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## **AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE EYES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS**

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### **Introduction**

Homi Bhabha posits that the dynamics of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are created through performative actions. Differences in representation should not be quickly interpreted as mere reflections of pre-existing ethnic or cultural traits entrenched in tradition. From the minority perspective, the social articulation of difference is a complex, ongoing negotiation aimed at legitimizing cultural hybridities that arise during times of historical change (Bhabha 2). Postcolonial theory can therefore help us to start thinking differently about cultural diversity, why it is important, and how it should emerge in the study of literature. As Carter points out, literature has largely been silent on the cultural processes that have transformed literary education but this needs to change, given the great importance of culture on individual artistic and literary expression (821). Post-colonialism has the ability to dissect the processes in question through the lens of pertinent themes such as representation, identity, modernity, and resistance, all of which are central to a lot of theories on culture and difference (Carter 822).

One of the hallmarks of postcolonial theory is that it helps to center existing theories on the legitimacy of colonial power within literature. Such discussions

can be traced all the way back to the early discourses on the morality of European expansion and the subsequent ethical challenges created by forceful conquest, violent settling, and revolts arising from this conquest (Marzagora 163). In the context of the current research, the moral question of why African students are forced to study American literature despite the trauma of colonialism, questions of neocolonialism and persistent white supremacy cannot be ignored. The mere fact that African students still study these writings more than 50 years after most African countries gained independence from their colonial masters speaks to the strong presence of post-colonialism.

It is against the backdrop of this post-colonial reality that this paper explores the various feelings of an African Student reading specific American literary texts through themes such as puritanism and transcendentalism.

### **Teaching American Literature in African Schools**

Very few studies on how American literature is taught in African schools exist, pointing to a serious research gap in this area. This research dearth possibly stems from the fact that most African schools focus on teaching literature written by African authors as a form of decolonization (Paasche 67). The few Western literary works taught in African schools are mainly classical British literature – and not American – due to British colonial legacy in Africa (Nebbou 2013: 2023). Generally, Western education in Africa has its roots in the European education systems brought to the continent by colonial powers such as France, Britain, and Portugal (Osikomaiya 10).

It is also important to note that the dissemination of American literature in Africa is usually a product of donations from organizations, schools, and well-wishers based in the West rather than officially through the educational system (Zell and Thierry 5). As such, African students typically consume American literature unofficially through donations and not as part of their school syllabus and curriculum. The result is that popular book genres, such as American romance and thriller novels, are more popular amongst African youth (Hofmeyr

133) than literature written by American literary giants like Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain.

One of the few studies that have explored how American Literature is taught in African schools was conducted by David Nicholls. He focused on the process of teaching of American literature in Francophone West Africa and found that American literature was most prevalent in West African universities during the late 1990s. According to Nicholls, the majority of literature students at West African universities preferred American literature to African and British literature due to the prevalence of American popular culture (392). American music and movies were an integral part of African youth culture in the late nineties, gaining widespread acceptance by way of radio and television. In addition, the desire of many African students to work in America was an influential factor as these students sought to learn American cultural and linguistic nuances through American literature.

Nicholls, however, noted an interesting phenomenon, namely that the specific type of American literature taught in these West African universities was African American literature. Nicholls hypothesized that the reason behind this is the desire of African scholars to create ties with their African American kinsmen across the Atlantic due to the common ancestry between Africans and African Americans (392). Inspired by the theoretical directions of the African diaspora and the passionate efforts of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic to create ties with each other, most literature teachers at West African universities heavily favored teaching African American literature. Classes are therefore infused with lectures about the moral outrages of slavery and other atrocities that African Americans have undergone. In that way, many professors have found in African American literature a critical language of dissent. However, Nicholls argued that, by focusing predominantly on African American literary texts, the teachers are providing skewed perspective of America, giving their students a very limited view of race and race issues in the United States.

In terms of the mode of pedagogy and instruction, literature in Africa is mainly taught as an optional subject at the secondary school level (Sanoto and Van Der Walt 33). While the English language is a compulsory subject at both the primary and secondary school level, many African students can opt out of being taught literature, as it is not a compulsory subject in all African school curricula. Furthermore, countries in Africa approach teaching literature differently. For instance, in Botswana, the literary texts taught at primary schools are mainly literature for younger children, with a heavy inclination towards nursery rhymes, poems, stories and role-playing (Sanoto and Van Der Walt 36). The syllabus for teaching English in primary schools in Botswana does not include a list of literary texts that students should be taught and teachers are expected to incorporate literature teaching using their own preferred books. At the senior secondary level in Botswana, literature is an optional subject and even then there is a lack of depth in the content matter.

