies a "strong sense of locale; an attachment to his homeland" (69), as the main strength of Clark's early poetry. Asein makes a stout revision of Obi Maduakor's closely-argued case in *African Literature Today*, 14 (1984), against the banality in Clark's later poetry, stating that Maduakor is here failing to respond to Clark's evolution: "Clark has become much more socially aware than in his earlier verse. The range of his social comment has become more extensive, and there is greater assurance in the manner of his handling of the medium as a vehicle for social and political censure" (73). This essay exhibits competent use of biographical material, close reading, and deductive analysis.

In fact, it is the failure to come to grips with literary criteria of a similar validity that mars the weaker papers, which are typified by unsubstantiated remarks, skimpiness, and meaningless verbal tricks. At best, these papers (Egudu on Okigbo — and given his previous work on Okigbo, this is a pity; Kalu Uka on J. P. Clark; Ezenwa-Ohaeto on Onuora Nzekwu, Paul Ndu, Funso Aiyejina, Ojaide, and Chukwuemeka Ike — one wonders why so much space was given Ezenwa-Ohaeto when he has so little of value to say; Ossie Enekwe on Achebe and Biodun Jeyifo on Osofisan, Achebe, and Soyinka) manifest occasional insights but there is really not much to justify their inclusion.

Deserving special mention is the disservice done Achebe in two separate essays by Enekwe. After the brilliant work on Achebe by scholars like E. N. Obiechina (in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, 1975), M. J. C. Echeruo (in *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, 1975), and David Carroll (in *Chinua Achebe*, 1980) among others, one expects Achebe scholarship to advance, or at the very least stay at its post. But in "Chinua Achebe's Short Stories" (38-42) and "Chinua Achebe's Poetry" (43-47), Enekwe slights Achebe's stature. References to Killam and Irele are used to illustrate tired formulations on Achebe's art: "Achebe is as much concerned with style as with what he says" (36). The most careless statements on Achebe's art yet are Enekwe's observations in his essay that against "the wishes of his father," Achebe's "mother and other relations told him stories from native folklore and history.

All this was to crystallize in his fiction" (31); and a few pages later, he says that "Chinua Achebe developed as a writer in an environment where the story form was not taken seriously, where there was no flourishing tradition of short fiction" (38). A more useful undertaking would have been for Enekwe to demonstrate the folkloric influence in Achebe's fiction which the first paper suggests (if indeed he has anything new to add to Lindfors's work in the area), and not to go ahead belatedly to deny it, as he does in the second essay.

The overall impression of *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature* is that the stronger essays are those on the older generation of Nigerian writers; these essays are also those written by the pioneer Nigerian critics. The situation is therefore symptomatic of a general failure of dialogue between the generations: the older generation of critics fight shy of venturing outside familiar territories; but in their attempt to respond to the works of their own generation, the younger critics do not always show sufficient command of their subjects. Despite the many limitations, these books are useful reference works of who's who in Nigerian literature, which should not be ignored.

NOTE

[1] O. Owomoyela's review in *Research in African Literature* 15.3 (1984): 451-55.

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