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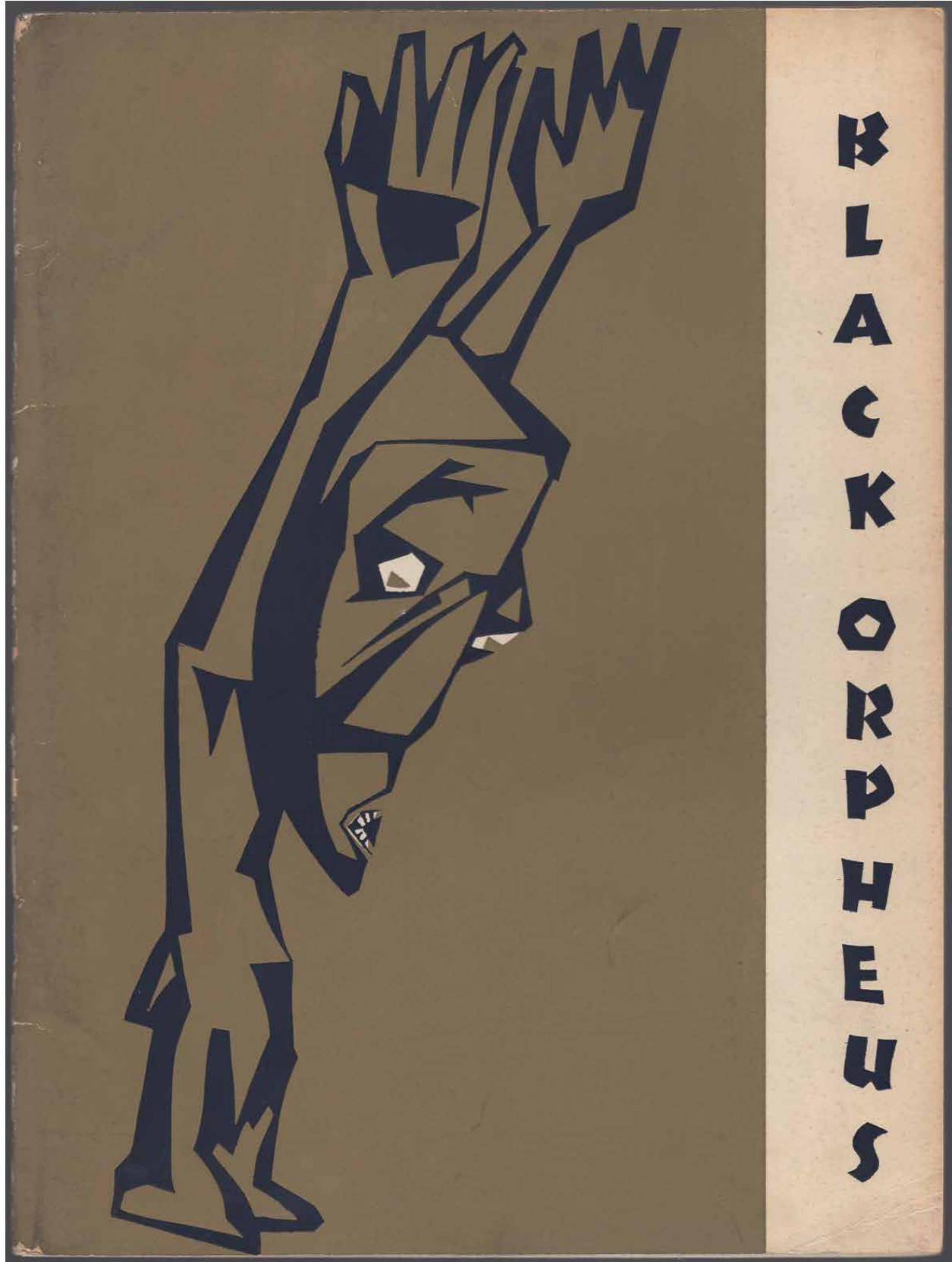


Ulli Beier and Jann Janhienz

Black Orpheus: A Journal of African and Afro-American Literatur. No. 4

Ibadan: General Publications Section, Ministry of Education 1958

\$475



First Edition. Quarto. Silkscreened wrappers. Very good or better in illustrated wrappers with a little rubbing along the spine. Contributors include Paul Vesey (the pseudonym of American author Samuel W. Allen) and Ezekiel Mphahlele. A scarce early issue of this important African literary and arts journal published in Nigeria.

Black Orpheus was founded in 1957 by Ulli Beier, a German-Jewish lecturer at Ibadan University. Beier read widely in traditional Yoruba folklore, as well as in the modern francophone literature of Négritude. *Black Orpheus* reflected both influences, and expanded them. Before the magazine's publication, "it was not widely considered that Anglophone Black Africa had any modern art or literature," notes Paul Benson in his authoritative history of the magazine, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa*.

The magazine's first number established its representative mix of content: a critical essay on Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola; translations of Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor; a review of *Black Power*, Richard Wright's account of revolution in Africa's Gold Coast; and translations of ijálás, the traditional chants of Yoruba hunters. The magazine's vibrant covers, designed by Beier's wife, the artist Suzanne Wenger, isolated details of traditional African art forms to produce an immediately recognizable, strikingly modern aesthetic.

Black Orpheus was active in providing a vehicle for new African writers; more than half of its material in the early years was written expressly for publication in its pages. The book review section that closed each number of *Black Orpheus* provided an opportunity for African writers to critique a diasporic literature increasingly engaged with the experience and idea of blackness, featuring early reviews of works by Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and V.S. Naipaul.

The first series run of *Black Orpheus* began when Nigeria was still under English rule, publication continued into independence, and ended at the outbreak of civil war in 1967. It was difficult, even at the time of publication, to assemble a complete run of *Black Orpheus* with buyers finding one number at their local shop, but not the next. Our research indicates that while institutions often hold runs, they are more often than not incomplete. [BTC#431658]