

montage

Graphics this week by Peter Reeder.

Montage is your creative arts forum. Each week students' work — poetry, short stories, graphic arts or photography — will be featured. Contributions should be addressed to Kandy Biggs, Excalibur.

"African literature has considerable claim to attention," said Dr. G. Killam, assistant professor of English at York, adding, "so much has been produced in such a short time."

During the past two years Dr. Killam taught at the universities of Ibadon and Lagos. "Students there use the university in a much different way". He was impressed by the amount of time they put at their studies "they rarely missed a class". In a sense they were a privileged class, there a university degree means something very important."

The writers there do their works in English, the official language of the country. "Not very much writing is in their native languages.

All of the Nigerian writers, with a few exceptions, have been university graduates." He explained that university is where they come in contact with English literature being taught in a consolidated fashion. "They are anglicized as far as the language," he said but their writings are "basically a recognition of their Africanness.

Chinua Achebe is one of the novelists gaining considerable recognition today. Dr. Killam has recently finished a book on this writer examining his novels in detail.

"Achebe has always said that Africa gained a great deal from its contact with Europe, but on the other hand she suffered a great deal as does any country which is victimized. His theme is, in a sense history — the inevitable flowing out of history."

Dr. Killam has met and corresponded with Achebe several times. He says his fiction is like the man - "balanced objectivity."

Wolfe Soyinka, a poet and dramatist, is another literary figure gaining prominence today. His plays are performed in London and off-Broadway. But his whereabouts is unknown now because of the war.

While in Nigeria Dr. Killam met several writers around the city and the university. "These writers see themselves as a kind of vanguard" he said.

He is concerned for the future of a young literary culture being so deeply affected by the war. "There's not much time to write now — the writers are either involved in some movement or numbed by the situation."

Three years ago a peaceful nation erupted into one of the bloodiest civil wars of history. Each week some 6,000 children die of starvation. Its not their war, they're not responsible.

This week Montage is featuring Nigerian poetry. As you read these poems you cannot help but reflect on the horrible tragedy that is taking place in their country today.

Hear now the dry wind's dirge. It is
The hour of lesson, and you teach
Painless dissolution in strange
Disquietudes
Sadness is twilight's kiss on earth.

- Wolfe Soyinka

The souls of men are steeped in stupor
who, tenants upon this wild isle unblest,
sleep on, oblivious of its loud nightmare
with wanton motions bedevilling our breast.

— J.P. Clark



Grey, to the low grass cropping
Slung, wet-lichened, wisps from such
Smoke heaviness, elusive of thin blades
Curl inward to the earth, breed
The grey hours,
And days, and years, for do not
The wise grey temples we must build
To febrile years, here begin, not
In tears and ashes, but on the sad mocking
Threads, compulsive of the hour?

- Wolfe Soyinka

Ibadan,
running splash of rust
and gold - flung and scattered
among seven hills like broken
china in the sun.

— J.P. Clark



The mystic drum beat in my inside
and fishes danced in the rivers
and men and women danced on land
to the rhythm of my drum

- Gabriel Okara

The moon has ascended between us
Between two pines
That bow to each other

Love with the moon has ascended
Has fed on our solitary stems

And we are now shadows
That cling to each other
But kiss the air only.

— Christopher Okigbo