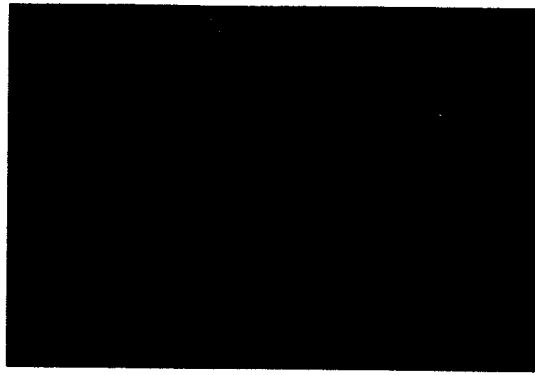


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in an atmosphere peculiarly their own, gives them a lyrical quality which to a large degree compensates for their lack of drama.

Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *The Russian Literary Imagination* (1969), pp. 104–5

... C. cannot be deduced from his plays the way, for example, Strindberg or more indirectly Ibsen can. To an astonishing degree the plays are without an authorial voice, which is to say ... that they are untendentious and make no claim on any kind of personal territory, but more than this, that they appear to be natural objects, things come upon. These uncoerced dramas seem to issue from a distance in which a relinquishment has taken place: the characters have been placed on their own, there is no shaping and controlling creator arranging their movements and determining their fates. ...

One of the demands the plays make is that we go beneath their surfaces, not in order to discover some "true" core, the secret heart of C.'s matter, but to perceive how these surfaces themselves contain the depths, how modesty in C.'s case is a question of a respect for truth and of a refusal to make experience more "dramatic" than it really is or ... to construct his plays like mysteries. Which is to say that with perhaps greater clarity and resonance than any other playwright C. discovered the drama of the undramatic, the uninflected and commonplace. In this sense his plays are opposed to the reigning tradition of overt passion and significant culmination, the tradition of Greek and French classical tragedy, of Shakespeare and the Jacobean and indeed of all drama rising out of an impulse to organize the world in systematic, hyperbolic fictions, to magnify it and convert it into legend.

Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama* (1974), pp. 119–21

Close examination of C.'s texts calls for the techniques of poetic analysis. Many of the typical features of prose narrative are often absent, such as intrigue and dénouement, even though there is a great deal of action; often the distinction between hero and narrator is blurred. Other elements dominate the structure: a recurrent, variable image, for instance of clear or contaminated water; or a senseless, half-conscious refrain uttered by one of the characters. C.'s sentences, especially in his landscapes or his interior monologues, have a rhythmic and international power just as important to the final effect as his handling of plot (or anti-plot).

Often as instructive as the definitive text are the deletions and alterations C. made when preparing his stories for book publication; sometimes he deleted a passage out of sheer delicacy, unwilling to impose an authorial interpretation on his reader; sometimes his own taste had altered. No other Russian writer made such extensive and such significant revisions of his

work, thus giving us valuable insights into his "creative laboratory."

Donald Rayfield, *C.: The Evolution of His Art* (1975), p. 4

To the humanist writer, for whom the most immediate personal value in life will probably be love and fulfilled relationships generally, there is a special pathos about lives which lack love or in which love is frustrated, and even about simple misunderstandings between people. Each instance of these is a lost opportunity for understanding or fulfilment which can never be regained. In some cases, as in "The Kiss," and "Verotchka," it is virtually a lost life. If, then, C.'s art is unusually preoccupied with the frustrations of loving purpose at the points where human lives intersect, it is because of the value that such relationships must bear in his view of things, and the waste of love that he must quietly deplore. The capacity for love in people who lack the opportunity for it, and the deprivation of love in those who have known it, are things of which he is unusually and painfully aware. It is in this context, and not one of morbid negativity, that C.'s presentation of "frustrated lives" should be viewed.

Beverly Hahn, *C.: A Study of the Major Stories and Plays* (1977), p. 68

CHENEY-COKER, Syl

(also spelled Cheyney-Coker) Sierra Leonean poet and novelist (writing in English), b. 28 June 1945, Freetown

C.-C. was born to Christian Creole parents in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Having received his early education in Sierra Leone, at the age of twenty-one he came to the U.S. to pursue postsecondary education at the Universities of Oregon and Wisconsin and also worked for a time as a journalist. He has taught at universities in the Philippines, Nigeria, and the U.S. and served as editor and publisher of a fortnightly newspaper, the *Vanguard*, in Freetown in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

C.-C.'s earliest uncollected poetry reflects a heavy debt to the ideas of the NÉGRITUDE movement. The poem "Ghetto Woman" (1970) is modeled after Léopold Sédar SENGHOR's ode to and objectification of African women, "Femme noire" (1945; "Black Woman," 1964). Although C.-C.'s subsequently collected verse shows less of Négritude's heavily romanticized and "Africanized" imagery, he continued to base much of his early critical evaluative works, through the 1970s, on the tenants of the Négritude ideology.

C.-C.'s first book-length poetry collection, *Concerto for an Exile* (1973), has as its driving force his wrestling with questions of identity and his personal and poetic place in the world. As a member of the Sierra Leonean Creole community, he is caught between the privilege that this afforded him in his youth and the instability of that identity, rooted as it is in the slave trade and the community of freed and returned slaves that settled in Freetown and came to dominate Sierra Leonean society. The poetry is passionate, almost masochistic, as C.-C. poetically figures himself as a Christlike figure, to be martyred for his community.

