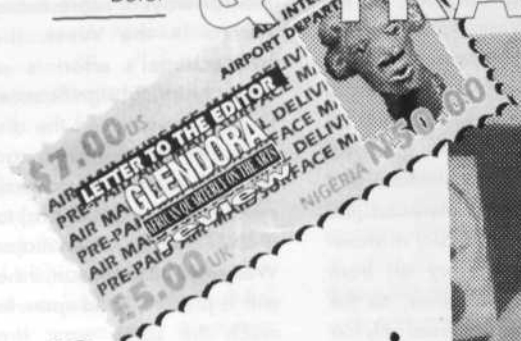
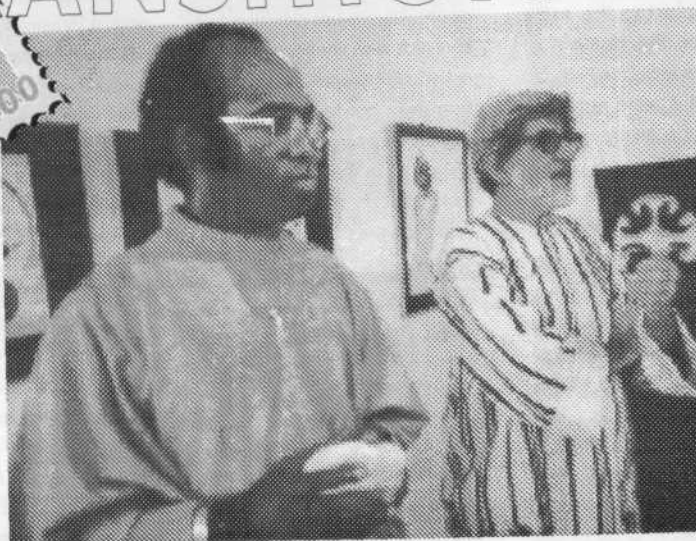


# BLACK ORPHEUS & TRANSITION-

Ulli  
Beier



## 'Some errors in the article in Glendora Nr3'



Artist  
Obiora  
Udedukwu  
with Ulli  
Beier

**THE first I heard of Peter Benson's work on the subject was when he sent me the completed thesis to read. He never interviewed me and I have never met him. My letter may have been a response to that thesis - but it was obviously too late to make any impact. Whether he modified his ideas in the subsequent book I don't know, because I haven't read it.**

2) I was never a prisoner of war. I have never carried anybody's uniform let alone anybody's gun. (I was detained in a civilian camp as an 'enemy alien' but that is not the same thing).

3) 'His contacts among expatriates who taught in schools ensured that Beier gathered material rather rapidly....' I didn't know expatriates teach-

ing in schools. I had little contact even with the staff of the University. The only expatriate teaching in Nigeria who was helpful in this respect was Gerald Moore. There was, of course, the vast archive of Janheinz Jahn to draw on. Remember that his anthology of African poetry (in German) appeared in 1954! Otherwise most of the authors found me.

4) 'Obsessive' interest in the literatures of the black world. If you start a journal of African literature what else are you expected to publish in it other than African literature? Of course many African American authors felt that they belonged and they were anxious to appear in BO. That was a good reason to include them, I thought.

As for Okigbo's remark: why didn't I publish white Americans, the answer is I did! Dorothy Obi, for example, and Peter Thomas, who was English and white. I even pub-

lished an Indian poet. People thought contacts across border lines and cultures. And a magazine is a good vehicle for that!

The trouble seems to be: Akin Adesokan has obviously made a thorough study of Peter Benson's book and other secondary sources. (Congratulations on a good piece of research). But has he read the magazine?

5) The author complains that most of the critics were white. As an editor you will be aware that you can only publish things that people present to you for publication, or that they deliver when you have solicited them. At the time Nigerians were more interested in writing than in reviewing. As for Paul Theroux: I always found him a highly overrated writer and critic. It was Christopher Okigbo who was the champion of Paul Theroux in Nigeria. Christopher met Paul Theroux in Kampala. He brought him to

Nigeria and actually pressured me to ask him to write this piece!

As for Martin Esslin: he was at the time the authority on Brecht and the Theatre of the Absurd in Britain - in fact in Europe. If Nigerian playwrights wanted to be performed in Britain (and they did!) why should they resent a review by a British critic? Or are you implying that 'only an African should review African literature'? If so - who is indulging in the black mystique? If people were unhappy with these reviews, why did nobody write a rejoinder?

6) 'Abiola Irele succeeded Beier'. Wrong! Abiola Irele was my co-editor from Nr 17 - 22! During this time he wrote one major article on Chinua Achebe for the magazine. Unfortunately no more.

By the way: the articles by Paul Theroux and Esslin appeared while Abiola Irele was an editor of the magazine.

7) Ulli Beier's preference for the 'negritudinal sensibility'. I published what was available and what I considered (rightly or wrongly) as valuable. Of course there was an emphasis on writers from French West Africa at first - but then they had produced a vast body of work before Nigerians even came on the scene! What is more, French wasn't taught in Nigeria, so Nigerian authors couldn't read them. Chris Okigbo wouldn't have been able to object to Senghor, if he hadn't read him in BO (He studied Classics at the university - not French!)

Most Nigerian authors and many South Africans and West Africans made their debut in either BO or Mbari Publications. Ama Ata Aidoo wrote

her first story ever in response to our short story competition. Have I left anybody out? Not many.

8) I was not 'running' the Duro Ladipo company, though I was involved with it, supported it where I could and - above all - loved it! The same is true of the other things I was supposed to have 'run'.

9) The author asks why Ezekiel Mphahlele did leave BO in 1963. This is a case of an author not reading his own article, because he informs us elsewhere that he went to Paris in 1963.

10) I never said that 'all the talents had gone to the East' in 1966, though I did point out that there was an intense

conglomeration of talent in Biafra and that amazing literary activities went on even in the midst of war.

11) Finally: the gravest error of all. It says that Ulli Beier 'disbanded the Mbari Club before leaving Nigeria.' I left the club in (I think) 1964 when the committee decided to move premises to the Central Hotel in Ibadan. Both Wole Soyinka and myself were attached to the particular atmosphere of original premises right in the midst of Dugbe market; the informality of the place, the food it offered. Here people wandered in freely from the street - passersby, curious people, even thugs. Mbari was at the heart-beat of Ibadan. The Central Hotel offered space for Demas

Nwoko's theatre (and he did stage more impressive productions there!) but as a building it was a nouveau-riche bourgeois monstrosity and we both knew that one could never give it that flair of the old place. We both left. Wole got his own premises for the Orisun Theatre, whereas I stayed in Osogbo where there was more than enough to do.

The Mbari club went on successfully till it was killed by the civil war, with members ending up in different camps.

Iwalewa Haus,  
Bayreuth, Germany.  
20th June, 1996.



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