In addition, teaching of literature in African countries like Botswana mostly focuses on helping students to enjoy the texts they read and the student's language development as opposed to the aspects of literary criticism that are typical in the literature classes of the West (Sanoto and Van Der Walt 33). Generally, the goal is to encourage the development of a reading culture amongst African students by providing them with an opportunity to develop a fundamental interest in reading, especially given the challenge of illiteracy on the continent (Sloan 45). Overall, literature lessons at primary school level are regarded as reading lessons during which the engagement with literature is rather minimal. As a result, Sanoto and Van Der Walt bemoan the fact that literature students in Botswana are not exposed to the typical analytical elements of literature pedagogy, such as literary device identification, plot structure analysis, character and plot development, and analyzing thematic elements like imagery and symbolism (33).

## **Historical Events that Influence African Students' Readings of American Literature**

One of the most impactful events that have influenced the way in which African students approach and interpret American literature is undoubtedly colonialism. According to Mosweunyane, the infiltration of Western powers during colonialism generally helped to facilitate the entry of Western knowledge systems into Africa (50). Therefore, due to the colonial and neo-colonial connection that African countries had with Western countries, Africans have been exposed to all forms of American culture, including music, film, and literature and this exposure has naturally shaped the education system. Furthermore, the omnipresence of American culture functioned as a way of molding the overall development of the African continent in a very Western way by attempting to make it similar to Europe and North America in terms of modernization, capitalism, culture, entertainment, and education. The teaching approaches, including class lectures and teleconferencing, inevitably shaped the transmission of knowledge in African classrooms and the type of information consumed by African students, which was mostly Western in nature and origin (Mosweunyane 51).

The introduction of Western-style formal education in Africa also influenced the process of cultural transmission and inter-generational communication, which are viewed culturally as some of the functions of the school (Mosweunyane 51). One area of literature that was affected greatly by the introduction of the Western-style formal education was oral literature. Oral literature includes the traditions and stories passed down from one generation to the next through verbal narration and includes folktales, myths, proverbs, and legends (Shehu 178). In pre-colonial Africa, oral literature served as an important educational vehicle for the youth where moral lessons and values were carried forward to the next generation. This reduced drastically following the introduction of western formal education and was replaced with a culture focused on the written form of text. Therefore, African students went from

mainly listening to stories to actually reading them, helping to inculcate a reading culture that was largely missing traditionally (Trudell 436). The regrettable result, however, was the quick erosion of African culture and the rich African traditions of oral literature.

Overall, the fast spread of Western civilization and globalization has had a massive impact on how and what African students read (Olney 30). Among the most evident effects of Western civilization on African students has been the introduction of Western literary forms and genres like the novel or short story collections. Traditionally, African storytellers conveyed their stories orally but that changed when the focus turned to the written form of storytelling. African writers naturally adopted European literary traditions and methods and, as a result, their works reflected those Western influences even when the stories were African in nature. Furthermore, the themes and topics within African literature have been molded due to interactions with Western civilization whereby topics like colonialism, globalization, and romance are now regular themes in African literature (Gikandi 313).

In response, however, African authors made concerted attempts to prevent the proliferation of American literature in Africa to prevent the re-colonization of African minds (Pandurang 162). The rise of Pan-Africanism is therefore a major historical event that helped redirect what African students read, especially given the movement towards intellectualism that it inspired (Mazrui 59). Leading African authors like Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka were encouraged to write about their unique experiences in their individual African countries and communities. They were also urged to highlight their people's suffering and plights, and assert their African identity by shedding light on their ancestry (Nebbou 2015: 251). Therefore, although these African writers were all exposed to Western culture, they rebelled against Western literature and narratives to assert their African identities and maintain a connection with their African communities and roots. Achebe and Soyinka, in particular, focused on the conflict that existed between

African and Western traditions, pointing out that Africans were at risk of losing their culture and values due to mental enslavement, what they referred to as colonialism of the mind. As a result of Pan-Africanism, African students started to mainly read African literature (Paasche 67).

Slavery and the civil rights movement is a final major event that has affected African students' readings of American literature. As has been mentioned earlier, Africans feel culturally and spiritually connected to African Americans and, as a result, they favor African American literature over general American literature. This has affected the type of literature that African students read with an overwhelming majority preferring to read African American texts than those written by white Americans. The sense of connection and empathy due to similar lived experiences has created this affinity towards African American literature (Nicholls 392).