His next collection, *The Graveyard Also Has Teeth with Concerto for an Exile* (1980), reprints the first volume along with fifty-three new poems, poems "in conversation with" both Sierra Leone and death. These new poems also mark the beginning of C.-C.'s shift away from a focus on the tormented self and a turning of his poetic gaze ever outward. There is a much deeper sense of mission in these new poems together with a recognition of his needs and limitations as a poet. Whereas in the earlier verse the separation from his home is almost crippling, now "I want to return into exile to be your poet!" It is a collection of seeming paradoxes, the halfway point in his poetic development, torn between a sense of duty to his community—"I want only to plough your fields / to be the breakfast of the peasants who read"—and a recognition that this Creole history and consciousness he is so busy constructing necessitates that his poetry and his life is one that crosses "From continent to continent."

This development of C.-C.'s poetic persona is completed in his third volume of poetry, *The Blood in the Desert's Eyes* (1990). The Christlike persona of the earlier verses is replaced by the warnings and laments of the biblical prophet. This move away from martyr to trumpeter of injustice is reflected as well in his critical works and interviews starting in the early 1980s where C.-C. begins to view exile as the socially responsible alternative to sacrifice in the context of the repressive and often deadly state. The redemptive death of *Concerto for an Exile* is here reimagined as a brutal, chilling exercise of power and control.

Read in sequence, these three works illustrate quite clearly C.-C.'s development as an author and thinker. The actual poetic form varies little, however. His seeming aversion to the comma and almost unremitting presentation of often disturbing poetic conceits threatens at times to overwhelm the poetry itself and has triggered a certain wariness among critics of his work who are electrified by the passion and energy of C.-C.'s poetry and yet somewhat put off by the thematic bleakness and structural laxity of his verse.

His novel, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990), won the 1991 Commonwealth Writers Prize, Africa Region and shows the influence of Latin American literary movements and authors, an influence notable from *The Graveyard Also Has Teeth* onward. It is a sprawling, massive work chronicling the history of Malagueta, an imaginary African country which neatly mirrors the actual—and C.-C.'s own poetically imagined—history of Sierra Leone. Framed by the execution of the contemporary "reformer," General Tamba Masimiara, the narrative traces the development of the community through slavery, resettlement, colonialism, and neocolonialism, the one constant being the figure of the prophetlike Alusine Dunbar/Sulaiman the Nubian. The novel and the figure of Alusine/Sulaiman are in many respects the novelistic embodiment of that "Creole consciousness" C.-C. is struggling after in his earliest poetic works.

Long characterized as one of the more exciting and strident voices among the younger African poets, C.-C. has put together a body of works that reflect a growing maturity of vision without losing any of its passion or righteous anger. His poetry is not noted for its use of more traditionally recognizable "African" imagery but rather for the ways in which he connects the themes born out of his own personal experience and upbringing to an ever widening poetic world. It is this thematic broadening as well as stylistic experimentation that makes C.-C. a poet of consequence both in Africa and beyond.

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—MARK L. LILLELEHT

CHESNUTT, Charles W.

American novelist and short-story writer, b. 20 June 1858, Cleveland, Ohio; d. 15 Nov. 1932, Cleveland, Ohio

Born in the North, from 1866 to 1883 C. lived in North Carolina, which provides both the geographical and the cultural setting for his work. Supplementing his few years of formal education by intensive study with private tutors, he became a teacher and a principal, then returned north to work as a stenographer and to study law. He published his first short story, "The Goophered Grapevine," in *The Atlantic* in 1887, the same year he passed the Ohio bar examinations. Although he published three novels, a biography, and two collections of stories between 1899 and 1905, after 1906, C. supported himself primarily as a court stenographer while continuing to participate actively in civil-rights causes and literary societies. In 1928 he received the Spingarn Achievement Award from the NAACP for his "pioneer work as a literary artist depicting the life and struggles of Americans of Negro descent."

C. considered fiction a medium through which he could subtly educate Americans to perceive the rights of contemporary Afro-Americans to equality and respect. His first book, however, reflects the cautiousness of publishers, who concealed his racial identity. *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales* (1899) is a collection of stories about slavery and magic ("conjuring") narrated from the perspective of a white Northerner who, after the Civil War, has become a plantation owner in North Carolina. In each story the narrator (identified only as John) recalls an experience in which he heard a tale of conjuring from Uncle Julius McAdoo, his coachman and a former slave. Writing from the perspective of the white John, C. criticizes slavery and refutes allegations of black American ignorance by revealing the shrewdness of Uncle Julius, who tells the tales only to profit from them, financially or otherwise. For example, when John plans to tear down an abandoned schoolhouse so that he can use the lumber, Julius warns him that the wood may be haunted. During slavery times, Julius says, a slave who resented separation from his wife persuaded a conjure woman to turn him into a tree as a first step toward escape. Before he could flee, however, the tree was cut down, and the wood later was used to build the schoolhouse. After John, persuaded by his wife, abandons his plans for the schoolhouse, he and the reader learn that Julius wants to use the building for meetings of a religious group he has organized.

In the collection *The Wife of His Youth, and Other Stories of the Color-Line* (1899) C. tried to win respect for Afro-Americans through interracial stories emphasizing their strengths. The title story of the volume refutes allegations of immorality and laziness by stressing the nobility of the protagonists. On the day he proposes to announce his engagement, Mr. Ryder, a prosperous and educated former slave, meets an old black woman who for twenty years has searched faithfully for the husband to whom she had been wed