

Tobias Robert Klein (Ed.)

Schools and Schooling as a Source of African Literary
and Cultural Creativity

Susanne Gehrmann, Flora Veit-Wild, Tobias Wendl (Hg.)

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Table of Contents

Schools and Schooling as a Source of African Literary and Cultural Creativity: Introduction	i
<i>Tobias Robert Klein</i>	

I. Cultural Creativity and Institutional History

Gyama Songs in Ghanaian Schools: A Note on a Student's Musical Creativity	3
<i>De-Valera Botchway</i>	

Holy Aruosa School and Development of Creative Arts in Edo Language in Benin City, Nigeria, 1945-1973	33
<i>Uyilawa Usuanlele</i>	

The Missionary Factor and the Development of the Eve-Pandora Complex in the Shona Novel	51
<i>Jacob Mapara</i>	

How to Make Gun-Powder: St Augustine's Mission School, Penhalonga in the Days of Marechera and the Second Chimurenga	63
<i>Flora Veit-Wild in conversation with Fr. Keble Prosser</i>	

II. Faction or Fiction? Schools and/in (Auto)biographical Writings

"They were among my happiest days": Future Nostalgias and the West-African Boarding School	77
<i>Tobias Robert Klein</i>	

"Knowledge Gained... outside a Formal Setting": Invisible School Curriculum and Ngugi's Formation as Writer in <i>In the House of the Interpreter</i>	93
<i>Senayon Olaoluwa</i>	

Childhood Autobiographical Memory and Literary Development:
A Reading of Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* and
Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water* 111
Catherine Olutoyin Williams

J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood: Ashes of Childhood* 125
Hilmar K. Heister

III. School Writing(s) Today

Creative Writing Competition Experience
at a Tanzanian Primary School 135
Ngenda Sebahene and Immaculata Kaiza

School as Place of Literary Inspiration:
Analysis of Three Poetry Anthologies from Northern Nigeria 143
Yusuf M. Adamu

Schools and Schooling as a Source of African Literary and Cultural Creativity: Introduction

Tobias Robert Klein, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

In a usually overlooked passage of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chris, one of the novel's chief protagonists, explains the origins of a triangular bond between him and his former class-mates Ikem and Sam, the military head of state:

Ikem was the brightest in the class – first position every term for six years. Can you beat that? Sam was the social paragon [...]. He was the all-rounder – good student, captain of the Cricket Team, Victor Ludorum in athletics and, in our last year, School Captain. And girls worshipped at his feet from every Girl's School in the province. We are all connected. You cannot tell the story of any of us without implicating the others. Ikem may resent me but he probably resents Sam even more and Sam resents both of us most vehemently. We are too close together, I think. Lord Lugard College trained her boys to be lonely leaders in separate remote places, not cooped up together in one crummy family business (Achebe 2001 [1987]: 61).

In just a couple of sentences Achebe captures the deep psychological impact that the colonial version of the British Public School with its quixotic and enviable melange of athletics and literature, submission and critical thinking or friendship and passionate rivalry exerted on several generations of African politicians and intellectuals. The fictional and factual depiction of schooling as a major social leveller, the coming of age or boarding house life has however with only some few exceptions been conspicuously ignored in African literature studies. Brigitte Alessandri's *L'école dans le roman africain* (2004) covers the assimilationist context of education in Francophone Africa and an anthology by Robin Malan (2008) gathers school experiences of South African writers that for obvious historical and political reasons differ from those in the East or West of the continent. Of late, Terri Ochiagha (2015) has picked up the nostalgically tuned school passages in Achebe's memoirs *There was a Country* and in her fascinating monograph on the budding writer and his friends at Umuahia College unearthed the literary roots of a versatile and multi-faceted squad of South-Eastern Nigerian poets and novellists.

This volume explores the peculiar significance of schools and schooling in Anglophone African countries as a trigger of literary and cultural creativity: Despite its function as a centre of cultural alienation, the (colonial) boarding house

became, as **De-Valera Botchway** argues, a highly fertile ground for African students' creativity. The history of the both vociferous and competitive Jama student songs in Ghana, which have left notable traces even in recent popular culture, turns out to be an exemplary case study for the conversion and reconfiguration of existing indigenous cultural items and attitudes. Contrary to the development of a sub-culture other areas also witnessed a reaction of the traditional elite: Akenzua II, the Oba of Benin, responded to the continuing effects of cultural alienation by establishing the Holy Aruosa Cathedral Schools in 1945, which, as **Uyilawa Osuanlele** shows, have made a considerable contribution to the development of creative arts in Edo Language.

Jacob Mapara relates the rise of the Shona Novel to the introduction of a unified writing system which promoted a peculiar reading culture at many mission schools in Zimbabwe. The growing demand for books was instantly met by publications which were largely grounded in Christian thematic frames, in particular with respect to the portrayal of female characters. Excerpts from a conversation of **Flora Veit-Wild** and **Fr. Keble Prosser**, the long-time headmaster of the prestigious St Augustine's Mission School, underline the impact of the school environment on the literary aspirations of Dambudzo Marechera, an influence which can still be felt in various scenes of his *début* novel *The House of Hunger*. At the same time the interview gives an intimate insight into students' growing political (self)-consciousness and the increasing difficulties of maintaining a conducive atmosphere of learning in the midst of Zimbabwe's Liberation war.

The considerable gap between schooling as a crucial and formative life-experience and its subsequent fixation repeatedly blurs the thin generic borderline between novel and memoir. **Tobias Robert Klein** traces the intersection of nostalgic memories and future dreams in Ghanaian and Nigerian boarding school texts of various, vastly different times, registers and literary genres. Of particular interest are autobiographical accounts of notable figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Obafemi Awolowo, Joe Appiah or Wole Soyinka and their generic and narrative crossover with the (fictional) depiction of school life in novels and factual events. Based on the experience of Ngugi wa Thiongo, **Senayon Oluoluwa** focusses on the "invisible curriculum" as designation of the unstated and deliberately excluded. The overarching presence of Shakespeare and English literature at Alliance High School together with the glaring exclusion of the African literary and social world-view eventually achieved the opposite of what it intended to do and fires Ngugi's desire to fill the missing gap.

Catherine Olutoyin Williams links psychological theories on the preservation of childhood memory with its literary treatment. In the autobiographical reflections of Chinua Achebe's *There Was A Country* (2012) and Buchi Emecheta's