## **Discussion**

The world of literature is largely dominated by Western authors, most prominently American authors who have been fixtures in the literary world ever since the advent of the American Revolution in the eighteenth century which spawned an era of enlightenment and the creation of an elite class (Uslu 183). This has, without a doubt, been at the expense of literature from the developing world, African literature included. Given the sheer influence American culture has had on the world, most African students and readers of literature have consumed American Literature in some form or fashion, whether formally in class or just casually as lovers of literature. Most African students have therefore been exposed to an inordinate amount of American literature. This experience has not been a straightforward or positive one, though, considering the shadow of neocolonialism that exists between African people and the West. American Literature as perceived by contemporary African students is thus a critical area of investigation. Do African students see themselves in American literature? Do American stories and themes resonate

with the African experience? Do the depictions within American literature demonstrate similarities or differences between Africans and Americans? These are all pertinent questions that require careful dissection.

While there are particular themes featured within early American literature, there are some that transcend both eras, namely those that revolve around the survival of the land (Giles), which would later evolve into the famous “The American Dream” discourse. A significant number of writers discussed themes like wars, battles, slavery, the strength of the American trials, freedom, belief in God, hard work and Manifest Destiny. There is no doubt that these narratives have shaped the perceptions of overseas audiences about America, its people and American Literature (Giles).

Of particular interest in this discourse is how African students feel when confronted with the concept of “manifest destiny” which is pervasive within much of American Literature. Manifest Destiny propagates the idea of American exceptionalism where America is portrayed to be special when compared to other countries (Depkat 98). The term is widely used in American literature and history to refer to the philosophy of ‘territorial expansion.’ The main argument proposed by this philosophy is that nothing could come between American expansionism and its realization. It is borne from the time when Puritans came to America in 1630 with the belief that if they managed to survive in the new world, this would be a sign of God’s favoritism and approval and following their eventual survival, they indeed started to believe that they were a special and chosen people. In fact, the Puritans considered other people to be ‘savages’ who lacked the ability to develop themselves and were therefore in need of salvation (Boggs 38). This belief was so pervasive in literature that, as Buell (25) points out, one cannot read any pre-Civil War American literature without seeing the phrase “manifest destiny.” Even journalists used this term to refer to the objective of the White Americans to settle and civilize the West. “Manifest Destiny,” as explained by Gray, essentially revolves around the inevitability of American Supremacy (28).



One of the most problematic aspects about the literary works that have appraised Manifest Destiny is their seeming acknowledgement that violence is a way of achieving breakthroughs (Madsen 378). It is seen as an inevitable remedy for the wrongs done in the society, and the survival of one group over the other. Obviously, this rhetoric does not sit well with most African students due to their history of colonialism. The inference an African student deduces from reading about manifest destiny as presented in the literary texts is that violence and the sense of American and white supremacy can be justified which, taking into consideration atrocities of colonization experienced by Africans in the past, may understandably cause feelings of anger and annoyance (Gray 48). The idea that, somehow, colonists were justified in their imperialism because of their desire to achieve their goals is an affront to the African pride that many students have. Therefore, whereas the concept of manifest destiny may create a sense of patriotism amongst white Americans, the opposite feeling is true with respect to African students. More so given the fact that conflict and violence is still very much prevalent on the continent. Most parts of Africa have faced different forms of ethnic hostility, often motivated by one community's expansionist ideals that threaten the very existence of other groups. The latter was evident in the Rwandan 1994 genocide, for instance, which was propagated against the Tutsi ethnic group.

Among the most compelling explorations of the concept of manifest destiny is found within the aptly titled book *Manifest Destiny* written by Anders Stephanson. Stephanson argues that the idea of manifest destiny is exemplified by three main ideals (7). The first one is the assumption that the US has unique moral virtues that other states do not have. Secondly, that the US had a mission to redeem the world by spreading the American way of life to all parts of the world. Third, that manifest destiny is divinely ordained. These ideals provide a specific lens for the critical analysis of American Literature by African students. For one, it provides them with a first-hand view of the superiority complex that Americans have over Africans. Africans feel alienated and different from

Americans by the mere description of being morally inferior to them. Moreover, by propagating the first ideal about Americans having morally superior virtues to other countries, African students can easily begin to feel like something is morally wrong not only with them and their people intrinsically, but with their governments as well. It is not uncommon for many African students to feel that African governments are inherently evil and corrupt, especially given the level of corruption and conflict on the continent, and this idea is reinforced by ideas such as those proposed by Stephanson in his text. It is almost as if he was saying that only Americans have a moral compass and this idea is dangerous for the self-esteem and self-perception of African students.

