In June 1962, an important gathering of Anglophone African writers took place at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. Ezekiel Mphahlele (later Es'kia Mphahlele), the expatriate South African fresh from the success of *Down Second Avenue* (1959), organized the event. The idea was simple and unprecedented: to bring together established and promising writers, magazine editors, critics and publishers for discussion about the future development of African literature.

Among the attendees were the Nigerians Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka; a young T. J. Ngugi (now Ngugi wa Thiong’o), a Makerere student from Kenya, buttonholed Achebe at the conference and asked him to read the manuscript of *Weep Not, Child*. Achebe read it with great interest, and the novel would become title number seven in Heinemann’s African Writers Series, which was getting started with Achebe’s editorial guidance. The Nigerian poets J. P. Clark, Gabriel Okara and Christopher Okigbo were also in attendance, as were George Awoonor-Williams (later Kofi Awoonor), Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, Grace Okot, and Okot p’Bitek. Langston Hughes, Barry Reckord, the Jamaican playwright, and Robie Macauley, then Editor of *Kenyon Review*, also attended. Rajat Neogy, who had begun publishing *Transition* magazine in 1961, served as an unofficial local host. The event – the Conference of African Writers of English Expression, to give it its cumbersome official title – is now often remembered as the start of the debate on the status of English in postcolonial African literature. Many readers do not realize that the conference was part of a remarkably vibrant network of African literary institutions formed in the late 1950s and early 60s. *Black Orpheus*, the Nigerian little magazine, was founded in 1957 by the German expatriate Ulli Beier (who did not attend the conference, although the script of his undelivered address is among the conference archives). Beier, Clark, Okigbo, and Soyinka would all be involved in the creation of MBARI, a combination of bar, restaurant, performance and gallery space, library, and publishing venture in Ibadan. Neogy’s *Transition*, which would achieve an international circulation of 12,000, began life as an avant-garde review with editorial offices on the verandah of Neogy’s home. These were the days of the Transcription Centre, a London-based radio programme headed by Dennis Duerden (also a Makerere attendee). Duerden had done tours of the Transcription Centre, a London-based radio programme, and the Leeds conference was all about activities sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). As Frances Stonor Saunders discusses in *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the cultural Cold War* (1999), but that transatlantic publication was only one item in a long inventory of cultural activities around the world. The CCF established all over the African continent and distribution schemes, scholarly conferences, radio broadcasts and cultural events. Europe was the centre of diplomatic efforts in the early 1950s, but the hierarchy soon set their sights on other parts of the world, especially areas where Soviet influence might be neutralized. The CCF established insecure footholds in the southern and eastern parts of Asia and tried their luck in Latin America and in the Middle East, but it was in sub-Saharan Africa that the organization had the largest impact outside Europe.

For some, the involvement of the CCF might seem to cast an unfavourable light on the Makerere conference, *Black Orpheus*, *Transition* and their legacy – as has been the fate of *Encounter* and one of its Editors-in-Chief of the conference, Stephen Spender, who cried foul when the news of the funding scheme broke. (There has been much discussion, in this paper and elsewhere, of how much or little the magazine’s editors knew about the sources of their support at the time.) But it would be misleading to describe CCF activities in Africa as comparable to the European situation. In sub-Saharan Africa, and in decolonizing areas of the world more generally, we should not dismiss such events as peripheral episodes in the Cold War. In the CCF’s African programmes especially, a conspiratorial picture that posited CIA infiltration and control of credulous organizations would not be quite accurate. Instead, the CCF pursued a policy of non-interference, exerting very little control over the organizations to which it offered subventions, infrastructural investment and professional contacts.

This may seem highly implausible: since when did the CIA disburse money to writers and intellectuals and expect little or nothing in return? The archival record – available for inspection at the University of Chicago’s Regenstein Library Special Collections – tells a very unusual story, one in which the CCF sponsored African literary institutions without demanding very much from their collaborators, least of all a public defence of American political interests. The Makerere conference, *Black Orpheus*, *Transition*, MBARI, the Transcription Centre and the Leeds conference were all about activities sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). As Frances Stonor Saunders discusses in *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the cultural Cold War* (1999), but that transatlantic publication was only one item in a long inventory of cultural activities around the world. The CCF established all over the African continent and distribution schemes, scholarly conferences, radio broadcasts and cultural events. Europe was the centre of diplomatic efforts in the early 1950s, but the hierarchy soon set their sights on other parts of the world, especially areas where Soviet influence might be neutralized. The CCF established insecure footholds in the southern and eastern parts of Asia and tried their luck in Latin America and in the Middle East, but it was in sub-Saharan Africa that the organization had the largest impact outside Europe.

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PETER KALLINEY

Decolonization was either imminent or a reality in many areas, although the struggle in the southern part of the continent would continue for several decades. Intellectuals, however, were equally excited about the creation of new literary institutions. For this generation of ambitious but largely untested writers, the growth of conferences, periodicals, publishers and radio producers, all in an African orientation but also with connections to international audiences, was as meaningful as any political development.

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COMMENTARY

Wole Soyinka, 1962

Tu Fu In Academe

Autumn sun brings little hope of favour
and a new name for the institution, the fourth
in seven years. Once, it was boot-on-the-table
mawkish egalitarians, who sapped
our strength with remedies; now, it’s knowledge-
entertainment and courtesy or else
and a faulty radiator two years to fix
if you go through channels. In the jargon of
our paymasters we denounce ourselves. They
commend the veracity of our assessment.

IAN HARROW
The CCF collapsed in 1967, there was a great deal of hand-wringing, back-tracking, pleading of innocence, moralizing and gloating. Since then, there have been a number of accounts by participants, journalists and scholars. The majority of these treatments have focused on the CCF’s activities in Western Europe, but the organization’s presence in sub-Saharan Africa, where intellectuals and audiences were not in thrall to either superpower. 

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