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**ARTS & LETTERS**


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*Black Africa's  
American Heritage*

"The Impact of the New World on Modern African Literature" by Samuel O. Asein, in *Comparative Literature Studies* (Mar. 1977), University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill. 61801.

The fascination of some leading black American writers with their African heritage has long been acknowledged. In poet Langston Hughes' words, "If you want me you must search for me / Beneath the palms of Africa." But scholars tend to overlook the influence of America's black authors on the literature of blacks in Africa, writes Asein, a professor of English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

During the 1930s and '40s, South African writers such as Peter Abrahams (*Dark Testament*, 1942) and Ezekiel Mphahlele (*Man Must Live*, 1947), beset by white supremacy in their own country, discovered both techniques and purpose for their fiction in the pan-Negro consciousness of W. E. B. DuBois, the rage of Richard Wright, and the revolutionary rhetoric of Claude McKay. "The agony [of Wright's "Big Boy Leaves Home"] told me how to use the short story—as a way of dealing with my anger and indignation," Mphahlele wrote in 1947. Mphahlele's early writing had focused on "private concerns." His later works echoed American blacks' interpretation of racial problems by taking a "wide-angle view" of South African society as the determining factor in the lives of his characters.

Today, with many South and West African writers (among them, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Joseph Okpaku, and Mphahlele) emigrating to the United States, America's influence on African literature is entering a new phase: Recent work by these Africans reveals a willingness to experiment with new settings, American fictional characters, and the "overtly combative" tradition of American black radical politics.

*The Making  
of a Myth*

"Fictions of Merry Mount" by John P. McWilliams, Jr., in *American Quarterly* (Spring 1977), American Studies Association, 4025 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19174.

On May Day, 1627, Thomas Morton erected an 80-foot maypole and declared a day of festivity. He welcomed "all comers, red or white, to a barrel of beer, a case of spirits . . . and dancing to drums" in celebration of spring and the re-christening of his fur-trading community near what is now Quincy, Massachusetts. Morton dubbed his settlement Ma-re (pronounced "merry") Mount—a "compound title