Students have the opportunity to critique Africa-US relations through the manifest destiny ideology. For example, the US threatened to withdraw aid to Uganda for passing an anti-gay law. While this may seem to be a win for democracy, an African student may find themselves questioning whether this has been done in good faith to protect human rights in Uganda or merely satisfies the inherent manifest destiny by spreading the American way of life. To what extent does this perpetuate the idea that Americans are morally superior to Africans? How can an African student gauge whether anti-gay laws are based on a genuine goodness or a moral superiority complex? It becomes a slippery slope, especially considering that African students have their own cultures, norms, and religious perspectives.

In *Manifest Destiny*, Stephanson also introduces readers to the role of manifest destiny in American ideology, underlining how important this ideology is within the American landscape as a whole. The author argues that it is the manifest destiny ideology that has significantly shaped how America has understood itself and its foreign relations, creating a major impact on American culture and beliefs. According to him, manifest destiny had “ideological power that worked in practical ways and was always institutionally embedded ... not mere window-dressing” (Stephanson xiv). As such, manifest destiny is not a mere theoretical concept but has had real and tangible, practical ramifications

on the United States, shaping America's perceptions of the external world and its responses to it. It is not surprising that ramifications of such a perspective have been felt by African students as well. The ideological focus on white male elites that the ideology created has elevated rich Caucasian Americans above other demographics of people. Since African students do not fall within this demographic, it is easy for them to feel alienated from the greater American culture as a whole, like second class citizens playing second fiddle to their more 'important' white male counterparts. This feeling of difference reverberates throughout the United States whereby white males have a greater concentration of power and wealth than any other demographics, especially African immigrants who come to the United States in an attempt to escape poverty. The stark difference in the class and socioeconomic levels undoubtedly creates a rift between the two demographics, which is a recipe for disillusionment and anger.

Nonetheless, even though an African student may be angered and triggered after reading American texts such as *Manifest Destiny*, there is a certain degree of enlightenment that comes with reading a book like *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy. Contrary to other works, this work of fiction departs from the obsession with violence as a means for Western expansion. Instead, it depicts it as a massacre of women, children and men from all cultural backgrounds. An African student reading this novel feels a sense of redemption and vindication that is missing from the chest-thumping of Stephanson's work. Daugherty's analysis of *Blood Meridian*, which belongs to the new school of thought (Western Revisionism), explains how McCarthy used Judge Holden, a terrifying and the most fascinating character, to depict the selfishness, unparalleled traits of violence, power and cruelty of Western expansionism. Judge Holden's obsession with brutality towards both non-humans and humans stemmed from his belief that the only way to achieve a unified existence is to fulfill one's destiny, which ties in with the ideology of manifest destiny. Through hyperbole, the author invites the readers to critically analyze the United States'

westward exploration and expansion (McCarthy 107). In effect, it raises questions about the inevitability of violence in American expansionism and raises the question: does the end necessarily justify the means or does the process matter as well? The heinous qualities of the judge anger and repulse the reader, particularly African readers who have an intimate knowledge of the brutality of Western colonization.

While much of the attention in *Blood Meridian* is devoted to Holden, the Kid, another important character in the novel, rejects Holden's ideology of brutality and war acts as a source of renewal that is intrinsic to biblical eschatology (McCarthy 108). By using the American ideological tropes of spiritual regeneration, relinquishment and individualism, the author portrays the Kid as fulfilling the desire for what he calls "apocalyptic transformation" (330). Even though the Kid's death signifies a failure to chart a course from the violence, he ends up developing a moral center in a world that is lacking in morality. The Judge's tenure epitomizes the biblical apocalypse, a period of chaotic rule by the Anti-Christ followed by a divine rule. Therefore, the storyline in the novel seems to move the narrative towards a rupture in human history heralding a transformed world. Any African student reading such a text can feel optimistic about the future of the continent, especially when comparing the end of this novel to his or her own context. As a continent, Africa has been subject to numerous ills ranging from epidemics, pandemics (like Ebola), ethnic violence, genocides, the brutality of dictatorial regimes, civil wars claiming the lives of millions of people. In close reference to the *Blood Meridian* narrative and the apocalyptic theory, could those tragedies be seen as heralding a better future? The novel's ending suggests that even in the face of immense violence and suffering, there is still hope for renewal and transformation. This message can resonate with African students who have witnessed the continent's struggles and yearn for a brighter future.

The works of twentieth century American literature and its authors, especially Afro-American critics (particularly female ones), resonate more with

African readers than authors from previous eras. These authors have helped to ensure a semblance of balance in the American literary landscape by calling into question some of the narratives and themes that are harmful to Africans. The voices of such authors have largely contributed to a richer, more unbiased analysis of American Literature heritage in the eyes of African students. Furthermore, the twentieth century brought with it the emergence of Black intellectuals who countered white supremacy and challenged long-held anti-Black beliefs that were borne out of white-centric ideologies such as the manifest destiny ideology. Boutelle, in his work, explored how Black intellectuals such as Mary Ann Shadd, Jane Nardal, Martin Delany and Daniel Peterson centered their work on the concept of Black internationalism (31). This is a concept that emerged in the 1940s as a politically insurgent reaction to slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy that put a voice to Black people's rebellion against their oppression. This movement replaced slurs like "negro" with "Afro-American," thereby providing Africans with a dignity that been denied from them in previous American literature, especially those that underscored manifest destiny.

Boutelle countered the concept of manifest ideology, taking issue with the way how emigrants were consistently framed as settler-colonists in West Africa despite the fact that it was the historiography of the colonial movement that allowed for African Americans to be deported from America to Liberia in the first place (33). According to the narrative discussed by Boutelle, the return of African Americans back to their home countries could be seen as an embodiment of manifest destiny as they brought with themselves the benefits of Christianity and civilization. This highlights the type of arrogance amongst white authors and historians as they felt that Christianity and colonization had been a benefit and blessing, and not a burden or curse, to African people. Boutelle (33) rightfully pointed out that colonization relied on American imperialist ideology in order to thrive. This work validates the feelings of alienation and disconnect that many African students experience when reading

texts that propagate ideologies such as manifest destiny by affirming that, indeed, colonization and slavery were wrong and not a part of America's manifest destiny as had been claimed in American literature. The twentieth century literature focusing on the experiences of African Americans gave a voice to the voiceless and, in consequence, made it possible for African students to see a dignified depiction of themselves through these Black intellectuals and authors.

Beyond Black intellectually, Giles pointed out that the view and perception of African literature can, ironically, still be understood through the lens of America's history and thus received in a more positive light by African students. This is evidenced in the writings of Christopher Columbus who famously penned about his travels in Africa that occurred from 1482 and 1485. During these three years, Columbus traded along the tropical West African Gold and Guinea coasts, as well as the Portuguese fortress of São Jorge da Mina in what is currently Ghana, in the process creating awareness about the Atlantic wind systems and Portuguese navigation (Hair 113). His work highlighted the importance of Africa in his so-called discoveries. Thus, while he did not specifically depict Africans in a positive light, his work nevertheless provides African students with some idea about what Africa was like in that era.

A discussion about the overseas audiences' attitudes towards American literature cannot ignore the main concepts characterizing the diverse stages of its historical development. These include the Puritan Age, the Transcendentalism of the mid-1860s, romanticism, slavery (predominantly in Afro-American literature), and the call for social reform. The themes, characters and symbols discussed and applied by the authors in each of those phases stir different observations in the African student. In the Puritan Heritage, the common themes in American literature revolve around concepts, beliefs and values. This is evident in the works of Brad Streit who highlighted Puritan ideals and values (Jovanović 129). Streit not only recognized the role of women in this era but also portrayed them as submissive, modest and reverent. Even

though these ideas come from texts written centuries ago, these themes, especially the portrayal of women, still resonate with current events occurring in Africa. In this regard, a contemporary African student reading early American literary texts has a sense of connection with the literature of that era.

Simultaneously, the obsession with the Puritan values in the literary works of Streit is criticized for overly exerting pressure on women to be submissive, modest, and reverent (Lecky 56). These are the same struggles women in African fiction seem to face. Similarly to the male-centric Puritan Age, African male writers often depict women through “their androcentric models” which place them in a subordinate position, similar to the one in Brad Streit’s works (Adesanmi 271). Kumah established a connection between the literary world and male dominance, noting that: “As a consequence of the male-dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive – perpetuating popular myths of female subordination. Female characters in male-authored works are rarely granted primary status – their roles often trivialized to varying degrees – and they are depicted as silent and submissive in nature” (6).

Anne Bradstreet is, however, one of the pleasant surprises of this Puritan era, standing out as the first true female voice in American literature who combined a conservative Puritan outlook on life, society and politics and the important role of women in not only domestic life but also in art and literature. In her poem “Dialogue between Old England and New,” Bradstreet expresses her concerns with the social, religious and political upheaval in England, lamenting about the destructive impact of the civil strife on human life:

O pity me in this sad perturbation,  
My plundered Towers, my houses devastation,  
My weeping Virgins and my young men slain (in Gordon 196).

Bradstreet, unlike most Puritan authors, abhorred violence and did not see it as means of achieving one’s destiny. She also took issue with discrimination against women as can be seen in her work “In Honor of that High and Mighty

Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory” where she reprimanded her male readers for demeaning women. Thus, whereas Bradstreet did indeed portray women as “submissive, modest and reverent” in her earlier works, she evolved and became more feminist-leaning in her work, a marked departure from fellow writers at the time. By reading her work, therefore, female African readers can be consoled by the fact that not every Puritan era writer had a superiority complex that encouraged discrimination against minorities. Some, like Bradstreet, called for equality in society.

Apart from the Puritan age, the concept of transcendentalism is also essential in exploring the possible feelings of an African student studying American literature. This spiritual philosophy is both an idealistic literary and philosophical movement that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century (Buell 24). The dominant themes espoused in the fiction of that era included individualism, equality, self-reliance and integrity. In addition, literature is dominated by the belief that humans are best as an independent entity and not as a part of a political or organized entity. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous quote affirms: “a man in debt is so far a slave” (114). The message of this quote can be found also in other Emerson’s texts in which he often encourages his fellow countrymen to free themselves from indebtedness.

The works of the representatives of transcendentalism, especially those focusing on individualism, seem to evoke many feelings and observations in African students: for instance, the issue of indebtedness, even though discussed in the 1860s, still resonates with the contemporary economic context in Africa. A Kenyan reading the works of Emerson cannot help but sympathize with the thought that Kenya runs the risk of being economically enslaved to China since, as one of the biggest recipients of Chinese loans, its outstanding debt totals \$9.8 billion. Thus, these works are thought provoking for African students, serving as a call for reflection on the socio-economic situation of their countries.



## Conclusion

Feelings of difference, alienation, and connectedness are critical themes within literature, including American literature. This article aimed to explore the impact studying American literature has on African students. The analysis revealed that, besides providing a platform for critical analysis, American literature can also be used to better understand how the African continent is perceived by the world. The application of postcolonial theory allows for pertinent themes such as representation, identity, and resistance to find their rightful place within literature. The fact that African students still study American literature today is evidence of the lasting effects of colonialism.

Additionally, this paper also explores the feelings of African students reading various American literary texts, such as *Manifest Destiny* by Anders Stephanson and *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy. The analysis showed that the students can experience a wide range of emotions: from anger and frustration when confronted with themes of violence and supremacy in *Manifest Destiny* to a sense of connection and optimism when reading about the possibility of renewal and transformation in *Blood Meridian*. The students can also find parallels between the portrayal of women in Puritan literature and the struggles of women in contemporary African fiction. Finally, the theme of indebtedness in transcendentalist works resonated with the current socio-economic situation in many African countries. In conclusion, reading American literature evokes a complex mix of emotions in African students, highlighting the enduring impact of colonialism and the importance of cultural diversity in literary studies. Postcolonial theory provides a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics and fostering critical engagement with literature across cultures.

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**Abstract**

American literature is undeniably a powerful force in the literary world. A towering giant, it stands above others, exerting a significant influence on global literary cultures. Students from different nationalities and cultures therefore find themselves having to contend with the fact that they have to focus heavily on American literary works, typically at the expense of their own literary traditions and the unique experiences from their respective cultures. All societies should receive their just due to ensure a more well-rounded understanding of the world. Without this representation, there is a very real danger that perspectives become skewed towards the American experience at the expense of other cultures which are very rich, colorful, and replete with enlightenment and lessons that can often be missing from American literature. The United States does not represent the whole world and literary works need to reflect this reality. Having cultural diversity is critical in literature to ensure proper representation. The following discussion thus seeks to examine the feelings of African learners who read American texts such as *Manifest Destiny* by Anders Stephanson and *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy. The article tries to answer the question whether the students may feel a connection to certain stories but feel alienated from others, depending on the relatability of the texts to their African experience.